

## Parallel Provenance<sup>1</sup> (If these are your records, where are your stories?)

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<sup>2</sup>"

The ICA Descriptive Standards<sup>3</sup> tell us that 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 :

**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)

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 article, 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. This is true, I believe, not only for those (like me) who want to see description used to traverse the imagined boundary between records-making and records-keeping but even if the aim is

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<sup>1</sup> This article appeared in two parts in *Archives and Manuscripts* : Part 1 (What, If Anything, Is Archival Description?) in vol.33, no.1 (May 2005) and Part 2 (When Something is *Not* Related to Everything Else) in vol.33, no.2 (November 2005). 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*, v. 23 no.2, Nov. 1995, pp.234-259, "The Making and Keeping of Records : 1. What Are Finding Aids For?"★ *Archives & Manuscripts*, v.26 no.1, May 1998, pp.58-77, "The Making and Keeping of Records : 2 The Tyranny of Listing"★ *Archives & Manuscripts*, v.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 (indicated as ★) is available on the website of the Records Continuum Research Group at <http://www.sims.monash.edu.au/research/rcrg>.

<sup>2</sup> Chamberlin, J Edward, *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories? Finding Common Ground* (Canada, A Knopf, 2003), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> References to internationally adopted standards refer to the work of the International Council on Archives (ICA). Two standards have been developed - *ISAD(G) : General International Standard Archival Description* (1994, 1999) and *ISAAR(CPF) : International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons, and Families* (1995, 2004). To date (2007) each has appeared in two successive editions. The second edition of *ISAD(G)* and both editions of *ISAAR(CPF)* may currently be found on the ICA website at <http://www.ica.org>. A draft standard on documentation of functions may be found at the same location.

merely to describe dead records in an archival repository. 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 also needed to enrich our descriptions and develop them to support traditional archival undertakings such as preservation, appraisal, and support for historical research in more effective and socially responsible ways.

## 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 and in the preservation of the "original" order in which owners left them. The provenance of records was once thought of as something to be found chiefly in the identity of the office, enterprise, or individual uniquely responsible for their "creation". For the last fifty years or so, some archivists, not seeking to abandon that 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" by separating documentation of records and provenance.

The ICA standards have effectively adopted a notion originally borrowed from the world of discovery to support data exchange - viz. "authority control" – as a means of separating the documentation of records and provenance :

**Authority control.** The control of standardized terms, including names (personal, corporate or geographic) used as access points. ISAAR(CPF) v.1 (Ottawa 1996) deleted from version 2

**Authority entry.** A standardized access point established by an archival agency responsible. ISAAR(CPF) v.1 (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 not just discovery. 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 ICA last said it was (in 2000) then the definition of description still excludes the management of 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 process set out in the ICA rules<sup>4</sup> but multiple provenance can hardly be said to have yet been integrated into the conceptualisation of description in these international standards.

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(s) the records served. Descriptive narrative deals with :

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<sup>4</sup> *ISAAR1*, para 1.3.

**Formation.** Carrying out a recordkeeping or a business process.<sup>5</sup>

**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 documentary objects. 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 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 ...<sup>6</sup>

The SPIRT Project<sup>7</sup> 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 - i.e. in the sense of causing them to come into being as objects. This view may be defined as :

**Recordkeeping.** A process or activity that organises documents.

It can be argued that organising documents is not just about managing someone else's creation, that it creates (causes to come into being) a collectivity that otherwise would not exist. 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, for the archivist, the *creator* of a letter is not its author but the one who assumes control over its organisation, management, and preservation – prosaically, 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

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<sup>5</sup> 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 (i.e. are responsible for their formation), but the thesis here is that they are not unique in having that role. Functions too can form records.

<sup>6</sup> Sue McKemmish, Michael Piggott, Barbara Reed and Frank Upward (eds), *Archives : Recordkeeping and Society* (Charles Sturt University, Centre for Information Studies, 2005), p.9.

<sup>7</sup> 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. 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.

them (the *fonds*). This is not wrong but it over-emphasises the organisation of documents as the source or origin of evidence at the expense of a broader view of function and use. The larger significance of the organisation of documents is the *arrangement* given, not by recordkeeping alone, but also by function and use : by events taking place within the realm of action of which documents are only traces<sup>8</sup>.

It is not the documentary traces which are in sequence, but the episodes in life which they document.<sup>9</sup>

Though records must be related to formation and function, 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 and use are known or knowable<sup>10</sup>. This can be accomplished *accidentally*, without recordkeeping purpose or intent, without a recordkeeping system - e.g. by linking documents to a function through a workflow or process management - in the murky no-man's land between recordkeeping and function.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>. On this view, recordkeeping and archival description are one, providing the descriptive attributes needed to understand, manage, and retrieve records. Others hold that documents can be managed as artefacts in a dedicated process behind a protective barrier<sup>13</sup>. On this latter view, description is 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<sup>14</sup>, 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<sup>15</sup>.

In the Australian system<sup>16</sup>, 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

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<sup>8</sup> For of fuller exposition see "Relationships in records Part 5"★ *op cit.*

<sup>9</sup> "Relationships in records : Part 6 (Everything is an episode in the life of something)"★ *op cit.*, para 6.2.

<sup>10</sup> 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 (so far) perform badly.

<sup>11</sup> Or, as Oliver North and Admiral Poindexter found, to their cost, when there is a deliberate intent and purpose to delete the record.

<sup>12</sup> The classic exposition of this view (the metadata encapsulated object) was made by David Bearman, "...". 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>.

<sup>13</sup> This is essentially the InterPARES approach, see <http://www.interpares.org>.

<sup>14</sup> The meaning of the record (including its metadata/attributes) must itself be controlled from outside the record and from a stipulated point of view.

<sup>15</sup> See "Relationships in records Part 5"★ *op cit.*

<sup>16</sup> 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.

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).

Insignificant things (such as names, titles, and terms) are attributes of entities but significant things (records, agents of action, functions) must be depicted and controlled as entities because only thus can the most significant kind of recordkeeping knowledge (how things are related and when) be properly documented.. In this way, every entity can carry 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 subsequent 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 if they never left the real world. The distinction between records (documentary objects still engaged in the processes of formation) and archives (inanimate objects preserved inertly to enable coronial examination of traces left by those processes) ceases to be meaningful.

As recordkeeping and business systems converge, our systems must integrate, not just portray, the functionality needed to manage entities involved in keeping records of business<sup>17</sup>. 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 yet to come.

We are still far (both technically and conceptually) from being able to implement this model. 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]" takes us part of the way. 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<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> 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.

Only thus could archival description be said to include the making of authority records - i.e. 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"<sup>19</sup> 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 One : ICA definition of "Archival; Description"**

**Interpretation One**

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

**Interpretation Two**

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

Ambiguity lies in the different possibilities opened up by the words ICA has chosen to define "archival description" (see **Table One**). Are 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 :

1. a document or set of documents, and
2. the context that produced them, and
3. 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"<sup>20</sup>). 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.

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<sup>19</sup> ISAAR 2, para 1.2.

<sup>20</sup> ISAAR 2, para 1.2.

## 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 item/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 or remote 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 current technological developments. Clever methods to emulate in cyberspace what we once did in physical space are a waste of time and effort. 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 one wants to avoid is one that precludes an analysis of contextual entities that "produce" documents being described vicariously rather than directly<sup>21</sup>. 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 as the best one 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

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<sup>21</sup> 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 - e.g. a series wholly top-numbered into another. As the ICA Commission itself recognised, 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.

more complex than the ICA standards can deal with. In this piece of work, I shall leave aside 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<sup>22</sup>. 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 appraisal<sup>23</sup>) 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.

## 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 formation<sup>24</sup>) 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, etc., or
- simultaneously *created* by X, *accumulated* by Y, and/or *maintained* by Z

These are exemplars for two kinds of contextual statement -

- **multiple provenance**, which is successive generation of the same thing in the same way at different times.

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<sup>22</sup> 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 few care to say so.

<sup>23</sup> What else is appraisal but a focussed 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.

<sup>24</sup> 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.

- **simultaneous multiple provenance**, which is coterminous generation of the same thing in different ways at the same time.

I doubt that the ICA standards admit of

- **parallel provenance**, which is 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) acts<sup>25</sup> 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 (e.g. two participants creating one set of records in shared workspace), or
- **broadening the ambience** to encompass a single over-arching view of other participants in the generation process - different creation stories (e.g. one set of papers linked to a person and the office he holds), or
- **structuralising the provenance** to establish creation relationships at different "levels" (e.g. 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 between 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 are 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 below, 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 are intended to affirm that descriptive practice, if applied intelligently and maturely, can deal with it. 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 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.

