

Parallel Provenance: (1) What, if Anything, is Archival Description?*

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Archival description tells a story about the formation of records and the activity they document. The stories we tell about provenance reflect a necessary choice to exclude contested narratives. We justify that choice by legitimising our point of view (inherent in any statement of ownership) according to archival principles that we claim mandate taking a single view of provenance and depicting a fixed internal structure for the fonds.

This article argues that records are linked to a dynamic set of diverse and changing relationships that cannot be properly described under that mandate. Neither the internal structure of the fonds nor its external associations are stable. Accordingly, statements about both can and should be multiplied to enable a full and accurate portrayal. This approach facilitates electronic recordkeeping and can be used to improve finding aids and appraisal. Problems

of contested ownership, it is argued, may reflect an incomplete or imperfect view on the part of the describer. This can be resolved by contextualising different points of view (different narratives concerning the events and circumstances that records document) into a single ambient description that does not detract from, but rather enriches, the evidential meaning of the records we are describing.

Compare the following three descriptions:

Archival Description. The creation of an accurate representation of a unit of description and its component parts, if any, by capturing, analyzing, organizing and recording information that serves to identify, manage, locate and explain archival materials and the context and records system which produced it. The term also describes the products of the process. *ISAAR(CPF) version 2 (2004)*

Unit of description. A document or set of documents in any physical form, treated as an entity, and as such, forming the basis of a single description. *ISAD(G) version 1 (Stockholm 1993) & version 2 (Ottawa, 2000)*

It happened at a meeting between an Indian community in northwest British Columbia and some government officials. The officials claimed the land for the government. The natives were astonished by the claim. They couldn't understand what these relative newcomers were talking about. Finally one of the elders put what was bothering them in the form of a question. 'If this is your land,' he asked, 'where are your stories?'

Chamberlin, JE. *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories? Finding Common Ground*
(Canada, A Knopf, 2003)

The ICA (International Council on Archives) Descriptive Standards Committee believes archival description is the 'creation of an accurate representation' of a 'document or set of documents ... treated as an entity' and crafted into a 'single description' of it. But what if it is a story - a narrative - and the descriptive archivist a teller of tales about

structure and context who must ask questions like the one put by the Gitskan elder: 'If these are your records, where are your stories?'

In this, the first of two articles, I try to introduce the idea of parallel provenance by arguing that the internationally standardised idea of archival description is too narrow to document the *formation* of records and the *functions* or processes in which they took part. The rules governing the documentation of these things and for linking them with the records being described are, I think, in disarray. New rules are needed, in part because these weaknesses in our methods disable us from making and keeping records within the diffuse context of a digital environment. They are needed also to enrich our descriptions and develop them to support traditional archival undertakings such as appraisal in a more socially responsible way. In Part 2, the nature of parallel provenance will be explored more deeply.

What story should we tell?

The narrative of recordkeeping is about belonging – ownership of the records and of the truth that records memorialise. It is to be found in the attribution of what archivists call provenance. The provenance of records was once thought of as something to be found in the identity of the office, enterprise, or individual uniquely responsible for their 'creation'. For the last fifty years or so, some archivists, seeking not to abandon the notion but to refine it, have quarrelled with the idea that a 'single description' can accurately depict the provenance of records. They have sought to enrich the narrative with 'multiple provenance' in order to make the description more accurate.

One response to this has been the adaptation of a notion originally borrowed from the world of discovery to support data exchange – viz. 'authority control':

Authority control. The control of standardized terms, including names (personal, corporate or geographic) used as access points. *ISAAR(CPF) version1* (Ottawa 1996) deleted from version 2

Authority entry. A standardized access point established by an archival agency responsible. *ISAAR(CPF) version1* (Ottawa 1996) deleted from *version 2*.

Authority record. The authorized form of name combined with other information elements that identify and describe the named entity and may also point to other related authority records. *ISAAR(CPF) version 2* (2004).

But authority control does not enrich contextualisation, it simply multiplies the pathways whereby records can be discovered. Recordkeeping is about meaning. Columbus discovered America, but he did not know what it meant: he went to his grave thinking it was China. Until 2004, when a definition of authority control was deleted from *ISAAR2*, archival description (the representation of documents) could be distinguished from authority control (the standardisation of terms). Terms can only be 'access points'. A *fonds* may have many access points, but only some will tell a valid and coherent story about structure and context.

If a unit of description remains what the ICA last said it was (in 2000) then description still excludes authority records. An authorised form of name (whatever it may or may not be 'combined' with) cannot lucidly be said to be a document or set of documents. Using authority records to capture and maintain 'contextual information independently ... linking it to the combination of other information elements used to describe archival documents' is allowed under the ICA rules¹ but multiple provenance has not yet been integrated into the international conception of archival description.

Lists apart (those interminable inventories of 'units of description'), the greater portion of any description tells a story about who created the records, what activities they carried out, and what purpose the records served. Descriptive narrative deals with:

Formation. Carrying out a recordkeeping or a business process.²

Function. A business process or personal activity.

Formation is what archivists think of as *creation* or *production*. People and organisations are agents of formation, what archivists identify as sources of provenance. Function denotes the processes or activities undertaken by a formative entity – an activity that is of interest to us if it generates documents. Formation confers provenance through the structure given to documents via function, not just through authorship

(the generation or origination of artefacts). Context derives from both. Formation is meaningless without an understanding of the function or process that connects it with the resulting records.

Historically, archivists have taken a strikingly narrow view of the process that connects records with formation – viz. the organisation or filing of documents,

Such archival traces become records, in the sense used in the recordkeeping professional community, when they are stored by recordkeeping and archiving processes ... Through these processes records come into being, and acquire their quality as evidence ... Whether achieved by rudimentary accumulation processes or by highly formalized and systematic ones, documentary traces are incorporated into the record of an individual or organization ...³

The SPIRT Project⁴ identified these processes of ‘recordkeeping’, an activity that documents the carrying out of a business function, as a special kind of function. This view encompasses all aspects of documentation (including a deliberate decision to make records) within the concept. Traditionally, however, the focus has been narrower, on a process that organises documents resulting from a function but does not necessarily create them in any ordinary sense – ie in the sense of causing them to come into being. This view may be defined as:

Recordkeeping. A process or activity that organises documents.

The power to organise documents, it is assumed, is concomitant with the power to generate them, control them, modify them and eventually destroy them. Evidentially speaking, that is essential knowledge when deriving their meaning. Thus the *creator* of a letter is not its author but the one assumes control over its preservation – the one who files it, either the recipient or the corporation where the author is employed. Archivists have given particular weight to *recordkeeping* as an activity that identifies the formative entity and defines the resulting structure, concentrating their descriptive efforts on the one who organised documents being described (the *creator*) and the organisation they gave to them (the *fonds*). This is not wrong but the monocular view over-emphasises the organisation of documents as the source or origin of

evidence at the expense of a broader view of function. The larger significance of the organisation of documents is the *arrangement* given, not by recordkeeping, but rather by function.⁵

It is not the documentary traces which are in sequence, but the episodes in life which they document.⁶

Records must be related to formation and function but they can exist without *recordkeeping* (in the narrow sense) – provided meaning derived from related events or circumstances comprising function and the identity involved in formation are known or knowable.⁷ This can be accomplished accidentally, even pursuant to some kind of recordkeeping purpose, without a recordkeeping system – eg by linking documents to a function through a workflow or process management – in the murky no-man’s land between recordkeeping and function.

