Theories of the Archive
from Across the Disciplines

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abstract: Creative and compelling theoretical formulations of the archive have emerged from a host of disciplines in the last decade. Derrida and Foucault, as well as many other humanists and social scientists, have initiated a broadly interdisciplinary conversation about the nature of the archive. This literature suggests a confluence of interests among scholars, archivists, and librarians that is fueled by a shared preoccupation with the function and fate of the historical and scholarly record. The following essay provides an exploration and overview of this archival discourse.

There has been a striking growth of interest in the concept of the archive outside of the library and archival communities. In the past decade historians, literary critics, philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, political scientists, and others have wrestled with the meaning of the word "archive." A compelling body of literature has accumulated around this term that demonstrates a convergence of interests among scholars, archivists, and librarians. This archival discourse provides a window onto current debates and common concerns in many academic fields. It also helps illuminate the ways in which all of us are implicated in transformations in scholarship, publication, and the changing fortunes of libraries and archives. This essay provides both an overview and a sampling of archival discourse across the disciplines.

Researchers are proclaiming the centrality of the archive to both the scholarly enterprise and the existence of democratic society. Political theorist Irving Velody declares, "[A]s the backdrop to all scholarly research stands the archive. Appeals to ultimate truth, adequacy and plausibility in the work of the humanities and social sciences rest on archival presuppositions."[1] Jacques Derrida argues, "[T]here is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation."[2]

The Ambiguity of the Archive

But as Derrida has also pointed out, "nothing is less clear today than the word 'archive.'"[3] Many writers investigating the concept begin with a standard dictionary definition: "a place where documents and other materials of public or historical interest are preserved."[4] Most writers exploring the concept share a notion of an archive as a repository and collection of artifacts. Frequently, the term archive refers to the contents of museums, libraries, and archives and thus the entire extant historical record. Some writers distinguish between archives as repositories of documents, manuscripts, and images; libraries as repositories of published books, journals, and other media; and museums as repositories of yet other kinds of cultural objects. Sometimes they do not. Writers focusing on the digital archive may use the term to refer to everything currently existing in digital format anywhere or they may use it to refer to some small subset of such material, typically a discrete collection of related electronic documents. Even librarians and archivists have become somewhat careless in their use of the term.

Robert Martin, director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services, argues that the distinctions between libraries, archives, and museums have always been ambiguous.[5] He describes the work of Paul Otlet, one of the founders of the documentation movement, who in the 1930s redefined the term "document" to include a wide range of objects and artifacts. Otlet claimed that documents were simply objects that conveyed information and thus the term could refer to anything collected by archives, museums, or libraries.[6] The digital environment has further eroded these distinctions. As libraries, museums, and archives increasingly make their materials available online in formats that include sound, images, and multimedia, as well as text, it no longer makes sense to distinguish them on the basis of the objects they collect.[7] In any case, for purposes of this essay I will use the term archive in its broadest sense, because that is how the majority of writers I will be discussing use it.

Two related forces are apparent in this archival discourse. One is the conflation of libraries, museums, and archives; and the other is the inflation of the term "archive," which has become a kind of loose signifier for a disparate set of concepts. Many have attributed these effects to changes in information technology. Paul Voss and Marta Werner, in the introduction to a special issue of *Studies in the Literary Imagination* devoted to "The Poetics of the Archive," claim that the revolution in writing technologies "has altered in still unimaginable ways our relationship to the archive."[8] Literary scholar Alan Liu declares that the term archive has become a metaphor for what we are not yet able to grasp about the nature of digital collections.[9] And in another technology-based formulation, social theorist Adrian Mackenzie finds that the centrality of the archive to cyberspace stems from the fact that existence in virtual culture is premised on a live connection. In Mackenzie's phrasing, "to die is to be disconnected from access to the archives, not jacked-in or not in real time."[10]

The Complexity of the Archive

But the development of digital technology only partially explains the tremendous growth of attention to the concept of the archive and the way the term itself is loosening and exploding.[11] This can be seen in the amazing number of uses to which the term has been

put and in the amount of intellectual work it has been called upon to do. Some interesting examples were published in 1998 and 1999 in two special issues of the journal *History of the Human Sciences* devoted to the archive. In fifteen essays, scholars in a variety of humanities and social science disciplines meditate on the meaning and role of archives in both the scholarly and political realms. They ponder such questions as the role of archives in the formation of national consciousness and in the development of democratic, liberal citizenship; they investigate the role of archives in totalitarian societies and their role as a weapon in ethnic struggle; they address the contribution of the archive and of archival metaphor to anthropology, classics, history, and literature as well as to the work of a contemporary visual artist; and they explore the use of archival metaphor in our conceptualizations of digital collections and the Internet.