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<sup>25</sup> It is the act or circumstance with which documentation is connected that makes it a record. One view of the act or circumstance in which the record is formed is hard to find in most finding aids. Multiple views are displayed in the "descriptive text" but not the provenance statement . It does not follow, however, because acts and circumstances that define records are more complex than we can represent in a single view, that you can portray as many as you please. What is being asserted here is not that any old connection may 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 formation to a complete understanding of the related act or circumstance not the assertion of a dogma that if one is identified two cannot be. Parallel provenance does not imply an indiscriminate attribution of "creators" to documents.

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**<sup>26</sup>. 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*". By the same token 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 of 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<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> If that were to occur legitimately, then it would be the archival equivalent of joint authorship. That is possible, but 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.

<sup>27</sup> 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

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 then 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<sup>28</sup>. 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 it in western thought<sup>29</sup>.

Description involves more than depicting documents and incidental features belonging to their context. Documenting context by describing formation, function, and recordkeeping activity 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

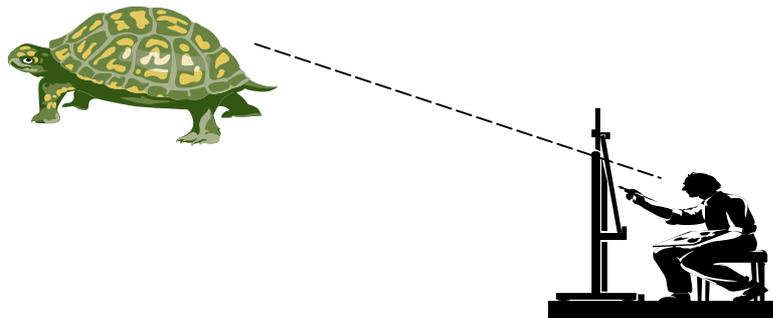
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transaction. This is not being maintained by a trusted third party, but by the party with the greater power and technological capacity. The trustworthiness of the record comes from the robustness of the recordkeeping functionality of Bank's system.

<sup>28</sup> Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, University Press, 1997 (originally published in 1957)).

<sup>29</sup> 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.

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, deriving from a single view that has been taken of 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) based on "archival principles" which govern physical arrangement.

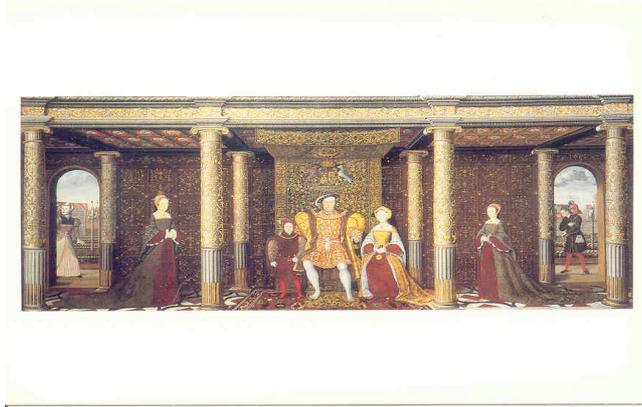


**Figure One : Archivist See, Archivist Depict**

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 (**Figure One**). 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* (**Figure Two**). 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 Two : 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, analyzing, organizing* 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<sup>30</sup>. 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 different<sup>31</sup> - 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"<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> 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.

<sup>31</sup> 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.

<sup>32</sup> Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, Act 1 (London, Faber, 1968).

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 - viz. 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, *inter alia*, comprehend 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 while. 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. So 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, so 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 or 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.

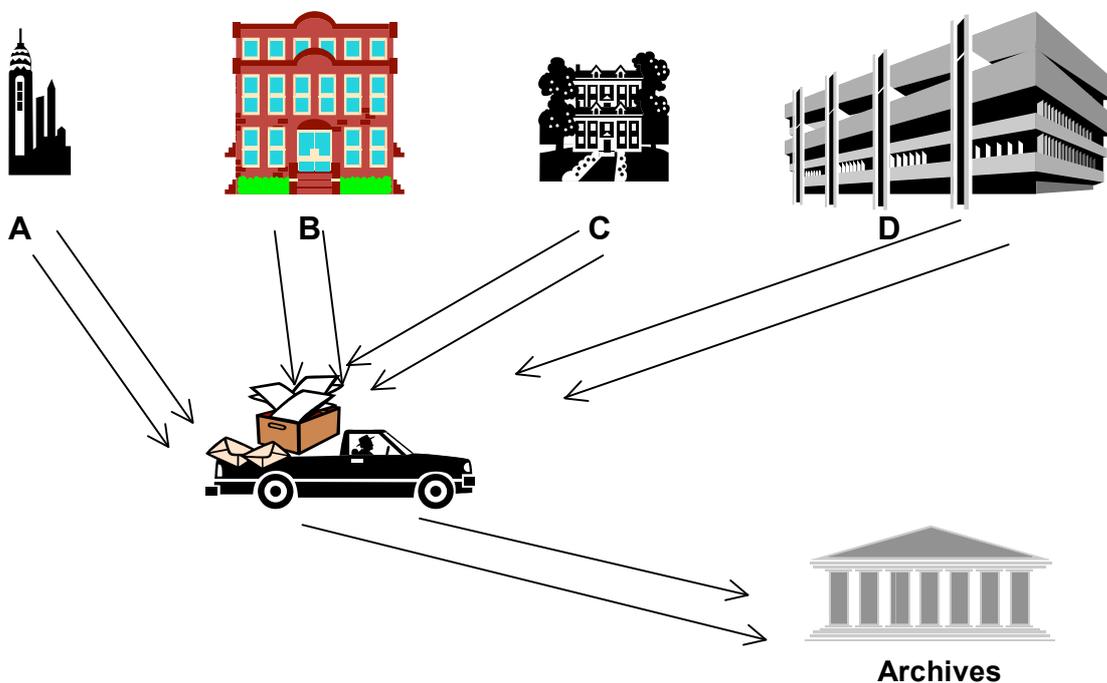


Figure Three : The Little Truck

## THE ARCHIVIST AS RECORDKEEPER

This is what happens when **The Little Truck (Figure Three)** 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 (e.g. 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 being produced by all programmes 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<sup>33</sup>

There are only four possible responses to this :

1. The parallel view(s) is/are not legitimate, there is no need to provide for them, hence our documentation is not faulty.
2. There are such views, but our programme does not illuminate them, hence our documentation is faulty.
3. 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.
4. 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 go on 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

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<sup>33</sup> 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.

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<sup>34</sup>. The author takes an almost Rousseau-esque approach. Authenticity is unspoiled, natural, un-tampered-with, un-interpreted, un-spun, original, not kept, accidental, unconscious, 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*<sup>35</sup>, 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. In another place<sup>36</sup> 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

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<sup>34</sup> David Boyle, *Authenticity : Brands, Fakes, Spin and the Lust for Real Life* (London, Harper Perennial, 2004).

<sup>35</sup> National Archives of Australia, *Making, keeping and using digital records* (Canberra, 2004) - "We are developing software called Xena (XML Electronic Normalising of Archives) to convert digital records to standardised XML". See [http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/er/making\\_keeping\\_using.pdf](http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/er/making_keeping_using.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> Chris Hurley, "Ambient functions : abandoned children to zoos" ★ op. cit.

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 predicted<sup>37</sup>) and only vicariously to the records. But this is speculation - once the concept is grasped it will up to descriptive archivists to find 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 programmes are trapped within the ambience in which they appraise. Where, it must be asked, will an adequate ambient analysis be derived from 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 and 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<sup>38</sup>,
- 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 programmes,

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<sup>37</sup> P J Scott and G Finlay, "Archives and Administrative Change - Some Methods and Approaches (Part 1)" *op. cit.* , pp. 122-123.

<sup>38</sup> At least, I have to my own satisfaction.

- 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 does not prove to be 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. Archivists, sure that the doctrines of archival description provide an authentic view of the truth about the records they depict will be troubled by an approach that not only permits but actually demands multiple views. They will want to know whether it is still possible to have standardised descriptions. Description is one of the chief ways we preserve archives. How can we be said to be preserving them if we allow more than one depiction of them to be true?