Some believe managing electronic records in cyberspace involves encapsulating content by means of metadata (or, more correctly, attributes) that describe not only the document but its related structure and context.⁸ This view regards recordkeeping and archival description as one, providing the descriptive attributes needed to understand, manage, and retrieve records. Others maintain that documents can be managed as artefacts in a dedicated process behind a protective barrier.⁹ This latter view considers description as an aid to authenticating and preserving records in a safe place. Both these approaches are flawed. The former has too little regard to the importance of registration,¹⁰ in addition to annotation or encapsulation, and ignores the convergence of recordkeeping with business processes. The latter fails to understand that place is a relatively insignificant issue in cyberspace and that registration of more than the artefact itself is needed. Indeed, it is possible to argue that registration or calendaring (logging) may, for some functions, obviate altogether the need for organising or preserving a documentary detritus.¹¹

In the Australian system,¹² essentially a registration process, separate entities are documented at capture and related to each other to produce a data product (output) rendered differently from the data capture (input) format. If data about formation, function, and recordkeeping is embedded in the portrayal of documents, then the format in which the data is presented (the product) is hard-coded into the data capture format and all four descriptive processes are combined in a single entity.

Although originally devised as an *archival* method, occurring post-transfer, the Australian approach intervenes conceptually at or even before creation – continually updating contextual and recordkeeping knowledge throughout the life of the record in a separated representation (or register) of its formation and of the function it serves. In the paper world of the life-cycle, this amounts to recovering a lost memory of circumstances pre-existing transfer (a lost *fonds*). In cyberspace, it can be implemented at once, so that the nexus between the method and the life-cycle is broken and archival knowledge is applied throughout the *continuum* of the recordkeeping process – taking successively updated views of the evolving *fonds* and its off-shoots without losing a memory of what came before.

In this approach, relationships are:

- specified (how related)
- timebound (when related)
- reciprocal (parentage; succession)
- contingent (not logical).

Every entity carries a complete history of all relationships (past and present) on the latest version. It is therefore possible to regenerate a view of the world as it was, not just as it is now. This enables a record (evidence) to be contextualised or proven by reference to the circumstances of its creation and use. In most implementations, this provides a virtual representation of ‘the real world’. Each of the ‘real world entities’ has to be managed and that management occurs in a ‘real world system’. Even the records themselves can be managed and stored externally. What we manage is a set of descriptive surrogates.

As recordkeeping and business systems converge, however, our systems must integrate, not just portray, the functionality needed to manage entities involved in keeping records of business.¹³ This is not yet happening. When it does, the management of records, formation, and functions will take place within a descriptive environment. Our systems will no longer portray the ‘real world’ they will be the real world – so far as the recordkeeping process is concerned. As now, records of a business process will be held, – not just portrayed but so will records of the management of objects participating in those processes – formation,

recordkeeping, and functions. This is the global model for e-recordkeeping to come.

We are still far (both technically and conceptually) from being able to implement this model. It will require the evolution of standards for formulating and managing descriptions of records incorporating what ICA correctly identifies as the information necessary to 'explain the context and records system that produced' them. In a business system with recordkeeping functionality – not a recordkeeping system to describe its products – the process will involve registration of entities embodying formation and function. By some confusion of thought and syntax, ICA may now be suggesting that a 'product' of their process may turn out to be an authority record.¹⁴ Only thus could archival description be said to include the making of authority records – ie as a by-product of document descriptions instead of being a process in their construction. It appears, however, that their purpose is only to recognise the use of authority records to document 'relationships between ... records creators ... and the records created by them'¹⁵ in a way that falls outside their own definition of archival description.

Lacking an approved statement of underlying principle, international descriptive standards have been cobbled together so they can be read in different ways – instead of providing an integration of descriptive thought. This, it may be argued, is welcome flexibility. They allow implementation according to different methods. But implementation of what? The purpose and basis of description remains unclear. There is no unifying elaboration of purpose upon which different implementation strategies can be based because that was lost in Stockholm in 1993 when debate over a disputed statement of principles was discontinued by the Ad Hoc Commission on Descriptive Standards. The standards subsequently developed do not support a shared view of the archival enterprise in the achievement of which different methods may be employed. To that kind of flexibility there can be no objection. What we have, however, does not represent coherent disagreement (much less a unified view) about what we do, but deep confusion and lack of leadership.

Table 1. ICA definition of 'archival description'

<i>Interpretation One</i>	<i>Interpretation Two</i>
<p>The creation of an accurate representation of a unit of description and its component parts, if any, by capturing, analyzing, organizing and recording information that serves to identify, manage, locate and explain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · archival materials and · the context and records system which produced it 	<p>The creation of an accurate representation of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · a unit of description and its component parts, if any, by capturing, analyzing, organizing and recording information that serves to explain and identify, manage, locate and explain archival materials and · the context and records system which produced it

Ambiguity lies in the different possibilities opened up by the words ICA has chosen to define 'archival description' (see Table 1). Are the context and records system to be an object of the description of documents or do they mean us to understand that archival description involves an accurate representation of three different things:

- a document or set of documents, and
- the context that produced them, and
- the records system that produced them?

Under *Interpretation Two*, description involves separate representations of documents, context and records system (which must be related in some way) whereas under *Interpretation One*, contextual and functional description must be wrapped up into the representation of units of description.

If this ambiguity is deliberate (a verbal ploy to cover over irreconcilable differences) it is unforgivable. If it is the result of true confusion of mind, it is deplorable. Under *Interpretation One*, description of context and recordkeeping is an aspect of a process whose purpose is to represent a single view of documents. Under *Interpretation Two*, context and recordkeeping may be separately represented for the purpose of adding

to the description of documents they produced (or for establishing relationships between 'different records creators'.¹⁶) Documentation of contextual and recordkeeping entities that are not document-producers falls outside the realm of archival description – unless, of course, a sufficiently broad view is taken of 'component parts'. And 'production' is undefined.

Another view of archival description

In order to manage evidence in cyberspace, a fully functional records and/or document management system (DRMS) needs the kind of contextual (meta)data traditionally provided by archives management systems (ArMS). Such items/ objects must be handled within the DRMS once and forever, although the technological platform through which they are supported may change many times. We do not preserve documents or content as such; our task is to preserve their organisation – purposeful or otherwise. In the paper world, context did not need to be articulated until the record passed over the archival boundary. Prior to that, it was derived intuitively from its physical 'place' while still with the creator. Electronic records, being virtual, cannot derive context from place – because, quite simply, such space no longer exists – it must come from description. Description too is what we must appraise in cyberspace – not the records; but it will be description transformed by new requirements – not just representations of a document or set of documents.

Too little consideration is being given, however, to the necessary distinction between descriptive methods designed to register and those designed to encapsulate. In the physical world, an ArMS had to deal with item/objects previously registered because they brought so little with them into the archives that would enable the archivist to manage them like the records they once were outside of their native environment. Such knowledge was recoverable, however, and we called the tools we used to do it finding aids. In cyberspace, an archival boundary makes no sense because – lacking recoverable memories of event and circumstances associated with placement – electronic records must have from the outset all the description needed to manage them throughout their lifetime (either registered or as metadata). An ArMS simply provides the functionality to control the meaning given to the values.

Unfortunately, nothing like a set of stable and effective descriptive standards has yet emerged from the archival discourse that would enable anyone to do that. You could:

- overlay item/objects with an awful lot of extra metadata to enable them to be managed better at the outset and then as records forever,
- overlay the DRMS with an awful lot of functionality to make it capable of managing records through time,
- register and manage entities in an ArMS to control knowledge and meaning of formation, function, and recordkeeping.

but you cannot do these things without knowing what any of it is for. Some archivists lay traps for what they suppose to be electronic records wandering over an imaginary archival boundary artificially established and maintained; and then try to stabilise and encapsulate them with lots of archival stuff when they fall into the traps. But then they are, at best, accidental records to start with. We need to become recordkeepers again, not huntsmen seeking out accidental survivals from a defunct process.