These and other essays formulate or adopt such terms as the "social archive," the "raw archive," the "imperial archive," the "postcolonial archive," "the popular archive," "the ethnographic archive," "the geographical archive," "the liberal archive," "archival reason," "archival consciousness," "archive cancer," and "the poetics of the archive." [12] This terminology reflects the development of theories about the nature of the disciplines and about what constitutes their legitimate objects of study. Archival discourse has also become a way to address some of the thorny issues of disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge production and the artificial character of disciplinary boundaries.

Derrida and the Archive

Derrida's *Archive Fever* has influenced much of the archival discourse outside of library and information science (LIS). This volume originated as a lecture delivered in 1994 and was first published in French in 1995 as *Mal d'archive: une impression freudienne.* It was translated and published the same year in the American journal *Diacritics* and as a separate English language monograph in 1996. Of the fifteen essays in the two special issues of the *History of the Human Sciences* mentioned above, ten build upon or cite *Archive Fever,* in which Derrida proposes a psychoanalytic reading of the concept of the archive. Although this volume certainly has its detractors, it is probably the most ambitious attempt by a contemporary scholar to understand the drive to collect, organize, and conserve the human record. Derrida provides a way of thinking about the work of librarians and archivists quite unlike anything we have previously seen in the professional literature.

Derrida claims that Freudian psychoanalysis offers us a theory of the archive premised on two conflicting forces. One is a death drive and the other is a conservation or archive drive that is linked to the pleasure principle. In this formulation, the archive affirms the past, present, and future; it preserves the records of the past and it embodies the promise of the present to the future.[13] Derrida claims that what Freud posited as a death drive (or sometimes as a primal urge toward aggression and destruction) may also be characterized as "archive destroying."[14] This death drive "not only incites forgetfulness, amnesia, the annihilation of memory. . . but also. . . the eradication. . . of. . . the archive, consignation, the documentary or monumental apparatus."[15] According to Derrida, what is at work in the construction of the historical record is a negotiation between the death drive and the pleasure principle, between Thanatos and Eros.[16]

The stakes in this struggle can be very high. In 1992, during the war between Abkhazia and Georgia, four Georgian members of the National Guard threw incendiary grenades into the Abkhazian State Archives resulting in the destruction of much of the history of the entire region.[17] According to Derrida's formulation, such destruction represents the failure of the present in its responsibility to the future. Similar losses have recently occurred in Iraq. In the aftermath of the U.S. led "Operation Iraqi Freedom," Iraq's National Museum, National Library, National Archives, and other repositories have been looted and burned. A chorus of voices has declared this a cultural disaster of immense proportion. Adam Goodheart in the *New York Times* reports that a number of scholars have gone so far as to suggest that what was lost with these repositories was an artifactual heritage that might have provided a basis for building a common culture among Iraq's disparate ethnic and religious groups.[18] Remarkably, this sentiment was echoed by Attorney General John Ashcroft, who, as reported by Martin Gottlieb in the *New York Times,* declared that the United States would work to restore looted museum objects "in part as a way of linking Iraq's ancient past to the task of building a new government."[19]

But even in arenas where the stakes appear to be lower, we can trace significant contention or struggle over the fate of the archive. Such contention has been evident in negotiations over the Elgin Marbles and other artworks and artifacts that have been removed from their countries of origin. It is also evident in the intensity of the debates over the stewardship of library collections sparked by Nicholson Baker's allegations that libraries have betrayed a public trust by disposing of material that should have been preserved for present and future generations.[20]