How then to judge the truth? How to decide whether we are in the realm of the imagination or in reality? One trick is to see things from different perspectives, recognising that stories and songs both express their truths in more or less direct communication and reveal them in words and images that we must interpret ... The word "witness" ... refers both to the testament given and to the individual giving it; in the Bible, the Greek word ... is the root of our English word "martyr". This sets truth-telling alongside suffering, which seems to settle responsibility onto the teller rather than the tale, with the test being the teller's credibility. But we know there is more to it than that.<sup>39</sup>

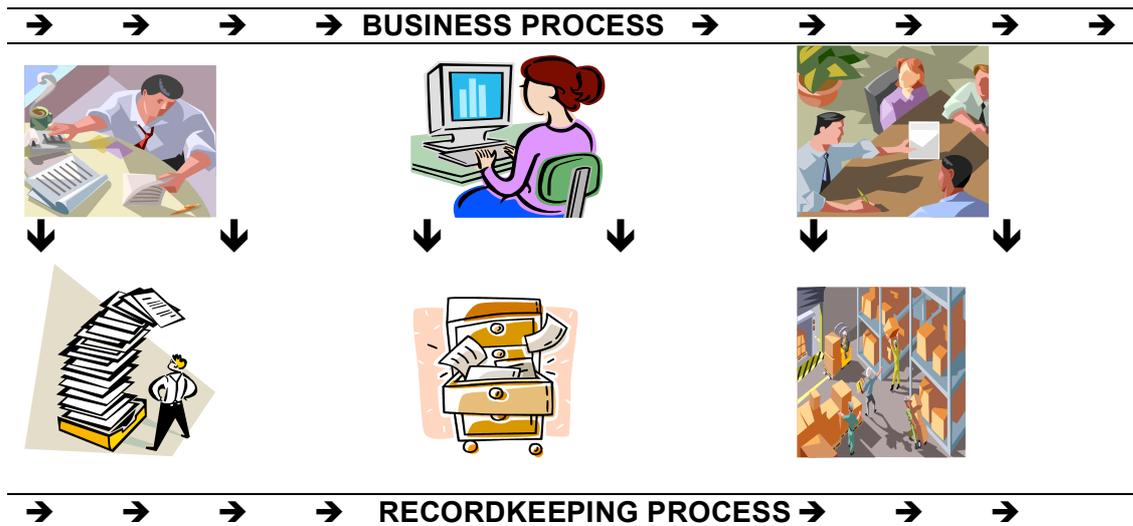
Describing the same records, archivists seldom produce identical descriptions although adherence to descriptive rules is meant to preserve authenticity by ensuring that a correct view of the material being described is preserved. Perhaps archival descriptions are rarely tested for this because archivists deal in unique materials. Differences can be accounted for by the unique characteristics of each "unit of description". But what if it goes deeper than that? What if descriptions do not conform to a uniform way of portraying common characteristics? What if our principles are so incoherent that parallel provenance exists in fact as well as in imagination in the diverse views our rules permit us to take of the same thing? How would we know?

Once allowance is made for some variation in style and expression, the need to *preserve* provenance by making an accurate and reliable depiction of it means the bandwidth for individual differences of approach to statements of ownership must be slight. If the use

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<sup>39</sup> Chamberlin, J Edward, *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories? Finding Common Ground* op. cit., p. 151

to which archivists put the idea of provenance is to be justified, we must get it right. If we assert that archives can only be preserved and understood if the provenance is correct then the onus is on us to get it right. But if any two of us are incapable of agreeing what it is when we see it (not how it may be defined, but what it actually is for a body of material before our eyes) the assertion may be doubted. Artistic variations and embellishments cannot be allowed to suborn the avowed purpose : to attribute records to the *correct* provenance. If the rules do not enable us to do this, then either correctly attributing provenance is unimportant (contrary to what we have always believed) or else the rules for identifying it are flawed. Yet it is difficult to find in our literature any satisfying discussion (indeed, any discussion at all) of the limits on allowable differences when identifying it. How far may two archivists disagree in the attribution of provenance before one or both is wrong?



**Figure Four : The Cabbage Patch Paradigm**

There are many sides to the truth to which archivists are witness in their descriptions. Before stating who *formed* the records, we must identify what it is that they have formed. The “unit of description” does not fall from the sky or form itself overnight under a cabbage leaf. Remember the unicorn. Disagree about what to describe and there will be disparity over whom to ascribe it to. The disputed statement of principles accompanying the first draft of the ICA descriptive rules gave at least one certainty with which to simplify and resolve such dilemmas. The *fonds* (and its component parts) was *something* concrete and tangible that could be described. It was not, as Australians understand it, a *view* - a method for combining units of description into collectivities reflecting their manifold circumstances and adventures (in short, their stories). Rules that identify units of description as component parts of something else (*composition*) will produce a different outcome from rules that treat them as episodes in a narrative formed by connections with other entities (*relationship*) – unless some unifying theory is employed.

In its purest form, parallel provenance may be observed within what I have sometimes called the cabbage patch paradigm (**Figure Four**). On this view of the world, records are created in a business process and organised in a recordkeeping process into which they fall like relief packages dropping from low-flying aircraft. Provenance derives from business and structure derives from recordkeeping. Every morning recordkeepers go out into the garden to look for records left for them by business under cabbage leaves from the night before. Description is a recordkeeping process that identifies the agents of formation in the business process (provenance) documents the organisation of the detritus left by the business process (records management). Although it is seldom expressed this way, the cabbage patch paradigm confers parallel provenance on all documents. The records are undoubtedly created by agents of formation in both

processes – the authors as well as the filers of documents. Kitty Pakenham makes and receives the letters and the Duke of Wellington files them in his bureau.

As has already been alluded to, the attribution of a single provenance to any document is a dangerous simplification. Filing must involve sequencing documents according to an activity that takes place within the business process. In cyberspace, the search for an underlying logic to the organisation and preservation of documents that is not derived from an ongoing analysis of the flow of work through which documents pass is a fool's errand. Similarly, the idea that the formation of records (and hence their preservation) is supported by different processes to the conduct of business (rather than a seamless integration) is clearly a dead end so far as electronic recordkeeping is concerned. The whole of the digital archiving endeavour is trapped within this cul de sac.

Consider the following :

**Description One**

Series **x** was created by enterprise **k** through the agency of **b**; it was succeeded by series **y** and series **z**.

**Description Two**

Series **x** was created through the agency of **b** in succession to **a**; it was succeeded by series **y** (created by **b**) and series **z** (created by **c**). Formerly, during the early part of the creation of **x**, agent **b** was part of enterprise **j** before moving to enterprise **k** and some of the responsibilities of **k** subsequently moved to enterprise **m**. Agent **c** inherited control over series **x** following the demise of agent **b** and the transfer of functions from **b** to **c**.

**Description Three**

Document **m version 2.09** was authored by **d**, submitted to **e**, and approved by **f**. It was produced as part of workflow **9876** in step **5** of (trans)action **1234**. Recordkeeping control was vested throughout in agent **g** under the authority of agency **b** within enterprise **k**. Workflow **9876** has been identified as belonging to sequence/series **x** amongst the records created by enterprise **k**.

These three descriptions are recognisably trying to accomplish the same purpose. The rules (and the accompanying theoretical basis) for descriptions two and three, however, are going to be very different from the rules underlying description one<sup>40</sup>. It would be possible to construct a unifying theory that encompassed all three approaches, but this has not been done<sup>41</sup>.

## TO WHOSE STORIES SHOULD WE LISTEN?

Developing methods to deal with parallel provenance involves an intricate twofold approach. On the one hand, there must be an assault on tradition - exposing limitations of views that are too narrow and confused. On the other hand, tradition must be defended against an indiscriminating application of any old contextualisation without regard for distinctions (whatever they may be) between those which confer true contextual understanding of the contingent circumstances in which records came into being (and which they evidence) and those which do not. We do not respect anything

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<sup>40</sup> Of course, the additional information contained in Description Two could and probably would be included as added description under Description One. This is why I assert that a unifying principle is possible. The example is concerned with the attribution of provenance and the identity of the entity being described, not with the corrective power of the "note".