The descriptive standardisation we have is not very helpful because it has been developed to implement a vision not of integration but of separation and the perpetuation of methods invalidated by technological developments. Our standards are about compiling finding aids and the associated system requirements are about accessing them. This is the art of writing obituaries, not managing records. The standards are not broad enough to encompass both traditional and integrative views. They focus on the creation and management of descriptions of records, not the management of the records themselves.

Another limitation to avoid is one that precludes an analysis of contextual entities that 'produce' documents being described vicariously rather than directly.¹⁷ This is ambience, or the context of provenance. The actual formation is undertaken by the author or filer of a document, by the recordkeeper within an organisation, family or group, by the agent mandated to act on behalf of an enterprise, or by the enterprise itself (or one of its component parts). Any of these may be nominated as the sole *creator* of records. Description, as a matter of logistics and

resources, has to limit itself by choosing from a number of options how to represent formation. It was not, is still not, feasible to document all aspects of formation. A choice must be made and we have chosen recordkeeping as our focus of description.

The error lies in making a virtue out of this necessity. The objects of description exist in radiating layers of structure and meaning – documents within docket exist within files that are part of a series. Many different agents of formation are involved in all but the most simplistic of functions – at each layer of understanding within which the documents are cocooned. The author of a document (indisputably its creator in at least one sense) may be very different from the agents responsible for formation of the docket, file, or series in which it is placed. Other agents (to say nothing of functions) are involved via their relationships with agents of formation – the parent corporation of the business unit responsible for forming the series, for example, or the family to which a personal correspondent belongs. These ambient entities contextualise documents vicariously. We cannot describe all of the possibilities. A selection must be made. Having done so, archivists took the fatal step of convincing themselves that the selection they prefer is the only valid one when preserving evidence. They are wrong.

To take an example familiar to practitioners of the Australian system, one wants to be able to document the family, enterprise, corporation, or organisation within which document-producing entities (agencies or persons) function – without, of course, precluding the possibility of a direct link between records and families, enterprises, corporations, or organisations either. In a sophisticated and scaleable descriptive process, entities involved directly in document-creation may account for only a fraction of the total number of entities participating in the formation and management of a *fonds* and its component parts. The actor or agent in a business transaction, for example, who authors the record may need to be documented separately from the entity whose mandate he carries out. The creator of the *series* may (almost certainly does) have to be distinguished from the author of the document. So long as ICA standards adhere to:

- the dreadful multi-level rule,
- a fixation on the single view, and

- an insistence on building a point of view into the description of objects

rather than into the crafting of relationships between them the standards do not merely inhibit, they prevent, truly accurate (in the sense of complete) representations from being formulated.

A document or set of documents capable of being represented in two or more ways is either not a fit and proper subject for archival description or else proof that archives are more complex than the ICA standards can deal with. In this article, I shall leave the question of the complexities involved in depicting recordkeeping and documents (or sets of documents) and deal only with the 'depiction' of formation and function. What I shall be saying is necessarily at variance with internationally standardised description.¹⁸ A robust body of antipodean archival theory holds that, in order to derive their evidential meaning, the accurate depiction of records requires (it does not merely allow) documenting more than one way of looking at formation and function. To discuss it in this more sophisticated way, further conceptualisations are needed:

Ambience. The context of provenance.

Provenance. An entity involved in bringing a record into being.

Record. An object whose meaning derives from an understanding of an event or circumstance with which it deals or is involved.

Description establishes relationships between records and formation (an enterprise, agency, agent, person, or family – a traditional records *creator*) as well as with business and recordkeeping processes. Documenting function separately from formation necessarily involves two views of provenance. Some archivists, in the belief that they have already undertaken functional description (or appraisal¹⁹) in addition to formational description, may be surprised to hear this. Archives are produced by recordkeeping and/or business processes. These processes and their products are scaleable and continue through time. Archival documents (or sets of documents) exist within the multi-layered (not multi-levelled) processes that produce them. Description is the ability to depict manifold layers of meaning enfolding the record with a documented understanding of related event or circumstance up to and

including the *fonds* and its ambience. Can anyone doubt that the ability to identify and document all four strands of description (formation, function, recordkeeping, and the records themselves) in order to preserve meaning is the key to making and keeping records in a digital environment? Yes, unfortunately they can.

Taking another look at the archival *fonds*

Typically, a *fonds* is an amalgam of the detritus of numerous phases in a recordkeeping and/or business process, resulting from the creative endeavours of more than one agent of formation. Disentangling these processes (and understanding the relative weight of each in records formation²⁰) is not the least important aspect of archival description. To the question 'Who produced it?' the ICA standards appear to admit of at least two possible answers – it was:

- *produced* successively by A, then by B, then by C, or
- simultaneously *created* by X, *accumulated* by Y, and/or *maintained* by Z.

These are exemplars for two kinds of contextual statement:

- **Multiple provenance.** Successive generation of the same thing in the same way at different times.
- **Simultaneous multiple provenance.** Coterminous generation of the same thing in different ways at the same time.

I doubt that the ICA standards admit of:

- **Parallel provenance.** The coterminous generation of the same thing in the same way at the same time.

Parallel provenance results from ambiguity over what 'creation' means or from an inability to see it from a different point of view (another ambience). It is a litmus test of faulty description and only exists in a world of confused, undocumented, or improperly documented context. It disappears when coterminous creative (or otherwise contextualising) acts²¹ are correctly depicted as different ways in which records are created. It can be eliminated, in other words, by converting it into simultaneous multiple provenance by one of three means, either by:

- **Disentangling confusion** over different meanings of 'creation' to allow for different statements to be made about whose records these are (eg two participants creating one set of records in shared workspace)
- **Broadening the ambience** to encompass a single overarching view of other participants in the generation process – different creation stories (eg one set of papers linked to a person and the office they hold)
- **Structuralising the provenance** to establish creation relationships at different 'levels' (eg the outsourced provider who, as agent, documents activity mandated to and carried out on behalf of the purchaser).

Some may reject parallel provenance because they regard the attribution of a creator as unproblematic. But even in its own terms, such views can be discredited by means of what might be called a 'blind description'. Put any two archivists using our standards in front of the same pile of records and ask them to describe it (without discussion amongst themselves). The resulting descriptions of provenance will not be identical or, in many cases, even similar. The rules are simply not predictive of the outcome when they applied. You cannot state them in ways that ensure the same result whenever they are applied and by whomsoever they are applied. There is nothing wrong with this unless you simultaneously subscribe to the theory of the 'single view' – that only one legitimate view of the provenance of records is possible. As I indicate in Part 2, the advent of finding aids onto the Internet enables us to demonstrate this by comparing descriptions of split *fonds* held in two or more institutions.

Parallel provenance denotes uncertainty, confusion, ambiguity, or unresolved contestation in existing descriptive practice. It is a flaw, for those capable of perceiving it, to which there is a solution. It is not an alternative descriptive paradigm. These articles intend to affirm that descriptive practice, if applied intelligently and maturely, can deal with these flaws. All three solutions to the problem of parallel provenance amount to making accurate depictions of different things made up of the component parts of a single 'unit of description'. This, essentially, is the method given to us by Peter Scott: the ability to render alternative narratives about the same records. In cyberspace, the essence of

recordkeeping will not lie in the management of digital objects but in narratives about formation, function, and process.