One of Derrida's most valuable contributions is his elaboration of the notion that the structure of the archive determines what can be archived and that history and memory are shaped by the technical methods of what he calls "archivization."[21] To explain what this means, Derrida cites the example of the history of psychoanalysis and its reliance upon Freud's correspondence with his colleagues. Derrida claims that if Freud and his contemporaries had had access to telephones, tape recorders, fax machines, computers, printers, and e-mail, it would have completely transformed the history and development of psychoanalysis "in its very *events.*"[22] Using these technologies would have altered the kinds of work done by early practitioners of psychoanalysis and the kinds of records created and thus susceptible to preservation. The methods for transmitting information shape the nature of the knowledge that can be produced. Library and archival technology determine what can be archived and therefore what can be studied. Thus Derrida claims "archivization produces as much as it records the event."[23]

Derrida's work has contributed to scholarly recognition of the contingent nature of the archive—the way it is shaped by social, political, and technological forces. If the archive cannot or does not accommodate a particular kind of information or mode of scholarship, then it is effectively excluded from the historical record. Electronic archives have very different implications for the historical record than do paper archives. Moreover, Derrida can help us to understand the scale of the effects we are witnessing as, for example, certain publishers exert pressure on libraries to abandon the archiving of print journals. By making it prohibitively expensive for libraries to maintain paper copies,

commercial publishers are altering the shape of the historical record. In the new digital marketplace, publishers like Elsevier are having as great an influence on the scholarly archive as the academic community that produces it.

Growing recognition of this fact is apparent in the recent controversy surrounding the decision by Elsevier Science to delete an article from its online journal collection because of concerns that the author had been guilty of plagiarism. Andrea L. Foster, in a recent essay in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, points out that Elsevier "has quietly withdrawn dozens of journal articles from ScienceDirect since at least January 2000."[24] Such excisions become increasingly problematic as we come to depend upon a digital record. Foster describes a growing consensus on the importance of leaving the record intact and affixing highly visible statements of correction or retraction to electronic documents that have been discredited. As a result of protests from librarians and scholars, Elsevier eventually modified its policy for "retracting" articles from its ScienceDirect database.[25] Nevertheless, in the print world, publishers do not have the ability to remove articles from the archive once they have distributed copies of a paper journal; all they can do is publish retractions. In the digital world, publishers and database vendors may deprive future researchers of access to the full record simply by deleting any material they deem objectionable or erroneous. The ease with which material can be excised from the electronic record illustrates Derrida's claim that the technical methods of archiving shape both history and memory.[26]

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The Archive and the Disciplines

Shrinking support for higher education and the embattled state of many libraries and university presses have increased many academics' awareness of that the archive is under siege. At the same time, there is a growing self-consciousness about the fact that all scholarship is implicitly a negotiation with, an interpretation of, and a contribution to the archive. Some scholars have argued that the archive functions for the humanities and social science disciplines as the laboratory functions for the sciences. Both the archive and the laboratory are sites of knowledge production.[27] Pushing this analogy further, sociologist Thomas Osborne proposes that we think of the archive as a "centre of interpretation," similar to "courts of law, psychotherapeutic encounters and departments of the humanities."[28] Osborne nevertheless claims that the archive is preeminent in that it supports all the others.

Scholars are raising questions about what counts as knowledge and what are appropriate objects of study in specific disciplines. One way these issues are framed is as a question about what legitimately belongs in the archive.[29] Growth in the academic study of popular culture, for example, has led to the expansion of materials deemed appropriate for research library collections. These now include comic books, romance

novels, and even video games. What is considered a legitimate contribution to the archive changes over time and is a function of the transformations of the disciplines and the shifting boundaries among them.

Many writers are addressing the issue of what constitutes the archive for their particular discipline. Irving Velody, for example, describes how for "much sociology and a good deal of anthropology and psychology" the impetus has been to "establish standards of data collection and collation that can in some sense stand beside the work of the natural sciences."[30] Velody offers the specific example of sociology where, he claims, there is a growing presumption that the kind of data that constitutes the field is quantitative. "In part this reflects disputed claims on just what should go into the archive, or at least this particular archive. What kind of data are worthy of being recorded, sorted, designated and located." [31] Velody says that for many the answer is clear: "measurable materials."[32] But he also points out that for some social scientists the exclusion of narrative and qualitative materials is highly problematic. Questions about what belongs in the archive reflect disputes over the nature of the disciplines—what counts as sociology or history or psychology.