<sup>41</sup> When deriding the ICA rules to overseas audiences, I am repeatedly told that the methods I advocate are what many of my auditors employ. When I tackle them about it and point out the conflict with ICA rules, they respond that they simply discard so much of the ICA rules as would interfere with their doing it the right way. I do not, therefore, mean to imply that international practice is faulty, simply that international theory cannot account for it. I am astonished, however, that others do not see this as a problem.

worth having if we only apply received methods, absent an understanding of what they are for. True respect comes from appreciating the purpose for which we strive and it is sustained by refining our methods (or abandoning them altogether and replacing them better ones, if need be) to ensure that the purposes for which we set out to respect provenance in the first place are met.

It is not necessary to abandon the established provenance perspective, only to recognise its limitations and be open to a richer view. It is a legitimate view, but not the **only** legitimate view. Ted Chamberlin makes a similar point about the certainty we cherish concerning our title to ownership over land :

... there is *another* title, one that contradicts this idea of exclusive ownership. We need to find a way of believing them both, just as we believe in both a sun that rises and a sun that remains right where it is ... Actually, we already do, so what I am suggesting should come easily. The other title is sometimes called "underlying" title. We don't think about it from day to day, just as we don't think about the round earth, until we are reminded about our responsibility to the land and to its creator or until the government decides to put a road across our front lawn or build a dam and flood the valley where we live. Then we are made rudely aware of the fact that our title is not quite as true as we thought it was. It is underwritten by a title vested in the nation ... It is a legal fiction, of course; but it shapes the facts of life and of the land ... Underlying title, whatever adjective we apply to it, is a trick, a way of understanding something beyond everyday understanding; but it's a trick the way the theories of science are, or the law, which routinely establishes fictions as fact.<sup>42</sup>

Our view of an exclusive provenance establishes truths we needed to believe by ignoring things we don't think about from day to day. It is our story, we are used to telling it, and we believe it. Like our title to land, we have forgotten how arbitrary it is. Now there are other stories to tell - the tale of a stolen child trying to reconstruct the process through which she was passed or that of an Internet transaction in shared work space. We must learn to recognise and recount those stories too.

Consider now the Lord Chancellor's words from *Iolanthe* :

The law is the true embodiment of everything that's excellent  
It has no kind of fault or flaw; and I m'luds embody the law.  
W S Gilbert *Iolanthe* (1888)

Here too is a legal fiction (in more ways than one). Much of Gilbert's humour comes from paradoxes as to identity and relationships (provenance). That is why I suggest descriptive archivists read him - if possible, accompanied by Sullivan's delightful music. The wit in the Lord Chancellor's song derives from the suggestion (a confusion in fact) about parallel provenance. The excellence of the Law infuses the position of Lord Chancellor and hence the current occupant of the position. Gilbert is humorously suggesting that the Law's excellence "belongs" also to the Lord Chancellor and to the current occupant. The humour comes because we know it is untrue - whatever excellence there may be in the Law, it does not automatically flow on to either the office or its occupant.

The entities shown in **Table Two** are a metaphor for parallel provenance.

<i>W S Gilbert</i>	<i>Arthur Sullivan</i>	<i>F C Burnand</i>	<i>Morton Maddison</i>		
	<i>Walter Scott</i>	<i>H W Longfellow</i>	<i>Richard D'Oyly Carte</i>		
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<i>Bab</i>	<i>Iolanthe</i>	<i>Ivanhoe</i>	<i>Golden</i>	<i>Lost</i>	<i>Cox &amp;</i>
<i>Ballads</i>			<i>Legend</i>	<i>Chord</i>	<i>Box</i>

<sup>42</sup> Chamberlin, J Edward *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories? Finding Common Ground* op cit, pp. 228-229.

**Table Two : The Works of Gilbert & Sullivan**

In **Table Three**, one way of sorting out the provenance of entities below the dotted line is displayed. Gilbert & Sullivan (an entity conceived of as representing their collaboration and including D'Oyly Carte) is responsible for the production of only one of the works listed here : *Iolanthe*. If *Gilbert & Sullivan* is seen as a corporate entity rather than a collection of individuals<sup>43</sup>, and as having an existence separate from them as individuals or in other roles, we could add *Ivanhoe*, produced by G&S without the participation of Gilbert - and a notable flop. When his name was omitted from the Court Circular following a private production of *The Gondoliers* for Queen Victoria at Windsor, Gilbert famously retorted : "I suppose I shouldn't be upset about not being given credit for *The Gondoliers*; I might have been given credit for *Ivanhoe*!"

Provenance	Unit of Description	Provenance	Unit of Description
W S Gilbert	Bab Ballads	Walter Scott	Ivanhoe (novel)
Arthur Sullivan	Lost Chord	Sullivan & Scott	Ivanhoe (opera)
"Gilbert & Sullivan" #	Iolanthe	H W Longfellow	Golden Legend (poem)
M Morton	Cox & Box (play)	Sullivan/Longfellow	Golden Legend (oratorio)
Sullivan & Burnand	Cox & Box (musical)	Carte & Sullivan	Ivanhoe (opera)

# includes D'Oyly Carte

**Table Three : The Gilbert & Sullivan Fonds**

From a parallel perspective, the work of Sullivan and the work of Gilbert separately (both respectable *fonds* in their own right) intersect and overlap at many points with other *fonds* and with each other.

## MULTIPLE PROVENANCE AND THE VIRTUAL FONDS

Peter Scott's purpose was to reconstruct descriptively a *virtual fonds* in place of the fractured and incomplete *physical fonds* existing on the shelf -

disordered, dismembered and dislocated filing systems; misplaced, destroyed or re-numbered files; chaotic and re-arranged records.<sup>44</sup>

Every series is listed on an *inventory of series* for every creator involved in its formation. But these inventories only supplement the *inventory of agencies* -

... our listing of agencies is arranged first by structure and then by date. The primary elements ... are listed in chronological order. We then have separate listings of the subordinate agencies attached to each of the departments or ministries referred to in the primary inventory .. [like series] agencies may also be transferred from one department to another ... An obvious complementary approach will, be the development of listings of agencies arranged according to ... function.<sup>45</sup>

Scott refers to the *inventory of series* in the plural and the *inventory of agencies* in the singular. In any complex enterprise, the *fonds* comprises one or more *inventories of series* (linking series to formation) plus an *inventory of agencies* (linking provenance to ambience - listing *sous-fonds* within a *fonds d'archives*). By speaking of a single listing for the whole of the Australian Government, which he seems to regard as a single *fonds*, Peter is addressing one of the confusions in the established concept. Departments or ministries are routinely given as examples of *fonds*, *fonds d'archives*, Archive Groups, and/or Record Groups. But they can be viewed, from the ambient perspective, as *sous-fonds* of an "organisation" (the government or enterprise of which they are part). Each

<sup>43</sup> If the ICA rules are to work (indeed, if any descriptive enterprise is to function), many non-personal institutions must be thus treated that are not going to be corporations in the legal sense.

<sup>44</sup> 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.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123. When we introduced *inventories of agencies* to the Public Record Office of Victoria we named them *Record Groups* - partly as a joke and partly to make the point.

*inventory of series* is a *sous-fonds* in Scott's system. He envisaged two kinds - one based on internal organisational structure (formation) and another upon function. He anticipated that it would be *inventories of agencies* not *inventories of series* that would be interwoven with functional analysis - that functions would form the basis for a second view of the *fonds* not a second view of its contents.

ICA contemplates the necessity of relating authority records to each other but gives no guidance on how they should be related to records (or, rather, when they should not) nor how such relationships (however used) must be

- managed in order to preserve the unity and integrity of the *fonds* at the ambient level, or
- applied, in order to display the internal structure of the *fonds*, at the level of description covered off by *ISAD*.

It is clear, however, that assumptions about both are embedded in our descriptive tradition. The consequences are significant when one remembers that the deconstruction of function requires that descriptive rules are scaleable<sup>46</sup> - a *fonds* may exist at any level within a recordkeeping or business process. In *ISAAR2*, the relationships area (5.3) deals only with "... relationships with other corporate bodies, persons and families ...". That is, ICA deals with relationships that might form the basis for an *inventory of agencies* but not the equally important set of relationships that might form the basis for an *inventory of series* or for description at the *series* or *item* level. Four categories of relationship (hierarchical, temporal, family, and associative) are nominated but exemplars of these categories are given only by example - no rule is stated. Furthermore, no principle is laid down for their use - anything can be related to anything. Since extended context is a form of provenance for any unit of description that is linked, directly or vicariously, to a provenance entity, this is an invitation to make anything you please part of the provenance and to confuse any association that takes your fancy with those that form the basis of a true *fonds*.