The fundamental principle underlying respect for provenance (the *registraturprinzip*) is adhered to – despite the multiplicity of provenance entities attributed in this analysis to a single ‘unit of description’ – provided no two contextual entities are linked to the same unit of description *in the same way and in the same time frame*.²² Having two or more sources of provenance for the same unit of description might appear to violate the principle. These values are not being assigned haphazardly, however.

Irrespective of whether or not the contextual reality is being accurately described (any archival description may be simply erroneous), it is possible for two provenance entities to be linked to the same unit of description in different ways and in the same time frame. To say this simply recognises that different kinds of ‘creation’, ‘generation’ or ‘production’ can take place simultaneously. While this recognition may not be common practice, it is not theoretically unsound – even the ICA definition of ‘creator’ recognises that may involve *creation, accumulation* – and/or – *maintenance*, while the definition of archival description itself identifies *production* as a fourth creative process.

ICA may intend these words to constitute a compounding list of features shared by a single source (or process) of creation, but the syntax of the definitions and the creation rule (*ISAD2*, para 3.2.1) allows them to be read as up to four different kinds of creation process because there is no qualifying phrase such as ‘*but only one of these*’. Similarly, there is no qualification in the ICA definition such as ‘*but only one of these at the same time*’. The latter qualification is necessary, however, to preserve the principle of respect for provenance. The descriptive problem of the archival equivalent of joint authorship is easily disposed of when one recognises it as an example of simultaneous multiple provenance.

At all ‘levels’, a recordkeeping accumulation (record group, *fonds*, series, even a file or docket) will represent the simultaneous endeavours of many actors or agents within or attached to an enterprise, agency, or family connected to the records by the processes in which the actors or agents were collectively engaged. Looking at those who authored or produced a component part of the *fonds* enables us to answer the

question: 'who wrote this letter?' or 'whose accounts are these?'. These questions also admit alternative responses:

- They are the accounts of spending authorised by the CEO.
- They are compiled by the personal assistant.
- They are sent to and maintained by the accounts department.

ICA accepts that a separately documented authority record can serve double duty as a description of provenance and as an access point, but still excludes the former from its definition of archival description. *ISAAR* allows for linking a description of records with an authority record (instead of including provenance as a part of the description of the records) and *ISAD* recognises that this may involve identifying a multiplicity of parties.²³ But if authority records continue to behave simply as standardised terms, rather than as entities with a specific recordkeeping purpose then, instead of providing a singular view of provenance, there would be as many different views of provenance as there were terms linked to the same unit of description. Standardised terms provide many alternative views by means of which the same thing can be accessed as well as the authoritative form of words by which to describe each access point. Their use is bound by no such restriction as applies under archival principles to the assignment of provenance. It is possible, in other words, to link two different entities (expressed as standardised terms) to the same unit of description in the same way and in the same time frame and from the same point of view (ambience). Identifying these as access points would be helpful. To suggest that they can also be used optionally as a means of identifying provenance, however, violates fundamental archival theory.

Dealing with contextualisation *within* the descriptive process but separately from terminological control requires necessary safeguards to ensure that basic principles are not violated. When employing a method that allows a multiplicity of provenance statements, you must have very robust ideas about what provenance is in order to distinguish between entities that confer it and those which do not.

Embodying the ambiguity of meaning

On 30 January, 1649, King Charles I lost his head. Legend has it that the execution was delayed because the regicides belatedly realised that

executing the King would not mean abolishing the monarchy and that a new King (the Prince of Wales who was out of their power) would automatically succeed. Unable to write a new constitution in a single afternoon, so the story goes, they made a law forbidding the proclamation of the new King and then went ahead with the execution.

This story (apocryphal or not) illustrates the doctrine of the King's Two Bodies.²⁴ The proclamation – 'The King is dead; long live the King' – does not mean, as many suppose, that the old King is dead and we wish long life to the new one. It means the man who was King is dead, but the office of King survives. In 1649, the regicides had tried and were about to execute Charles Stuart, but their real attack was upon the office of King. But the King had two bodies and they could only lop the head off one of them with an axe. In France, the immortality of institutions and the distinction with office-holders was proclaimed more theatrically. When the King died, it was customary for the Chamberlain (head of the King's household) to say: 'the King is dead'. Then the Chancellor (head of the King's official administration) stepped forward and proclaimed: 'the King never dies!'. So, at least, I have been told. The mediaeval doctrine of the King's two bodies – the mortal person and the immortal position he holds – the separation of the office and the office-holder – is a notion that the Romans would have had no difficulty understanding, but it took centuries to recover.²⁵

Description involves more than depicting documents and incidental features belonging to their context. Documenting context by describing formation, function, and recordkeeping is also necessary. Understanding formation, it is here argued, involves appreciating the ambiguities and uncertainties deriving from fictions such as the King's two bodies. For the ICA making an accurate representation of documents (or groups of documents) follows the organisation (arrangement) of documents in accordance with archival principles – importing a single view of provenance into physical arrangement and then basing description upon it. The description may or may not include stuff about formation, function, and recordkeeping process – it usually does, of course – but what it undoubtedly involves is identifying a 'single basis' upon which to describe it. That single basis, following the imposition of an organisation over the material that the archivist has chosen to accept,

represents one view only (one story about it) that derives from 'archival principles' governing physical arrangement.

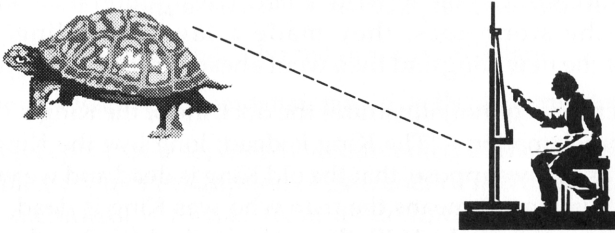


Figure 1. Archivist see, Archivist depict'

ICA's single view theory makes the descriptive archivist a prisoner of his physical arrangement. How the archivist then behaves, on this view of the matter, may be likened to that of an artist sitting at an easel into whose line of site there waddles a tortoise. The artist's job, metaphorically akin to that of the descriptive archivist, is to represent the tortoise on the canvas stretched across his easel. But unlike any artist, the archivist is denied an opportunity for representation – he must paint what he sees and what he sees reflects how he has arranged the records in accordance with his principles. These principles, it is alleged, ensure that the view taken is objective and impartial. His representations must be literal ('accurate'), reflect a reality imposed by the principles he has used, and – may we assume? – be identical to a representation produced by any other archivist. This may be likened to an old aphorism about what monkeys do. This depiction, we are asked to believe, is an accurate surrogate for that which is depicted.

Consider, now, the painting or accurate surrogate of a subject sometimes called *The Family of Henry VIII* or *The English Succession*.²⁶ It shows Henry, Jane Seymour, their son Edward VI, and two of Henry's daughters (Mary and Elizabeth) as well as two minor figures in the background. What view of Henry's family does this represent? What idea is involved about what family means? Henry famously had six wives. Why is only one shown? It excludes both his parents and all of his siblings (one brother and two sisters well known to history plus other obscure or short-lived siblings). His brother, Arthur, was married to one of the missing wives – Katherine of Aragon. Not all his children are shown here. Several were still born or miscarried, but some lived long enough to be baptised

and named. One bastard son, Henry of Richmond, survived until adulthood and was older than Edward VI when he died. What of Richmond's mother, Bessie Blount?

What is wrong with this picture? It shows Jane Seymour standing next to her son Edward who is depicted as a boy of about eight or ten. But we know that Jane died shortly after Edward's birth. The two of them could never have stood side by side as shown here. This is an allegory. It shows the component parts standing in relationships to each other that they never had in the real world. Just like a *fonds*.