The Transparency of the Archive

Not only are there questions about what legitimately constitutes the archive, but also there are also related questions about the truth claims of archival material. This stems from what might be described as the postmodern suspicion of the historical record. As Robert Darnton puts it, "hard facts have gone soft."[33] Many scholars (whether or not they describe themselves as postmodernists) have come to understand the historical record, whether it consists of books in libraries or records in archives, not as an objective representation of the past, but rather as a selection of objects that have been preserved for a variety of reasons (which may include sheer luck). These objects cannot provide direct and unmediated access to the past. Historian Dominick LaCapra has described the dangers of the "archive as fetish," of believing that the archive "is a literal substitute for the 'reality' of the past which is 'always already' lost for the historian."[34] Whatever the archive contains is already a reconstruction—a recording of history from a particular perspective; it thus cannot provide transparent access to the events themselves. But regardless of what historians may have once believed, there is currently a widespread sense that even government records that appear to be mere collections of numbers are, in fact, already reconstructions and interpretations. Someone decided what was worth counting and how to count it.

Many researchers also have made the case that archives are not neutral or innocent. A typical example is an essay by Wolfgang Ernst describing the use of genealogical records by Nazi Germany to identify European Jews for annihilation.[35] Similarly, the records compiled by British administrators in India and other colonial outposts are read by postcolonial scholars as providing evidence of a desire to consolidate and justify imperial power. Gayatri Spivak gives us many examples of the problematic nature of the colonial record in India. One document she describes is the "Statistical and Geographical Memoir of the Hill Countries Situated Between the Rivers Tamas and Sutlej." Spivak claims that an Australian in his early twenties, with little knowledge of the area,

wrote it in about 1811 "out of hearsay and interpreted conversations."[36] Yet the resulting document became part of the authoritative colonial record and was treated as an objective and accurate account. Government documents may prove useful, but not necessarily because of their accuracy or objectivity.

The suspicion of archives is especially strong in some disciplines. In women's studies, for example, a considerable amount of scholarship has been devoted to redressing the limits of the official record. One way of defining women's studies might be as a project to write women back into the historical record—to fill the gaps and correct the omissions in the archive. Similarly, the new field of postcolonial studies is highly suspicious of the colonial record and could be defined, in part, as an attempt to locate the voices of the silenced native within the literature produced by colonial powers. In both fields, scholars focus on the absences and the distortions of the archive, as well as new contributions by contemporary women and postcolonial writers.

Colonialism and the Archive

In the last couple of decades there has been an explosion of interest in the British colonial archive for the window it provides on the workings of the British Empire. In addition, the investigation of this archive provides a way to explore the relationship between information gathering and political power. Thomas Richards, building on the work of Michel Foucault and Edward Said, describes how the "administrative core of the [British] Empire was built around knowledge-producing institutions like the British Museum, the Royal Geographic Society, the India Survey, and the universities" and how its colonial bureaucracies were extremely "data intensive."[37] According to Richards, recording and documenting the empire was a way to bolster feelings of colonial power, even in the absence of full control of vast geographic territories.

Richards describes the creation of what he calls "the fantasy of the imperial archive" in which the state superintends all the knowledge of its empire and thus imagines that it controls all the territory that it surveys and documents.[38] He traces this myth of an imperial archive capable of absorbing and organizing every piece of relevant data to the positivism of Mill and Comte and the philosophical traditions of Leibnitz, Kant, and von Humboldt. The "fantasy of an imperial archive in which the control of Empire hinges on a British monopoly over knowledge" was an adaptation of the belief in "a universal and essential form of knowledge."[39] Current notions about the influence wielded by those who control the flow of information echo the imperial belief that control of the archive is a form of political power.

Fascination with the records of the British Empire is not limited to official documents; it also extends to a vast literature produced by civil servants of the Empire and by other Victorian and turn-of-the-century writers, including Rudyard Kipling, H. Rider Haggard, T.E. Lawrence, and H.G. Wells. Richards explores the fantasy of the imperial archive in the writings of several of these authors as a sampling of the genre he calls imperial fiction. These novels depict an empire held together, not by force, but by information.

Just as Thomas Richards uses the concept of the imperial archive as a key to understanding nineteenth-century England, Suzanne Keen investigates the proliferation in the past few decades of what she calls romances of the archive.[40] Whereas the imperial

romance celebrated the ascendancy of England through its knowledge-gathering power, romances of the archive constitute more recent attempts to come to terms with the loss of empire and to provide a way to explore and make sense of Britain's colonial legacy. In both instances, the archive anchors explorations of national identity and provides the evidence for establishing the meaning of the past.