**Creator** is defined by ICA as

The corporate body, family or person that created, accumulated and/or maintained records in the conduct of personal or corporate activity.  
Not to be confused with collector.

A corresponding definition is given for **provenance**

The relationship between records and the organizations or individuals that created, accumulated and/or maintained and used them in the conduct of personal or corporate activity.

The slight variation is intriguing. Does it mean that "collector" (a user of records) is part of provenance though not a creator? Does that mean a search room reader (also a user of records) is part of the provenance too? What is to be made of the omission of families that "created" records from the definition of provenance?

Provenance must be documented by way of relationships with records that have their own character not by adopting the character of the related entity. A "creator", however defined, has meaning beyond its function as a creator of records. Although the list of possibilities appears to be circumscribed (organizations, corporate bodies, persons, and

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<sup>46</sup> The rules of description can be applied to any entity regardless of its place within the network of relationships established by a single point of view. It follows that the meaning of an entity derives from the relationships established with other entities, not just the attributes assigned to it. This meaning can be altered by adding to the network of relationships. In this fashion, any entity can assume any entity-role and, within certain limitations, take over the function of any entity-type. In plain terms : a file can be anything from an "item" to a *fonds* or a recordkeeping system in its own right - depending on how it is described (or viewed).

possibly families) and somewhat circular, it is clear that many entities which may be so identified could be related in the ways nominated by ICA (create, accumulate, maintain, use). It is not clear how ICA intends these ways to be understood (defined) so the door is open to many varying and diverse linkages between "creating" entities and records. The key to having a focussed, rather than a prolific, outcome is the definition provided for these kinds of relationship or, in the alternative, a definition of the entities which excludes any other kind of organisation, body, or person besides the records-creator and, what is probably true of some archival practice, any other kind of activity beyond that of creating records - a manifestly absurd way of thinking about creation entities. Indeed, the value and purpose of attributing provenance - beyond establishing the identity of the *fonds* - is to incorporate meaningful data about context into the description of the records.

What does "create" etc. mean? When can such a relationship type be employed? More importantly when can it not? What relationships with authority records of the kind enumerated are excluded under *ISAAR2* rule 3.2.1 (creation) and *ISAAR2* 3.2.4 (source of acquisition)? How are relationships of any other kind provided for? What kinds of relationships are possible between units of description and authority records that are of a type not enumerated in the definitions of creation and provenance?

Simply, who can create records and who cannot? With what kind of entity is a recordkeeping relationship of *creation* possible (directly or vicariously)? How can we define them? How can we know what kind of entities, though in every other respect identical to those which create records, are themselves rendered incapable of doing so? We cannot responsibly narrate just any tale about records creation. There has to be some plausibility, some objectively verifiable connection that establishes a link between the contextual entity and the process of creation - an instance of what Terry Cook has called (in relation to appraisal) :

... the contextual narrativity found within the records-creation process ... emphasiz[ing] the dialogue and interaction of citizens and groups with the state as much as the state's own policies and procedures ... search[ing] for multiple narratives and hot spots of contested discourse between citizen and state, rather than accepting the official policy line ... in short, consciously attempt[ing] to document both the functionality of government and its individual programmes that are themselves the creation of citizens in a democracy **and** to document the level of interaction of citizens with the functioning of the state: how they accept, reject, protest, appeal, change, modify, and otherwise influence those functional state programmes, and are in turn influenced by them.<sup>47</sup>

The verifiable connection with the creative process, it should by now be clear, is participation in the act or circumstance by virtue of which a document becomes a record, not merely the management of the *fonds*. In many cases, such participation will involve more than one party of formation and more than one process. The exclusion of non-participating parties and processes is valid. The exclusion of all participating parties or processes save the one that handles the documents has to be justified by the descriptive archivists who assert such a principle.

The primacy given to a single formation appears to have come from ideas about the sanctity of the *physical fonds* - the observable outcome of document management. Despite the unfortunate title of his first published article, Scott did not "abandon" the Group or the *Fonds*. He sought its reconstruction in a virtual form for each successive stage in its formation, recognising the equal claims of two or more participating parties in the acts or circumstances of its creation. This was his way, I suspect, of trying to defend himself, as he thought, from anticipated accusations of archival heresy. In this, his efforts turned out to be futile. Towards the end, however, he began to open his mind

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<sup>47</sup> Terry Cook, "Fashionable nonsense or professional rebirth : postmodernism and the practice of archives" *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001), pp. 30-31.

publicly to alternatives involving simultaneous formations from alternative viewpoints, "pointing to the increasing need for a complementary approach to agencies by function" -

This will also involve the *classification* of agencies [fonds] by industry/activity/function ... of which more will need to be said on a future occasion.<sup>48</sup>

To avoid charges of heterodoxy, he had to identify those separated creations that when aggregated would form a true *fonds* as well as other aggregations that some might say were no *fonds*. Unlike descriptions of an accumulation of records on a shelf, series *registrations* must correctly identify each *virtual fonds* to which a series belongs before it is attributed to the formative endeavour of the *agency* in order to validate the attribution. A proper conception of formation is needed to enable the archivist to document the *fonds* in the absence of any of the records actually produced.

## HOW IS A RECORDS CREATOR TO BE IDENTIFIED?

The Achilles Heel in the Australian approach is this need to identify a *fonds*-producing entity without actually examining the records. Rosemary Collier comes close to exposing this weakness in a recent article re-iterating that the only valid focus for archival description under past and present approaches has been the records themselves<sup>49</sup>. The *virtual fonds* is a conceptual entity, not a contingent one, or else it is nothing, but (at the outset at least) Scott was anxious to demonstrate how his methods conformed to traditional approaches and merely broadened them, without violating the essential principles upon which they were based. The separation of the *virtual fonds* from an examination of the recordkeeping circumstances is a shaky proposition, however, in both theory and in practice. It is solvable, I think, by taking a more sophisticated and elaborate approach to delineating relationship types between *records-creator* and *records-created*. Scott's solution, however, was to define agency purely in terms of the *sous-fonds* it produces (or is likely to produce) - an entity with "an independent recordkeeping system".

### **Peter Scott (1966)**

An **agency** is a part of an organisation that has its own independent recordkeeping system.

This is Scott's synonym for *sous-fonds*. Produce a *sous-fonds* and you can "create" records series. Otherwise, you can't - no matter how much this seems to contradict any other circumstances of the formation. It follows by definitional logic that the total emanation of every agency is a *sous-fonds* bounded into a *fonds d'archives* by relationships the agency has with organisations and other ambient entities. Compare Peter's 1966 definition with subsequent developments :

### **National Archives of Australia : CRS Manual<sup>50</sup> now**

In the Archives' control system an **agency** is a distinct and recognisable body which has responsibility for carrying out administrative functions. An agency will usually have:

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<sup>48</sup> P J Scott, C D Smith and G Finlay, "Archives and Administrative Change - Some Methods and Approaches (Part 2)", *Archives and Manuscripts* (April, 1979) Vol.7, No.4, pp. 151 and 163.

<sup>49</sup> Rosemary Collier, "The return of the groupie, or the fonds farewell? Thoughts on the Archive or Record Group concept" *New Zealand Archivist* (Summer, 2004), pp. 14-19. I say that Rosemary's emphasis on examination of records as the basis for description is correct in my view. Yet my chosen and preferred method belies this. The cause of this intellectual conflict lies, I believe, in our primitive approach to documenting recordkeeping (and business) processes - a flaw long ago identified for us by David Bearman - and its resolution I believe lies in getting better at analysis and documentation of both functions.

<sup>50</sup> Downloaded from National Archives of Australia website (*CRS Manual*) on 20 February 2005. The *CRS Manual* is, of course, an implementation not a conceptualisation. *The CRS Manual* goes on to define two kinds of relationships between agencies and series (*creation* and *control*) and a third kind of relationship between agencies and "records" (*transfer*). None of these relationships embody *respect des fonds*. "Records" are not a unit of description within the Australian system.

- an identifiable head with **decision-making authority** at its hierarchical level;
- a legal instrument or some form of delegated authority which establishes its **basis for existence** and sets out its functions; and
- its own **recordkeeping system**.

This is a broader definition than previously used by the Archives. The previous definition emphasised the existence of an independent general recordkeeping system. An agency can be part of the executive, legislature, or judiciary

Under this definition, both the original defining characteristics have been eliminated - now, they are only features that agencies "will usually have" or things that "can be".