Figure 2. The Family of Henry VIII

You may say that the depiction is not accurate. But the artist could reply that it accurately represents a unit of description and its component parts by *capturing, analysing, organising* and recording information that serves to identify, manage, locate and explain the family of Henry VIII and the context and social system that produced it. The unit of description is the collection of individuals lawfully entitled to participate in the succession to the English crown. Richmond, an acknowledged bastard, was never included in any of Henry's many wills as a lawful successor. Elizabeth and Mary, both declared bastards at different times, like Richmond, are nevertheless depicted here as having some claim to inheritance because they were sometimes included as successors in Henry's will. However, unlike their brother, the sisters' presumptive succession, under the arcane complexities of Tudor politics, would be despite rather than because of the relationship their respective mothers had with Henry.

Edward was the only truly legitimate heir. Accordingly, Edward's mother and Edward's mother alone is included. What the artist is depicting and what you expect him to depict may be different, that is all. Both are accurate depictions of different stories involving the same participants in the same unit of description. The picture you expect would not be an accurate depiction of his idea. The picture he has made may not be an accurate depiction of your idea of what the family of Henry VIII means.²⁷ In fact, this picture belongs to a group of similar portraits depicting half a dozen characters involved in the succession to Henry's throne and each composition is different²⁸ – one of them even includes Phillip II of Spain, both as a claimant to the English throne in his own right and as the husband of Mary I.

The teller and the tale

What one sees (when setting out to create a representation of anything) depends very much upon what one is looking for:

A man breaking his journey between one place and another ... sees a unicorn cross his path and disappear ... 'My God,' says a second man, 'I must be dreaming, I thought I saw a unicorn.' At which point, a dimension is added that makes the experience as alarming as it will ever be. A third witness, you understand, adds no further dimension but only spreads it thinner, and a fourth thinner still ... until it is as thin as reality. The name we give to the common experience ... 'Look, look!' recites the crowd. 'A horse with an arrow in its forehead! It must have been mistaken for a deer'.²⁹

Any representation is a combination of the depiction and the contextual understanding brought to it by the observer. A contextual understanding may be incorporated into the depiction but that can never, practically speaking, exhaust the added context brought to the depiction by the observer. The depiction itself is not an 'accurate' description of something, it is the manifestation of the contextual understanding of the archivist or artist who made it projected onto and combined with the object of description. This contextual understanding may be shared by an observer or it may not. An artist's depiction of the transfiguration of Christ is understood only by those who know the theological assumptions upon which the incident rests. For those who do not share

the artist's theological background, it is a picture of a man being blinded by the sun – in desperate need of shades and lotion. One does not have to accept the artist's assumptions, but one does have to understand them to see the painting as he intended.

A shared view of the representation of a unit of description cannot be achieved outside of a 'common experience'. This means that any standard for rendering a representation outside of the 'common experience' must require that the context or point of view from which the representation is observed is itself stipulated. If a common point of view is merely assumed then the representation can never be accurate (in a technical sense). Amongst different observers, some will see wounded horses mistaken for deer whilst others see unicorns.

Only thus can a representation be called *accurate*. This is accuracy in a technical or professional sense – namely, the documenter takes steps to ensure that the representation is understood and interpreted correctly *according to the intentions (or ambience) of the documenter*. It is not accuracy or *truth* in the philosophical sense – archival describers are as capable of error, untruth, stupidity, carelessness, and mischief as anyone else. Accuracy in our work is always contingent and referential. Nothing is accurate except as an instance of a more general proposition (a more general proposition which is linked contingently, however, and not logically under the egregious multi-level rule).

An accurate representation of a unit of description must comprehend, *inter alia*, two things that are conveyed (explicitly or implicitly) to the mind of the observer:

- What kind of thing is it that you are seeing represented?
- From what point of view is it being depicted?

Satisfying a requirement for including an explicit stipulation of the observer's point of view in the representation of a unit of description is an aspect of what archival description has to be – what any worthwhile standard will require.

The distinction between explicit and tacit knowledge is now a commonplace in the discussion of knowledge management. The archival theory that archivists depict, but do not adduce, what they describe obscures the great truth that archivists have been knowledge managers for a very long time. Any court will confirm that the evidentiary value

of a document depends upon what it says (what is inscribed on the face of the record) and what is known about it (what can be sworn to about the document in oral evidence by a witness who has been involved in making or keeping the document). In the document's native environment, this unwritten testimony (commonplace knowledge so familiar to users of the document in its original context that it does not need to be written down) is part of the tacit context of the document. As far as users of the document in its native environment or domain are concerned, there is no other world than the domain in which the document was created.

The outside world in which the native context is not implicitly understood is, as far as this document is concerned, a parallel universe. The document's native context only needs to be made explicit when the document leaves its environment and speaks to another parallel context – such as a court, an archives, or in cyberspace. Then, the native context must be made explicit and linked to the larger world in which the document must now make sense. It must, in effect, be recontextualised so that the evidential meaning it had in its native domain can be re-expressed within the wider world. This is accomplished primarily by contextualising its context.

I have referred to parallel provenance as if it were a different way of looking at records-creation, an argument for identifying as creators entities that are different from (or, at least, additional to) those we are accustomed to dealing with. The vocabulary of description – deriving from notions that its object is a 'unit of description' (as ICA calls it) with a fixed internal structure and a single external persona – makes this unavoidable. A better way of looking at it – one more in tune with Australian thinking – would be to understand that the descriptive units comprising any *fonds* can combine in numerous ways with other descriptive units to form a variety of aggregations. From this perspective, parallel provenance is not about taking a different view of the same thing. It is about composing different things from the same particles – combining things in different ways to produce a variety of views of what they look like in the aggregate – just like the Family of Henry VIII. It is not so much about identifying a different creator as recognising manifold context.

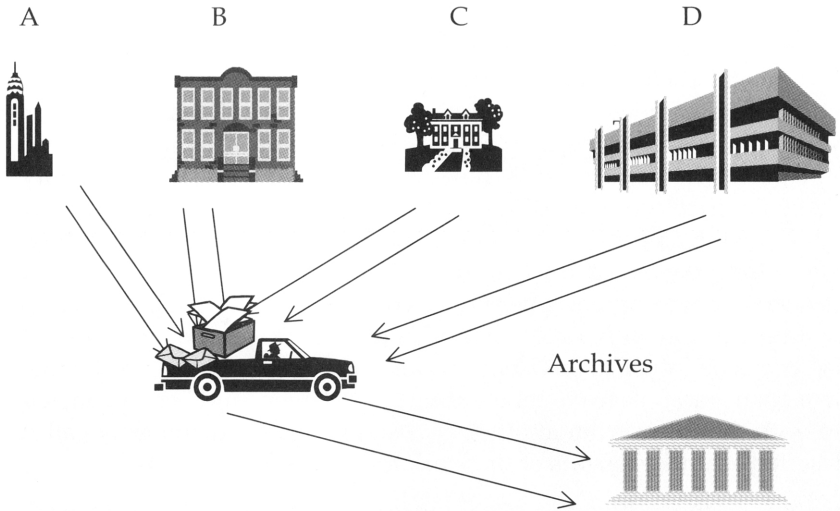


Figure 3. The Little Truck

The archivist as recordkeeper

This is what happens when ‘The Little Truck’ transports materials into another world (depicted here as an Archives). It may be a physical world (such as an archives) or a *terra incognita* of the mind. Metaphorically, the little truck is ‘archival description’ transporting records into a wider context from the one in which they are created (or into a parallel provenance) so that their meaning beyond the limited and unstable understanding of the circumstances of their immediate ‘creation’ can be preserved – either at once or at the end of a lifecycle. The ‘description’ may be a business process – ascribing metadata or linking a document to a workflow – to give an enterprise one view of a document created by an actor in the process. Alternatively, it may be a recordkeeping process – filing or registering the detritus of a business transaction – or a documentation process – integrating a document with a defined taxonomy or classification.