Keen describes romances of the archive as stories of archival research involving characters seeking information in libraries and archives. She interprets the existence of this large body of both popular and literary fiction as, in part, a response to the information revolution and the more impersonal forms of research conducted via computer.[41] In romances of the archive, traveling to do research and hunt down information in libraries, archives, and museums is invested with a kind of glamour once confined to adventure stories. Romances of the archive provide a way for both postcolonial and postimperial subjects to explore and come to terms with Britain's past. Their proliferation and popularity stem from the need to work through rival claims about the meaning of history and heritage in a multicultural society.[42] The novelists Keen considers include A.S. Byatt, Peter Ackroyd, Julian Barnes, Penelope Lively, Margaret Drabble, P.D. James, Graham Swift, and Kinglsey Amis, as well as postcolonial novelists Salmon Rushdie, Keri Hulme, Amitov Ghosh, and Bharati Mukherjee. Contemporary filmic versions of archival romance identified by Keen include *Stargate* (1994) and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989). *The Mummy* (1999) and *Possession* (2002) are also recent examples.

Richards and Keen find the concept of the archive key to understanding the British zeitgeist of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As literary critics they explore the archive as a theme in works of fiction. They invoke writers in a broad range of disciplines and demonstrate how fruitful archival theory has become in fueling interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary research.

If the establishment and consolidation of the empire was built on the accumulation of information about the people and places under colonial rule, one of the strategies adopted by postcolonial subjects has been to reinterpret and recontextualize the information and thus call into question the colonial version of events. Whereas the colonial archive places the British administrator at the center, surveying and documenting foreign subjects, postcolonial literature places the former subjects at the center and makes possible the exposure of the distortions and manipulations of the historical record.

Postcolonial scholarship has demonstrated how the colonial archive was shaped by the aims of its creators and how interpretation of the archive always depends on the perspective of its interpreters. As Hayden White has forcefully argued, transforming archival data into historical narrative is a subjective act.[43] The writing of history always requires the intervention of a human interpreter. Moreover, according to Michael Lynch, "the archive is never 'raw' or 'primary,'" because it is always assembled so as to lead later investigators in a particular direction.[44] Because there is never sufficient archival material, Carolyn Steedman goes so far as to declare that the historian's craft involves the ability to "conjure a social system from a nutmeg grater."[45] For these reasons, Steadman contends that "historians read for what is not there: the silences and the absences of the documents always speak to us."[46]

Researchers in many fields are used to dealing with gaps in the archive. Scholars of classical Greek, for example, are confined to the forty-three surviving plays of Aeschylus,

Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes of the roughly 330 plays produced by these writers.[47] Interest in the archive is growing despite—or perhaps because of—the recognition of the holes in the historical record, the problem of its arbitrariness and lack of transparency. Harriet Bradley notes that even as "professional academics become more modest and sceptical in their own approach to the archive," they "find its use more compelling."[48] As she puts it:

> even in an age of postmodern scepticism the archive continues to hold its alluring seductions and intoxications. There is the promise (or illusion?) that all time lost can become time regained. In the archive, there lingers an assurance of concreteness, objectivity, recovery and wholeness.[49]

Despite their limitations, we cling to archival materials in the hope of somehow connecting to a past we can never fully know. Or, as Derrida describes archive fever:

> **Despite their limitations, we cling to archival materials in the hope of somehow connecting to a past we can never fully know.**

> It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive. . . . It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.[50]

One Historian's Take on *Archive Fever*

While many have found Derrida's characterization of archive fever prescient and have used his work as a starting point for addressing a broad range of archival questions and issues, others have found it less helpful. After reading *Archive Fever*, historian Carolyn Steedman claims that her response was "that archives are nothing like this at all."[51] Indeed others have commented that Derrida fails to convey a sense of what it means to do archival research. In response to Derrida, Steedman sets out to provide an account of the historian's experience of working in the archives. Steedman finds that Derrida's notion of the archive is too broad, "a metaphor capacious enough to encompass the whole of modern information technology, its storage, retrieval, and communication."[52]