The change that has been made is undesirable until a more sophisticated archival concept of *creation* is uncovered. When you separate creator from the created by means of a relationship, the archival meaning of *creation* should be located not in the identity of the creator but in the nature of the relationship. Descriptive practice has taken an unproblematic view of creation based on observation of the material being described. Conceptually, the Australian approach must put it *a priori* into the relationship-type, not into the description of either entity. Initially, Peter Scott didn't do that. Instead, he made his definition circular. By the end, he had started to unravel the meaning of *creation* with forays into simultaneous multiple provenance. We still have to cling to the Scott formulation because no other way has yet emerged whereby *records-creation* can be properly documented. The alternative - developing more sophisticated ideas about *creation* and building them into a multiplicity of relationship types - has not yet been accomplished. When that has occurred, but not until then, we can move on from Scott's original idea of *agency*.

#### **ISAD(G) 2**

**Creator.** The corporate body, family or person that created, accumulated and/or maintained records in the conduct of personal or corporate activity. Not to be confused with collector (nb. "**collector**" is not defined).

This last definition is so broad that even ICA found it necessary to explain that it does not include *collector* - even though the act of collection is a perfectly legitimate notion within the concept of provenance. Scott defined the *creation* of records (viz. maintenance of an independent recordkeeping system - his proposed definition of *sous-fonds*) so that separation of a description of creator from a description of records would not prevent him from assembling a *fonds* (as he defined it) by listing all of the series created by an agency, itself forming part of a *fonds*. This will not be the result of using either the ICA's definition nor that now propounded in the *CRS Manual*.

ICA's definition covers a multitude of actions at a multitude of levels - all of which have to be dealt with in any adequate approach to provenance. In one sense, this is quite satisfactory. Any act of *creating, accumulating and/or maintaining* records - be it discrete documents or entire series or *fonds* - qualifies. But by unbinding the creator in the way approved of by the Australian system and **then** allowing separate identification of the unit of description and the creator in a manner that is fatal to its correct application, ICA has lost the baby of *respect des fonds* along with the unwanted bath water of a description of context bound up with a description of records.

Peter Scott's original definition survived to at least 1990 (long after Peter had separated from the National Archives and had ceased to have input into the development of his system there) :

#### **National Archives of Australia : CRS Manual (c. 1990)**

An administrative unit which has a recognizable identity, generates records and has its own independent general record/keeping system. An agency can be part of the Executive, Legislature or Judiciary and may be an authority, board, committee, court, military unit or part of a department.

In his original conceptualisation, Peter understood better than anyone else so far the need to work with a definition of creation that embodies some notion of the *fonds* and his 1966 definition is better at grappling with that requirement than either of those which followed. If we can find a more sophisticated notion of *records creation* than the one that is embodied in the notion of the *fonds* the additional notions of *creation* we introduce into descriptive practice need not involve the loss of *respect des fonds* as it has been understood - so long as a "true" *fonds* results from at least one definition of *create* in the form of either a single or multiple views and other definitions reflect a legitimate view of *formation*.

The argument Peter expected, I suspect, was over his definition of the *virtual fonds* in contradistinction to the *physical fonds*. I think the challenge he expected was: "Peter, your *virtual fonds* is not a *true fonds*" - not in the sense that some critics argued, that it was artificial, but in the sense that it did not conform to the defining characteristics of *true fonds*. Convinced that all other writers on the *Fonds/Group* were conceptually at sea, I think he was waiting for the moment (after they had committed themselves to a conceptual nonsense) when he could expose their confusion<sup>51</sup>. The opportunity never came. He was ready to defend his concept in comparison with anyone else's idea of a *fonds*. But the argument I think he wanted was a definition-by-definition comparison (a conceptual argument) and he never got it. Now 40 years later, it remains a debate that has yet to take place.

If Kitty Pakenham's letters are filed into her husband's bureau (regardless of whether they are intersorted, kept separate or as a discrete sub-unit) they are a series created by the Duke, not by his wife. They are Kitty's letters, but they are part of the Duke's *fonds*. According to Scott's theory, and in conformity with established archival thinking, the Duke "created" the series.

None of this goes far enough either in theory or in application. The question boils down to the problem posed by the title to one of Sue McKemmish's articles - are records ever actual?<sup>52</sup> If the tie between the *fonds* and an actual physical manifestation of the operation of a documentary process is broken, then the answer must be "no". I want to be able to describe Kitty's correspondence as the "creation" of two processes - Kitty's when corresponding and the Duke's when filing. Maybe three - Kitty's when writing, Kitty's when deciding what letters to keep (her own and her correspondents), and the Duke's when filing. Maybe four ... and so on. All this can be dealt with, I think, without violating archival theory and with little difficulty, by means based on Australian methods, enhanced and developed along roads that Peter himself scouted.

He was unhappy with the way that (in order to remain true to an archival theory he had inherited) he had to apply his own ideas within that theory's limitations - which he well recognised. He started experimenting with the application of simultaneous multiple provenance to ministerial papers. Private, electorate, and party records were attributed to a person, but we speculated about forming electorate correspondence into series for the electorate as well as the incumbent member. He was uncomfortable that files dealing with departmental matters in a Minister's office had to be attributed either to the Department (the "CRS A..." series) or to the Person who was temporarily the holder of

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<sup>51</sup> It remains true to this day that advocates of the monocular view insist that there is no confusion. In each and every case, that might even be true - though I doubt it. The confusion to which I refer is a conceptual one. Each and every descriptive archivist may indeed be able to state a view of provenance and apply it consistently to records that they observe. But they will not be able to articulate an agreed conception and apply it to produce consistent results amongst themselves by reference solely to their agreed conception. See below.

<sup>52</sup> Sue McKemmish ★, "Are Records Ever Actual?" in *The Records Continuum: Ian Maclean and Australian Archives First Fifty Years* edited by Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott (Melbourne, Ancora Press, 1994), pp. 187-203.

ministerial office (the "CRS M..." series). He must have been aware that by including political and personal papers into an ambience that was essentially governmental he was already ignoring another larger ambience of which such papers are necessarily part. By the time Peter and I parted company he had not yet thought through this problem to what I now regard as its logical conclusion - parallel provenance. I like to think that, given time, he would have. Maybe he did.

His interim solution was the first implementation of simultaneous multiple provenance. Experimentally, certain series were attributed to both the "official" provenance and to the personal in the same time-frame. We discussed the possibility of registering ministerial offices as sub-elements within either Parliament, Cabinet, or (less plausibly) departments. Thus five *sous-fonds* were, in effect, identified conceptually (if not in implementation) as subsisting in one set of circumstances

- personal
- parliamentary
- departmental
- political
- ministerial

to any combination of which a series created in the same timeframe could belong. Had Peter broken through the next conceptual barrier and started experimentally registering political parties and electorates without the necessary ambient superstructure, he would also have inaugurated parallel provenance, but so far as I know he never did.

## WHAT DOES RECORDS CREATION MEAN?

Hilary Jenkinson, Rosemary Collier argues, believed that the Archive Group should be based on recordkeeping structure, not on administrative structure. But Jenkinson defined the Archive Group in terms of the descriptive features of an administration not the descriptive features of a record-keeping structure - organic whole, complete, independent, etc. - not the descriptive features of a recordkeeping process (or the business process from which it derives).

Peter Scott indulged no such confusion of thought (although he too was beguiled by the quest for distinctive features that an agency should have - perhaps unhappy with the circular nature of the definition of a *fonds*). Despite the subsequent dumbing-down of his approach within many applications of it, the true locus of the *fonds* remains the agency, not the records - or rather it is to be found in the **records-creating relationship** between the agency and the records. As Rosemary Collier has noted, notions of provenance are developed in "a curious circular fashion". In Peter's case, the approach is perfectly circular and, therefore, as I have pointed out elsewhere, definitionally useless-

**Q.** Who created these records?

**A.** The creator of these records created these records.

**Q.** Who is the creator of these records?

**A.** The agency that created these records is the creator of these records.

Therefore, if it's a recordkeeper it's an agency, if it ain't it isn't.