The context of the materials in the back of the truck did not need to be explicit when the materials lived in a physical space whose boundaries established it unmistakably in the minds of those who worked there

(A, B, C, and D). It would have been pointless to inscribe every record in A that this was a record belonging to A, nor would it have served much purpose (so far as users working in A were concerned) to document the wider context (ambience) of which A was part. Everyone working there knew that and no one else needed to because the records were only used by people working there. When these materials are transported into an Archives, however, that is into a realm of activity (eg cyberspace) populated by other 'creators', then they enter a new environment, a physical environment or merely one of understanding, where they are mixed up with materials from B, C, and D. They are now in an environment where their context must be made explicit to avoid confusion with materials from somewhere else. For centuries, it has been the job of archivists to write down the 'missing' contextual data once materials leave their native environment and become mixed up with materials from another environment. We customarily call it description and the fruits of the work are called finding aids.

In doing so, the archivist is not adding to contextual knowledge. Instead, archivists document knowledge of the native environment that was previously undocumented in the heads of the people who inhabited the native environment whence the materials have been transported – the living finding aids. The contextual environment being documented was bounded by the walls of the Archives – but they were virtual walls, not physical, encompassing the entire enterprise being archived. True archival description involves drawing an imaginary line out from the Archives to embrace a documentary 'representation' of a world in which the sources of the materials (A, B, C, and D) existed. It is necessary not only to describe A, B, C, and D separately but also to document the ambience which they inhabit (as agencies of a single enterprise, for example, if that is what they are).

In a court, this contextualisation is done by witness – testimony which confirms and explains the making and keeping of the document so that its evidential meaning is plain. An archivist does it by documenting tacit knowledge about the document, its fellows, and its provenance in a finding aid. A notary does it by subscribing according to common rules of – document handling so that relevant features of the document are presented in accordance with societal rules which are not particular to the native domain of the document.

If documents from several different agencies of government (or several business units within a single company) were presented without the context and knowledge of structure, their meaning would be severely compromised. Documenting the several agencies or business units without relating them to each other would provide a single context for each of the groups of documents (*fonds*) produced by an agency or business unit, but no coherent picture of the documents as the archives of an enterprise. Only by documenting the ambience as well as the provenance can an accurate depiction of the context be achieved.

Thus it will be seen that only an imperfect and partial view (surely not an accurate one) can be achieved by limiting archival description to a single view of provenance based upon the representation of producers of documents or sets of documents. Taking a single view of provenance is like subsisting on Big Macs in Paris; it is like going to the Louvre and looking only at the *Mona Lisa*. The context of provenance is just as important. Similar complexity lies within provenance. A multiplicity of views is possible – not just over time but in the same temporal space. Not just any additional view is allowable, however, to be parallel provenance – not just another access point. The respective views of provenance must be ones which embody a legitimate concept of what ‘provenance’, and not just mere association, involves.

The ambience of parallel provenance

If archivists can develop a more sophisticated set of ideas about creation, such that by showing how records are related in different ways ambiguities inherent in traditional notions are eliminated, parallel provenance resulting from confusion over creation and fractured views of ambience can be dealt with. Parallel provenance of the other kind, revealing an inadequate or incomplete view of ambience, must be handled by linking the object of description to a *lost fonds* – one whose existence cannot be inferred from physical arrangement. This does not involve making up a non-existent *fonds*, but an as-yet unrecognised one. As archivists have always done, we must avoid inventing contextual knowledge. It is to be discovered, not manufactured. Our job is to identify context that always existed but has not hitherto been documented. Archival description habitually identifies previously undocumented context for new transfers. Legitimate provenance statements that link the object of description (the records) to an ambience

that is different from the one to which we have already joined the provenance statement indicates a hitherto unidentified *lost fonds*. Parallel provenance resulting from an incomplete view of ambience means there will be no documented inventory of agencies (*fonds*) to which that entity can belong representing the undocumented ambience. If such attributions are legitimate, it points to a great fact, viz. that the documentation produced by all programs that are not addressing parallel provenance must be as Peter Scott once described the *physical fonds*:

disordered, dismembered and dislocated ... [displaying] ... misplaced, destroyed or re-numbered files; chaotic and re-arranged records.³⁰

There are only four possible responses to this:

- The parallel view(s) is/are not legitimate, there is no need to provide for them, hence our documentation is not faulty.
- There are such views, but our program does not illuminate them, hence our documentation is faulty.
- There are such views, we have expanded our ambient view to accommodate them, hence our documentation is not faulty because the provenance identified is no longer parallel but multiple.
- There are such views, we have submitted our work to an external moderator who maintains a more complete ambient picture, hence our work, though faulty, can be viewed via a gateway which corrects those faults.

A contextual entity cannot just be any useful term for discovery purposes – it cannot just be a subject or a geographical idea or glossary alternative to a preferred term. It must reflect a legitimate idea about the creation or production of the instant units of description. An access point can be anything. A contextual entity must conform to a technically correct and standardised application of the rules for identifying creation/production.

How then do we determine which entities are worthy of conferring context? Such a sense of what linkages confer true context and which do not has to be (if not consensual) based on an accord, a tradition, a

shared sense of what is allowable. The ICA standards represent such a tradition, but they are not unimpeachable. Just because a mistake has become encrusted into a tradition, that is no reason to continue perpetuating it. A single mind, however, such as the one responsible for this analysis, can only critique accepted beliefs, it cannot manufacture new ones. That can only come from discussion and debate within the profession out of which a consensus might emerge.

This much can now be said. The tests of authenticity will be found in traditional archival thought. Jenkinson reckoned authenticity to lie in presenting Archives (a word he always capitalised) with nothing added to and nothing taken from them by the keeper. We may also agree with him that the hand of the keeper must always be visible. We may add that the same is true of the maker of records. That view of authenticity is echoed in a recent book with that title.³¹ The author takes an almost Rousseau-esque approach. Authenticity is unspoiled, natural, un-tampered with, un-interpreted, un-spun, original, not kept, accidental, unselfconscious, not interfered with, the 'unvarnished truth'. I think Jenkinson would approve.

Consonant with the test of authenticity are others – naturalness, impartiality, archival bond, and uniqueness as championed for us by Luciana Duranti, for example. These features all point to a great truth: recordkeeping entities cannot, *pace* Xena,³² be manufactured or 'normalised'. They must emanate naturally (an old fashioned word, much loved by the early writers) from an observation of the recordkeeping and business processes from which records spring. Archival description must be based on observation, not normalisation – be it of the logical or the technical kind. Context, therefore, must reflect an honest attempt to depict what was actually there, not what can be conveniently depicted. Observation must deal with what there is to be seen, not what it wants to see. Thus description of the origination of records, documented contemporaneously with their creation or later, instead of being discarded and replaced by an ethereal *essence* dreamt up by a custodian, must lie at the heart of electronic recordkeeping. Archivists are Aristotelians, not Platonists.

An authentic context, it might be allowed, is an entity observably involved in the process, business, or activity with which the records are connected in a view that makes them evidence. Thus, the context of the records of Australia's Stolen Generation is to be found in the official

agencies of government, in the churches and welfare agencies that participated, and in the people to whom that policy was applied (or set of policies, since different aspects were involved including Aboriginal affairs, health, education, to name but a few). Those records belong to the narrative of the people upon whom the policies were applied as well as the narrative of those who wrote them and set them aside.