Steedman contends that the English translation of the title *Mal d'archive* as *Archive Fever* is especially unfortunate. She argues that if one is going to talk about archive fever one should be thinking epidemiology and not metaphor.[53] Deconstructing the title of this volume by our most eminent deconstructionist, Steedman claims it would be more accurate to characterize archive fever as an occupational or industrial disease. Old books are "the very stuff of the scholar's life," but also a potential source of illness: "the book and its components (leather binding, various glues and adhesives, paper and its edging, and, decreasingly, parchments and vellums of various types) in fact concentrated in one object many of the industrial hazards and diseases that were mapped out in the course of the century."[54] Steedman traces the development of the field of occupa-

tional or industrial disease in early nineteenth-century England and describes a grow-ing recognition of the threats posed by the production and handling of printed vol-umes, including "meningitis due to or as a complication of anthrax."[55] Historians work-ing in archives breathe in "the dust of the workers who made the papers and parch-ments, the dust of the animals who provided the skins for their leather bindings, the by-product of all the filthy trades that have, by circuitous routes, deposited their end-products in the archives."[56] This, according to Steedman, is the "etiology of Archive Fever Proper," and it would be more fitting as a "new entry for the medical dictionar-ies" than as the title of a treatise on the psychoanalytic meaning of the historical record.[57]

Steedman is impatient with the archive as metaphor. For her it is a very literal and concrete space where those involved with the historical disciplines engage with mate-rial objects. Certainly part of the attraction of the archive is this contact with objects that have survived to bear witness to the pastness of the past. The pleasures of the archive, as well as the occupational hazards, are a function of this intimate and literal contact. Also, as I have discussed elsewhere, these pleasures have only grown in the face of an increasingly virtual culture.[58] But as Steedman points out, attention to this aspect of archival work is absent from Derrida's text. Her exasperation with Derrida, as she readily acknowledges, is also a function of the "mutual incomprehension" of some historians and theorists and the ways in which they "continue to talk right past each other."[59] Other historians are more sympathetic to Derrida.

Additional Formulations of the Archive

If Steedman finds Derrida's notion of the archive insufficiently literal, Michel Foucault's concept of the archive is even more abstract. Foucault, like Derrida, is often cited by theorists of the archive, and his most frequently referenced work in this context is *The Archaeology of Knowledge* in which he proposes his own definition of the archive. This volume originally appeared in French in 1969 and was translated and published in the United States and England in 1972. Foucault's concept of the archive is more easily described by what it is not than by what it is. For Foucault, the archive is not "the library of libraries;" nor is it "the sum of all the texts that a culture has kept upon its person as documents attesting to its own past." [60] The archive, for Foucault, is what he calls "the system of discursivity" that establishes the possibility of what can be said.[61] Foucault conceives of academic disciplines, for example, as discursive formations or systematic conceptual frameworks that define their own truth criteria. This notion, as well as his writing about the relation between knowledge and power, has had a tremen-dous impact on many writers concerned with the nature of the archive.

Drawing on both Derrida and Foucault, sociologist Thomas Osborne attempts to shape a concept of the archive somewhere between the "two extremes of literalism and abstraction."[62] For Osborne, "what makes the notion [of the archive] really useful is its very elasticity; that it goes beyond such a literal reference, or that it can be used to do so."[63] Archival discourse feeds on the multiple uses and meanings of the archive, and it is complicated and strengthened by the integration of perspectives from a variety of disciplines. Osborne proposes that we think of the archive "as a principle of credibility" that "functions as a sort of bottom-line resource in the carving-out of claims to

disciplinarity."[64] Thus, the discipline of history largely depends on archival credibility, which authorizes the historian to make statements about the past. But it is not just "historiographical disciplines per se" to which Osborne refers.[65] Citing Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic,* Osborne describes a cluster of disciplines rooted in the archive. The primary example is clinical medicine, which Foucault characterizes as focused on the individual fact and concerned with the specificity and singularity of particular cases.[66]

Osborne thus finds that "archival reason" is founded on the detail and most closely connected with those disciplines such as clinical medicine, philology, and art history that concern themselves with "deposits, traces, signs, or clues that require expert interpretation."[67] Archival work is about making fine discriminations to identify what is significant from a mass of data. These kinds of distinctions are also central to the work of librarians and archivists. Osborne concludes by arguing for the moral and epistemological value of the commonplace and the ordinary that is documented in the archive.[68]

Even those who are not sympathetic to the archival theories of Derrida and Foucault might acknowledge that their work has inspired and authorized a huge body of archival discourse that follows and cites them. Their work has spawned theories and counter theories of the archive; it has pointed the way toward adopting archival theory as a way to explore a variety of problems and issues in contemporary scholarship; and it has contributed to explorations of the function of the archive in both democratic and totalitarian societies. At the very least, archive theory, as formulated by Derrida and Foucault, has introduced a strategic shift in the winds of intellectual fashion and induced scholars in many fields to join the evolving conversation.