This is not simply to say that records relating to the stealing of children have been 'created' by those whose children were stolen or by the children themselves. It is about recognising that the whole of the records in which this process is documented make up a legitimate archival whole pertaining to the experience of those involved in the events or circumstances which the records document – just as a bank's ATM record documents the narrative of a transaction between two parties in shared space: the bank and the customer. That experience produced units of description whose context can only be described by identifying all of those entities whose involvement was necessary for the process to occur and by delineating their respective functions and activities within the story we tell about it. The life of those records continued into a period of reports, reversals, rectifications, apologies, and recriminations, so their provenance becomes mired in overlapping and contested ambient views deriving from Australian society and politics also.

It may be doubted whether alternative formational entities can be easily or reliably fashioned to deal with this kind of parallel provenance. Discussed elsewhere,³³ I have nominated ambient functions as an alternative focus of provenance statements based on activity. In that discussion, I had in mind functions that were the mandate of a nominated formational entity – the responsibilities assigned by a government to a department of state or by a business to a business unit. I think the better approach to parallel provenance of this kind might be to fashion another kind of ambient function – ones that encompass the activities of formative entities but are not their exclusive mandate. Thus, a nineteenth-century Protector of Aborigines would be portrayed as a participant in the societal ambient function relating to 'Aboriginal Affairs 1' but that would be distinguishable from (and relatable to) the mandated government function 'Aboriginal Affairs 2' and the *fonds* created by the formative entity 'Protector of Aborigines'. In all likelihood, the function would be ambient and relate directly to the formational entity (just as Peter Scott predicted³⁴) and relate only vicariously to the

records. But this is speculation – once the concept is grasped it will be up to descriptive archivists to find out how to implement it.

Aspirations that some government archivists have to undertake macro-appraisal from an ambient perspective on functions must be understood in this context. The flaws in appraisal methodology this approach seeks to overcome do not derive simply from taking an insufficiently ambient view. Nothing of value will be achieved so long as the functional analysis upon which it is based is internal to the enterprise whose records are being appraised. The methodological problem this highlights is that all archival programs are trapped within the ambience in which they appraise. Where, it must be asked, will an adequate ambient analysis be derived that contextualises the role of the appraiser as well as the appraised?

Let us consider how the Aboriginal People might be represented functionally as ambience for the records of the Stolen Generation. Suppose, for the sake of the example, we characterise them in two different and perfectly possible ways – ‘Indigenous People of Australia’ and ‘Post-Colonial People in Australia’. Apart from the differing temporal perspective of each notion as a locus for provenance, I would say that there is a material difference in the authenticity of each as a context for the records creation process for the records of the ‘Protector of Aborigines’.

While there are other examples of indigenous peoples (the Canadian First Nation, for example, and the Maori), the meaning of each comes specifically from time, place, and a unique experience with which each is associated. Their meaning comes from who they are not what they have in common with other indigenous peoples. If there was only one indigenous people, and they were the Aborigines of Australia, their meaning would be little changed. In that light, they satisfy the requirements to be a locus of provenance in one role or another. Post-Colonial People in Australia, on the other hand, is a notion that suppresses the unique and particular in the Aboriginal experience and stresses what is common about post-colonialism everywhere. I would feel much more comfortable with the former as an ambience of parallel provenance than with the latter.

Objections will be raised that my analysis ignores the currently agreed professional basis for defining provenance, which is the only justifiable

point of view from which to describe archival materials. All other points of view, it may be argued, are merely access points or (more derisively) subjects. Other views are possible, it will be argued, but they are not archival. Within the confines of this article I can only offer a partial response to this criticism:

- I have already shown here and elsewhere that the traditional view of provenance involves complexity and multiplicity beyond the capability of techniques based on a single view to cope with.³⁵
- An examination of such cases demonstrates that archival description (even when circumscribed within a traditional view of records-creation/production) produces a different view of the same records in separate descriptive programs.
- Such views are self-avowedly based on the imposition (via arrangement) of a chosen point view based on a vague appeal to 'archival principles'.
- The multiplication of parallel views that occurs when a more sophisticated approach is taken of what creation/production means and more than one possible creation/production relationship type is identified – a sophistication of which even the ICA Committee is, in part, capable – provides further examples.
- Coping with such confusion involves allowing parallel views as being equally legitimate unless a sufficiently broad view of ambience is taken in which, at least, simultaneous multiple provenance must still be allowed.
- In the literature there is no archival view of what 'creation' involves that is not simplistic and inadequate.

I refer to a 'debate' over the archival view of creation, but that is too generous a description. Such a debate, should it occur, would need to be carried along three (fittingly parallel) paths:

- How to deal with parallel provenance resulting from a '*fractured*' view of the same ambience? All five archives authorities along Australia's eastern seaboard are attempting

to describe the same thing (government of Australia) but they are doing so in a fragmented way, not in uniformity.

- How to deal with parallel provenance that derives from an alternative or *contested view* of ambience? Should the official view of the Stolen Generation prevail over a societal one? Is each a legitimate notion of provenance or not?
- How to deal with parallel provenance within a *unified view* of ambience that derives from alternative definitions of 'creation' or 'production' within a common context.

Clearly, such a debate will need to be lengthy and profound.

Endnotes

* This is the first of a two-part treatment, originally intended as a more closely focused discourse on parallel provenance. I am grateful to Frank Upward for suggestions that resulted in a substantial re-ordering of the material and to Glenda Acland for gently guiding me towards a version that now goes some way to meeting objections raised by peer reviewers to the style and structure of these two pieces. In developing the discourse, it became apparent that the idea could not be satisfactorily demonstrated without an analysis of flaws in current approaches to archival description. Prior thinking on this matter (which I do not have space enough here to satisfactorily synthesise) is to be found in previously published articles. Chief amongst these are 'Ambient Functions' *Archivaria* 40, Fall 1995, pp. 21-39, 'Problems with Provenance' *Archives & Manuscripts*, vol. 23 no.2, Nov. 1995, pp.234-259, 'The Making and Keeping of Records: 1. What Are Finding Aids For?' *Archives & Manuscripts*, vol.26 no.1, May 1998, pp.58-77, 'The Making and Keeping of Records: 2 The Tyranny of Listing' *Archives & Manuscripts*, vol.28 no.1, May 2000, pp.8-23, and 'Relationships in Records: Parts 1-7 and Retrospective' *New Zealand Archivist* Summer 2001 (Pt.1), Winter 2002 (Pt.2), Spring 2002 (Pt.3), Summer 2002 (Pt.4), Autumn 2003 (Pt.5), Autumn 2004 (Pt.6), Winter 2004 (Pt.7), Summer 2004 (Retrospective). Much of this material is available on the website of the Records Continuum Research Group at:

<<http://www.sims.monash.edu.au/research/rcrg>>

1 *ISAARI*, para 1.3.

2 Formational description is an unhappy term, but I can think of none better. An alternative might be structural description. The idea is to isolate the description of those who carry out business and recordkeeping (organisations, enterprises, persons, agents, actors, families, etc). These traditionally confer provenance being the entities that are said to create or produce the records (ie

are responsible for their formation), but the thesis here is that they are not unique in having that role. Functions too can form records.

3 Sue McKemmish, Michael Piggott, Barbara Reed and Frank Upward (eds), *Archives: Recordkeeping and Society* (Charles Sturt University, Centre for Information Studies, 2005, p.9.

4 Sue McKemmish, Glenda Acland, Barbara Reed, 'Towards a framework for standardising recordkeeping metadata: the Australian recordkeeping metadata schema' *Records Management Journal* (UK) 9(3) December, 1999. Refer to: <<http://www.sims.monash.edu.au/research/rcrg/publications/index.html>>.

Any reading of this work is erroneous that makes an identity between recordkeeping metadata and recordkeeping or archival systems. Admitting the possibility of 'accidental' records leads to the conclusion that recordkeeping metadata (taken in its broadest meaning) may attach to records in an unmanaged and non-purposeful way and that the presence of a system (particularly a recordkeeping or archival system) while always to be welcomed is unnecessary. See below.

5 For of fuller exposition see 'Relationships in records Part 5' op.cit.

6 'Relationships in records: Part 6 (Everything is an episode in the life of something)' op.cit., para 6.2.

7 For an extended exposition see 'Relationships in records Part 7' op. cit. where it is argued that, since the object of our attention is documentation of the event or circumstance rather than management and preservation of the documentary artefact, it may be that we should pay more attention to the process of logging (or registration) in which computers perform superbly and less to the process of preserving documents that are incidental to the action in which computers perform badly.

8 The classic exposition of this view (the metadata encapsulated object) was made by David Bearman, 'Item Level Control and Electronic Recordkeeping' *Archives and Museum Informatics*, vol.10 no.3, 1996, pp.207-245. This notion has subsequently been applied in other research models and implementations. See the RKMS projects at <<http://www.sims.monash.edu.au/research/rcrg>> and the VERS Project at <<http://www.prov.vic.gov.au/vers/vers/default.htm>>.

9 This is essentially the InterPARES approach, see <<http://www.interpares.org>>.

10 The meaning of the record (including its metadata/attributes) must itself be controlled from outside the record and from a stipulated point of view.

11 See 'Relationships in records Part 5' op.cit.

12 Chris Hurley, 'The Australian ('Series') System: An Exposition' in *The Records Continuum: Ian Maclean and Australian Archives First Fifty Years* edited

by Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott (Melbourne, Ancora Press, 1994) pp. 150-172.

13 Recordkeeping theory has become beguiled with the system design implications of electronic recordkeeping. Design is all very well, but it is business practice that must be moulded to recapture an understanding of how to behave in order to make and keep records, not the systems that support it. Once business requirements are clear the design features needed to support them will follow.

14 If this is the ICA position, it would be akin to thinking about the generation of provenance entities the way Lady Bracknell thought about marriage – it should come upon a young ‘gel’ as a surprise, pleasant or unpleasant as the case may be.

15 *ISAAR2*, para 1.2.

16 *ISAAR2*, para 1.2.

17 An entirely different analysis, only touched on here, is required around the concept of ‘produce’ or ‘create’. What do we mean by it? Usually, we mean the one person or body responsible for the ‘arrangement’ of the *fonds* or series under examination. Under the Australian system, earlier (and even subsequent) arrangements of documentary materials belonging to the same recordkeeping process may also be noticed – to the extent of documenting now non-existent series (or even now non-existent fonds) on the basis of evidence supplied by what has survived – eg a series wholly top-numbered into another. As the ICA Commission itself now recognises, there are deeper complexities surrounding the different ways in which creation or production can occur. If a closed series, for example, is handed on to another creator who then adds papers to existing files without opening new ones, there is no meaningful way in which the second agency cannot be accorded the status of creator – yet that status is clearly different from that of an inheriting agency which continues the series and opens new files within the same system.

18 But not, necessarily, at variance with international practice. I now deride the ICA approach wherever possible and whenever I am allowed to speak about descriptive standards. When I point out the logical absurdities and implementation nightmares of trying to apply these underlying principles in ISAD and ISAAR, I frequently get the reaction that although these standards are subscribed to they are not actually implemented as written. ‘Oh, yes,’ people say to me ‘we follow the standards, but we don’t do what they say – we actually do it your way!’ It is just possible that this is a case where everyone can see that the Emperor has no clothes, but no one cares to say so.

19 What else is appraisal but a focused form of description? The value of a record can only ever be gauged from one’s understanding of it – its meaning. Meaning, its articulation and preservation, is what archival description is about.

20 And recognising also that the weight of importance may be moving away from recordkeeping processes to business processes as the proper object of descriptive attention.

21 It is the act or circumstance with which documentation is connected that definitionally makes it a record. The counter-argument to parallel provenance is that a record admits of only one view of the act or circumstance in which it is formed. The knee-jerk defence to any suggestion that acts and circumstances that define records may be more complex than we can represent in a single view is that it is all or nothing – one view or as many as you please. The more sophisticated approach is to recognise that what is being asserted here is not that any old connection should be recognised as conferring provenance, but only those that are necessary to a full understanding of the acts or circumstances that make the associated documents meaningful as records. The argument should be about the relevance of the parties to a complete understanding of the related act or circumstance not the assertion of a dogma that if one is identified two cannot be. To allege that parallel provenance implies an indiscriminate attribution of ‘creators’ to documents is to miss the point and to set up a straw man instead of engaging with the argument.

22 If that were to occur legitimately, then it would be the archival equivalent of joint authorship. While such a possibility could be considered, the argument here is that the context is a combination of the records (and their associations) plus the provenance (and its associations). Since the participants in a true joint provenance would each (presumably) have different associations, this is a reason for avoiding joint provenance if at all possible.

23 Indeed, the transactional record, a key concept, is inherently the result of multiple provenance – a transaction by definition existing between two parties. Traditionally, we think of the records of a transaction as comprising two series or fonds when each party maintains copies of what passes between them. But suppose, what is technically very feasible, that the email records of a transaction were maintained in a single server with only one copy of each email being kept. Then, the resulting series of emails would be a single series produced by both parties. In the real world, Internet banking already supplies such an example. It is the bank’s recordkeeping system that supports the record of the transaction. What is, in effect, happening is that a single workspace is created within which the transaction occurs and only one record is created of the transaction. This is not being maintained by a trusted third party, but by the party with the greater power and technological capacity. The trustworthiness of the record comes from the robustness of the recordkeeping functionality of the bank’s system.

24 Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, University Press, 1997 (originally published in 1957)).

25 The central notion in the constitutional thought of Republican Rome, it has been said, is that all power should be held briefly and that it should always be shared. I think the Romans would have understood parallel provenance very easily.

26 The original painting, from the Royal Collection, hangs in Hampton Court in London.

27 It would be interesting to see how many different compositions of the 'Family of Henry VIII' an informed group of descriptive archivists came up with if they were put to it in a blind testing.

28 One, attributed to Hans Holbein, shows Henry, his father and mother, and Jane Seymour. Another, by Lucas de Heere, entitled *The Allegory of the Tudor Succession*, shows Henry and Edward VI with Mary and her husband (Phillip II of Spain) on one side and Elizabeth on the other - each accompanied by allegorical figures signifying peace and war.

29 Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, Act 1 (London, Faber, 1968).

30 P J Scott and G Finlay, 'Archives and Administrative Change - Some Methods and Approaches (Part 1)', *Archives and Manuscripts* (August, 1978) vol.7, no.3, p. 115.

31 David Boyle, *Authenticity: Brands, Fakes, Spin and the Lust for Real Life* (London, Harper Perennial, 2004).

32 National Archives of Australia, *Making, keeping and using digital records* (Canberra, 2004) <http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/er/making_keeping_using.pdf> 'We are developing software called Xena (XML Electronic Normalising of Archives) to convert digital records to standardised XML'.

33 Chris Hurley, 'Ambient functions : abandoned children to zoos' op.cit.

34 P J Scott and G Finlay, 'Archives and Administrative Change - Some Methods and Approaches (Part 1)' op.cit., pp. 122-123.

35 At least, I have to my own satisfaction.