The Institutionalization of the Archive

As more scholars investigate the concept of the archive, more have become interested in the process of its institutionalization—who builds the archive and for what purpose? How is it organized and made accessible? How is it preserved? This concern on the part of the broader scholarly community is part of the convergence of interests among scholars, librarians, and archivists.

Researchers outside of the library field looking at the institutionalization of archives approach the issue from a variety of angles. In "The Politics of the Liberal Archive," historian Patrick Joyce explores the establishment of public libraries as an example of the transformation of the modern archive into a public space and a public resource. According to Joyce, open archives are a cornerstone of a free and informed society. Joyce describes the founding of the Manchester Free Library and, to a lesser extent, the British Museum in London in the mid nineteenth-century as examples of this new kind of publicly accessible archive. He calls these archives a "political technology of liberal governmentality" and thus finds that public libraries were a crucial factor in the formation and education of "the liberal citizen," upon which an increasingly democratic state depended. [69] He celebrates early librarians for their "passionate" support for open access and for the creation of library catalogues that made "information accessible to all."[70]

In a more critical vein, David Greetham, an English professor and specialist in textual studies, focuses on the problematic philosophical underpinnings of both library and archival collection and cataloging practices. In so doing, he provides an eloquent

demonstration of the difficulties of determining how and what to acquire, preserve, and catalog. And he also demonstrates the absolute centrality of this work to the scholarly enterprise. Greetham offers a kind of deconstruction of the notion of the archive by showing how archival goals are always subverted by what he calls "the poetics of archival exclusion."[71]

Greetham claims that "all conservational decisions are contingent, temporary, and culturally self-referential, even self-laudatory: we want to preserve the best of ourselves for those who follow."[72] But according to Greetham, future generations may well desire and deserve something more. Greetham points out, for example, that the time capsule in the space probe contained ideal representations of our culture and nothing of My Lai or Auschwitz.[73] Greetham claims that this kind of selection also goes on in libraries. Typically they seek to collect the best or most important work in their particular subject fields.

But Greetham argues that any criteria for selection can be shown to be problematic and that we "are always in danger of looking like conservational idiots."[74] Accordingly, Greetham takes to task the British Library for its policy of requiring for deposit only those titles that have sold in excess of fifty copies. Greetham claims that it is precisely those works that are not commercially successful or that have not achieved canonical status that are most in need of bibliographic conservation.[75]

Greetham argues that even archives that appear to be built on principles of neutrality and inclusion can be shown to reflect prevailing prejudice. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), for example, is considered to be objectively constructed, as well as the most "lexically abundant historical archive to a language yet produced."[76] Nevertheless, Greetham describes how both Elizabeth Murray, whose grandfather James Murray edited the original volume, and more recently, John Willensky, have shown in their writings the ways in which the *OED* was shaped by a sense of Britain's imperial destiny.[77] The desire to create a national monument in the *OED* meant that it incorporated a certain view of the nation and of itself. Greetham notes Willensky's demonstration of how apparently objective historic citations were in fact chosen to reflect a particular nineteenth-century worldview. One example cited by Greetham is Willensky's claim that a very different series of attributes for women might have been produced if the dictionary had included citations from Mary Astell, Fanny Burney, Mary Wollstonecraft or any number of other women writers instead of relying on Fielding, Congreve, Wordsworth, and Byron.[78]

Greetham also wants to demonstrate what he calls the "archival hubris" of "universal library cataloguing."[79] He is critical of Library of Congress Classification (LCC), Dewey, and the Universal Decimal Classification (UDC) as attempts to "achieve an *anatomy* of the archive that will somehow derive from an empirical analysis of the full body of extant writings and yet try to stand outside the time and place of its making."[80] He contends that the apparent neutrality or objectivity of these classification systems belies their artificial and constructed quality and claims that "if anything the medieval logistical arrangement of the archive, both in practice and in theory, was eminently more 'natural' or at least phenomenological than LC or Dewey."[81]

But this resistance or hostility to Library of Congress Classification from outside LIS parallels a much broader questioning of traditional disciplinary divisions and hierarchies. Challenging LCC, or what Greetham and others call the organization of the

archive, is really just another way to question the "naturalness" of disciplinary distinctions, as well as any simple ordering of the universe of knowledge into ostensibly transparent categories. Debates within the library community about the efficacy of LCC are in fact part of a larger impulse to question the adequacy of universal systems and taxonomies developed in earlier centuries that provide the basis for both LCC and the current configuration of the disciplines.

Implications for Future Research

Whether or not Greetham is correct in his critique of library classification, there needs to be more dialogue between the library and scholarly communities. In part this would involve directing more of the library literature toward a broad scholarly audience. This notion is supported by the work of Barbara J. Floyd and John C. Phillips. These researchers surveyed authors' and editors' perceptions of the literature of LIS. One of their most interesting findings is the suggestion that librarians should "publish outside the field of librarianship."[82] In any case, as scholars in other fields continue to theorize about the role of library and archival collections, librarianship must develop a literature that moves beyond its disciplinary and institutional boundaries. Others have made similar arguments. Michele Valerie Cloonan, looking at the future of library preservation, has argued for the importance of exploring "the core meaning of preservation from a broad cultural perspective."[83] She deplores the fact that the introduction of new technologies has elicited a "disproportionate amount of emphasis on technical problems" and reminds us that there is an important social dimension to the preservation of the historical record.[84]

> **In any case, as scholars in other fields continue to theorize about the role of library and archival collections, librarianship must develop a literature that moves beyond its disciplinary and institutional boundaries.**

Derrida claims that current concepts of the archive are inadequate. He does, however, acknowledge that significant contributions to such a concept have been made in a variety of fields including "archaeology, documentography, bibliography, philology, [and] historiography."[85] Derrida goes on to propose a "project of general archiviology. . . that could designate a general interdisciplinary science of the archive."[86] Given the large number of contemporary writers expanding upon the ideas developed in *Archive Fever*, it is clear that this is a compelling enterprise to which librarians should contribute.

For those interested in pursuing theoretical work, archival discourse provides a place to enter the debate about changes in knowledge-making practices. Librarians and archivists are intimately aware of how new modes of scholarly production and communication are transforming the ways we collect, organize, preserve, and provide access to the archive. Developing a more theoretical perspective on these issues would promote a productive self-consciousness. It would also allow librarianship to reconceptualize its interests more broadly to promote greater conversation and cross-fertilization with other fields.

Richard Harvey Brown, a sociologist, and Beth Davis-Brown, a librarian, have co-authored an interesting example of archival discourse written from a librarian's perspective.[87] They describe the ways in which archives, libraries, and museums create and preserve national identity and thus contribute to social stability. They analyze the ways in which the work of archivists, librarians, and curators inevitably has a political component, whether acknowledged or not. They trace the political dimensions of decisions about acquiring, cataloging, digitizing, preserving, and providing access to collections. They also address the limitations of "old-fashioned taxonomies," including Library of Congress Classification. Theirs is the only librarian-authored essay in the two (previously mentioned) special issues of the journal *History of the Human Sciences*. But they do provide a productive example of what librarianship can contribute to broader conversations about the nature of the archive.

Librarians have been much concerned with the ability of libraries to support and foster interdisciplinary research. They have been less actively engaged in pursuing such scholarship themselves. Library science has certainly grown and expanded through interdisciplinary work, especially in computer-related areas. But it would also benefit from more interdisciplinary conversation with fields like sociology, media studies, cultural studies, history, the history of the book, and even literary studies where scholars are confronting similar issues and harnessing theory as a way to make connections and transcend the limits of traditionally constituted disciplines. These fields, in turn, would be enriched by the perspective of librarians and archivists working inside the archive and who thus occupy a privileged terrain from which to address these questions. It is frequently acknowledged that some of the most innovative and original work occurs in hybrid fields where scholars draw on the work of more than one discipline. Marjorie Garber has recently declared that our task "is to re-imagine the boundaries of what we have come to believe are disciplines and to have the courage to rethink them."[88] This is also true for library and information science. Archival theory is a promising path in this direction. Now is the time to join and expand this debate.

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Notes

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