The only part of Jenkinson's thinking that Scott abandons (apart from its confusions) is the physical arrangement that requires Jenkinson to fret about which Group to put stray records in. An unconcerned Scott puts them in both (or as many as they belong to) and describes each *fonds* as a list of agencies with inventories of series attached - an output report from the system rather than a depiction or data input format describing what sits together on the shelf as a result of arrangement. When the emphasis shifts from describing the *creator* correctly to getting the relationship with the records right, the chances are that records-creating relationships will exist simultaneously with more than one entity when the entities have been fashioned and documented without regard to the records they have *created*. No harm will be done provided we have carefully articulated

what *creation* means when applied as relationships in recordkeeping. The problem is that, apart from vague assumptions about document management, we haven't.

When or if we identify the variety of ways in which it possible for an entity to "create, accumulate, or maintain" records, we begin to enumerate and illuminate the kinds of parallel provenance that are possible. Even if we derive our understanding from archives that actually exist, what we derive should be the characteristics of relationships (not the attributes of authority records) that we need to properly document the recordkeeping experience. I have alluded elsewhere to examples of different ways of being a "creator"<sup>53</sup>. Family and estate papers abound with examples. In an imagined treatment of the Papers of the Duke Wellington, I once identified at least 13 *personas* which the Duke, in his capacity as a generator of documents, and leaving aside any marital complications, embodied as a provenance entity - each worthy of separate documentation :

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Member of Wellesley Family            | 2. Member of Parliament                 |
| 3. British Agent in Indian states        | 4. Chief Secretary for Ireland          |
| 5. Allied CIC in Iberia                  | 6. Ambassador to France                 |
| 7. Plenipotentiary to Congress of Vienna | 8. CIC Netherlands & Army of Occupation |
| 9. Prime Minister                        | 10. Warden of Cinque Ports              |
| 11. Foreign Secretary                    | 12. Minister without Portfolio          |
| 13. Himself                              |   |

In each of these various *roles*, the Duke can be involved in "creating, accumulating and/or maintaining" different sets of documents (including many documents that belong to more than one set) in a variety of different ways : e.g. as *author* of his own letters, as *minister responsible* for the Foreign Office correspondence, as *participant* in Wellesley family affairs, as *representative* of a government when ambassador or plenipotentiary. Each of these kinds of statements is capable of being represented as a different kind of "creation". This example merely illustrates that there is much ambiguity and confusion to be sorted out within the archival idea of provenance. The examples multiply if we allow that the idea may also be inadequate as well as confused and fail to represent alternative, but legitimate, ideas about what is involved in "creation" beyond those enumerated by ICA (viz. create, accumulate, and/or maintain).

Archival theory became fixated on the indivisibility of the formative source. The idea of provenance derives from a degenerate and curious notion that a *fonds* is the emanation from a single and indivisible office or agency, co-extensive with the embodiment of a function. A parallel provenance - contextualising the papers of the Duke of Wellington by showing his "two bodies" and relating them to the man as well as his office(s) and functions - is rejected. Functions, though routinely identified as important, are not made the basis of a distinct entity for the purpose of conferring provenance. An understanding that the context of Wellington's papers involves contextualising them to :

- The Duke himself
- His family
- His estate(s) and businesses
- The offices he held as soldier, diplomat and statesman
- The functions or activities (separately documented) which he undertook
- The wife whose correspondence was incorporated into his
- And so on

brings the object of description (the Duke of Wellington's papers) into different ways of looking at them - different narrative streams which explicate the events and circumstances with which they are connected. If these different points of view are

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<sup>53</sup> Chris Hurley ★, "Problems with provenance ..." op cit.

themselves contextualised into the same ambience, it will be an example of simultaneous multiple provenance. Otherwise, it is an example of parallel provenance.

The reader will see that I am pains here (as I have been throughout the composition of most of my earlier writings) to limit myself by illustrating complexity and ambiguity about the identity and context of the document manager. This leaves aside the more controversial question of whether or not other kinds of participation - beyond document management - form an allowable basis for identifying creation or provenance at the level of the item or series. One reason for this is that the more complete view we now take of multiple provenance, as a method applicable at all levels, was not one (initially at least) shared by Peter Scott himself. In the earliest manifestations of the "series" system, it was practice that the series remained intact physically and virtually as a single concrete expression of recordkeeping activity. An item could not belong to more than one series. It was only at the levels above the series (provenance and ambience) that virtual reality was to be recognised. My purpose is twofold. First to illustrate that some kind of parallel provenance is to be found even within established descriptive limits. That accepted, it becomes possible to have a sensible discussion about whether those limits are themselves too confining.

The divide between manuscript librarians and other archivists illustrates well the nature of parallel provenance. In the 1970s, I was compelled under instruction to physically "split" a series of papers belonging to the Prime Minister's Press Secretary into two portions to be housed in the National Library of Australia and in what is now the National Archives. This resulted from the bitterness and pig-headed obstinacy both institutions displayed in their battle over the acquisition of personal papers. My task was to sift out files (and sometimes documents from within files) belonging to the period in office of one of the four Prime Ministers this Press Secretary had served. From the point of view of the Library, I was identifying a missing portion of the personal papers of that PM to be housed with other papers from the same man at the Library. From the point of view of the Archives, I was dismembering a series belonging to the Prime Minister's Office throughout four successive incumbencies. Each custodian had a different story to tell and no way of telling it except by doing violence to the records.

## THE DEAD HAND OF ORIGINAL ORDER

The insistence on a single point of view derives from the archivist's approach to the custodianship of physical entities. By an unfounded leap of logic, the principle of original order imposes a dead hand on description because we believe that when only one arrangement is possible it follows that only one view is possible descriptively. This is intuitive but it is not logical. When I first started writing about documentation, thirty years ago, we spoke comfortably about "arrangement and description". Somehow, over that period, arrangement has become lost and A & D reduced to archival description merely. How did that happen? ICA has a definition of arrangement :

**Arrangement.** The intellectual and physical processes and results of analyzing and organizing documents in accordance with archival principles.  
ISAD(G) v.2 (Ottawa 2000)

Juxtaposed with the definition of archival description, what this means (if anything) is that the process of archival arrangement and the process of archival description are two different things and one has a dependency on the other. Documents are *analyzed* and *organized* and **then** described according to the single view imposed on the records by the organisation we have given them. Yet the meaning of the more venerable concept (A & D) implied the opposite :

Collections are rarely received by the archivist in the order in which he will decide to arrange them. This may seem to contravene the maxim that the archivist must preserve the original archive order. It is a subtle, delicate process, but, like a surgeon, an archivist must be firm, while remaining

sensitive to the nature of the organism he is operating on. From his first sight of a collection to the last catalogue entry he makes, the archivist adapts his treatment of the collection to an unspoken assessment of its character, its age, its comprehensiveness, its physical condition, its order, its housing, its use.<sup>54</sup>

I made my own modest contribution to the articulation of that nexus in the very first article I ever had published (a defence of original order) :

Order and provenance are often closely connected. In all aspects of arrangement, the greatest care must always be taken not to obscure the provenance of records through rearrangement ... Rearrangement can only be effected by accepting one aspect of the provenance, arranging the documents upon the basis of that alone, and arbitrarily rejecting (and therefore abandoning) all of the others ... the only really satisfactory solution (short of giving, in effect, full series descriptions to each document) is to have series in their original order and attribute them simultaneously to all persons and enterprises of whose transactions they formed a part.<sup>55</sup>

Of course, this was written thirty years ago and I then thought that the identification of an unobscured provenance for materials organised at the series level was unproblematic. This was based on the view inherent in Peter Scott's original formulation : viz. that the *fonds* was virtual but the series remained physical (i.e. "real"). Accordingly, in the theory as originally formulated, an item could belong to only one series while a series could belong to more than one *fonds*. Subsequent insights have taught us that the process of deconstruction Peter Scott applied to the *fonds* can (and, indeed, must) also be applied to the series itself. The implications of what I then wrote are that, while the processes of arrangement and those of description are interdependent, choices made about arrangement can be ameliorated through the use of multiple provenance. I would now say the same about parallel provenance. Under ICA's definitions, a degree of interdependency is also implied but it is linear rather than symbiotic. Documents are :

- First, analysed and organised according to archival principles
- Then, a representation is captured and recorded,
- Finally, the representations are analysed and organised according to descriptive principles.

This suggests that arrangement (the analysis and organisation of documents) produces a (re)construction in accordance with archival principles so that, provided the descriptive representation of the resulting arrangement is "accurate", those same principles will necessarily be satisfied by the description itself. There is no suggestion, however, that arrangement is in any way dependent upon description (documentation) and nothing more convincing than an assumption that description must be limited by arrangement and an assertion (by inference) that archival principles preclude more than a single view from being taken.

## THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Parallel provenance describes the imperfect state of an archival description which is itself imperfectly contextualised. Parallel provenance is like head lice - having it means you know there is a problem. Your descriptive system is inadequate to properly contextualise the records you are attempting to portray. So long as another way of looking at it is possible, then a parallel view of provenance may be taken. This could be eliminated by re-contextualising the description and providing the parallel views with a new, common ambience. Then, under the definitions propounded above, the two or more provenance statements occur within a single ambience rather than in different

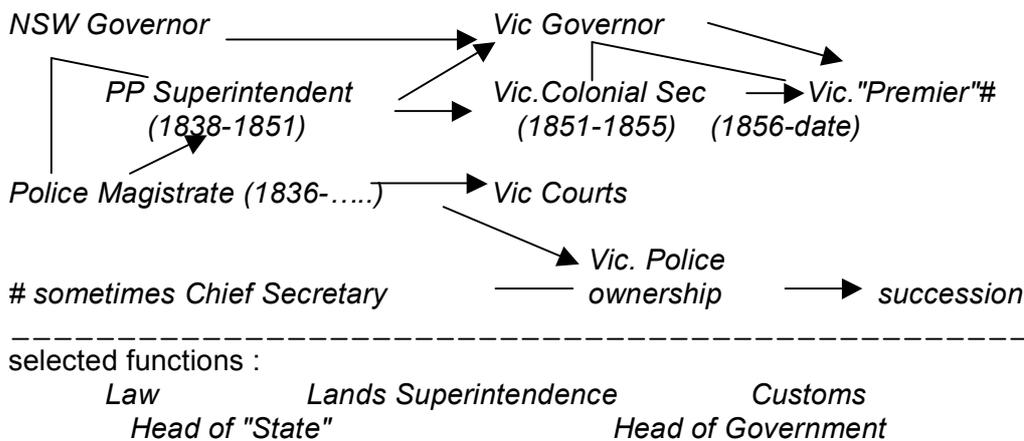
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<sup>54</sup> J. H. Hodson, *The Administration of Archives* (Oxford, 1972), p.124.

<sup>55</sup> Chris Hurley, "Personal Papers and the Treatment of Archival Principles" *Archives and Manuscripts* Vol.6, No.8 (February, 1977), pp. 361-362.

ones. At this point, the description becomes an example of simultaneous multiple provenance instead of parallel provenance. Because the formulation of a common ambience for all archival description would not be without difficulty (and might founder on political considerations outside the technical considerations dealt with here) I do not expect to see it in my lifetime but it is still depressing to see archival standards and initiatives actually lead away from such aspirations.

Consider now the much-simplified outline of the **Records of Port Phillip (Table Four)**. The Port Phillip (PP) District was established within the borders of New South Wales in 1836. Urgent first requirements of the new administration included the establishment of a system of policing and justice over the inhabitants (unauthorised settlers and Aborigines) and the establishment of a system for surveying and allocating land. The first Police Magistrate was the senior official present, but he had little superintendence over other officials who reported directly to their parent departments in Sydney.



**Table Four : The Records of Port Phillip (1836-1851)**

In 1838, a new office of Superintendent was established to formally take over the headship of administration. The powers of this official (a sort of Lt Governor) were circumscribed, however, and some local officials still reported directly to Sydney (e.g. in relation to Lands) at least in respect of some matters<sup>56</sup> although they had to defer to the Superintendent on matters of purely local administration. The Superintendent had no jurisdiction over the military but took over policing and local justice from the Police Magistrate who became a subordinate official.

Until 1855, the NSW Governor was both Head of "State" (vice-regal)<sup>57</sup> and Head of Government. In 1851, a separate Crown Colony of Victoria was established. Upon self-government in 1855, the function of Head of Government was transferred from the respective Governors to the post of Chief Secretary/Premier. This official (previously known as Colonial Secretary) had formerly been the chief executive of the Governor's administration.

The administrative position was, of course, much more complex and convoluted than this. Layers of administrative and constitutional complexity lay between the officials I have identified and the records. The area of courts, police, and military pose especial

<sup>56</sup> The point is disputed in the NSW finding aids which have the local commissioners subordinate to the Superintendent. The dispute (in itself insignificant) appears to be based on material supplied to NSW from Victoria which is certainly at variance with what I can recall was our conclusion on the responsibilities for Lands. An interesting illustration of how parallel provenance can arise from a difference of opinion as to facts, not just a different perspective on undisputed realities.

<sup>57</sup> The early governors of New South Wales can hardly be said to be vice-regal. They were, if anything, officials of the Colonial Office. Governors began to undertake what we now understand to be vice-regal functions with representative government in the 1850s.

problems of nuance and difficulty. To simplify the example, the descriptive state of affairs from the point of view of the Public Record Office of Victoria is set out below (**Table Five**) in relation to units of description relating to the administration of what is now Victoria that are today to be found spread between Sydney and Melbourne.

Context			Records "of" Victoria	
Provenance	Function	Dates	Units of Description	Dates
NSW Governor	Head of State NSW #	1788 - date		
NSW Governor	Head of Govt NSW #	1788 - 1855	Σ Law, Lands, Super'dence	1836 - 1851
Vic P. Magistrate	Head of Govt Vic	1836 - 1838	---: Superintendence Ψ	1836 - 1838
Vic Super...	Head of Govt Vic	1938 - 1851	---: Law, Lands, Super'dence Ψ	1838 - 1851
Vic Governor	Head of State Vic	1851 - date	Σ Law, Lands, Super'dence	1851 - date
Vic Governor	Head of Govt Vic	1851 - 1855	Σ Law, Lands, Super'dence	1851 - 1855
Vic. Col.Secretary	CEO	1851 - 1855	---: Superintendence Ψ	1851 - 1855
Vic Attorney-Gen'l	Official	1851 - 1855	---: Law Ψ	1851 - 1855
Vic Lands Csnr	Official	1851 - 1855	---: Lands Ψ	
Vic "Premier"	Head of Govt Vic	1855 - date	Σ Superintendence	1855 - date
Vic Attorney-Gen'l	Minister	1855 - date	Σ Law	1855 - date
Vic Lands Csnr	Minister	1855 - date	Σ Lands	1855 - date

# includes Port Phillip District    Ψ subordinate responsibility    Σ primary responsibility

**Table Five : The Port Phillip Fonds**

This is to say nothing of the complexities arising from the nineteenth century practice of creating duplicate records in different places. The purpose of this table is not to illustrate the complexities of contextual analysis, but to demonstrate the application of parallel provenance. All of the States along Australia's eastern seaboard began life as part of New South Wales and the same issues arise for each - New Zealand too. Although all of the records prior to separation are technically part of the archives of New South Wales, almost all of those held locally at the time of separation remained and are still treated today as part of the fabric of the archives of the successor states which those districts or sub-colonies became. It would, of course, be possible for the six government archives authorities to agree on a common ambience<sup>58</sup> - a single documented "authority record" providing a common ambience for all six - but, in the absence of that, the descriptive task in those five descriptive programmes is to make sense of what they have (rather than what their holdings are conceptually part of)<sup>59</sup>. A properly standardised descriptive process would then enable the different depictions of authority entities whose records are held in two or more places to at least have the same ambience, if not the same provenance.

For this article, I consulted the on-line catalogues of the Federal and NSW archives authorities. The on-line site for PRO Victoria is largely devoid of assistance regarding provenance, so in that case I had to consult the printed *Summary Guide* and *Digest* that we produced in 1990. There is good evidence that NSW is attempting to integrate its view of "Victorian" records with material being produced by PRO Victoria. My question was : does this create a single provenance or parallel provenance? In other words, are three archival programmes capable of producing an identical view of the provenance of the same records? The simple answer (which I will not take the space to demonstrate

<sup>58</sup> As well as the former colonies of New South Wales, Tasmania, Victoria, New Zealand (briefly), and Queensland, the Commonwealth of Australia (formed upon federation in 1901) is involved. Unlike the process that occurred upon separation from NSW ("let's leave the records where they are"), upon federation many Victorian records were handed over to the newly formed Commonwealth ("let's take them with us"). Thus some "Victorian" records from the pre-separation period may now be found in Canberra.

<sup>59</sup> When I was head of the Public Record Office in Victoria in the 1980s, I did propose such a venture to my Sydney and Canberra colleagues but it evinced no interest.

here) is that they are not. There are three different views of both the ambience and the provenance of records produced in the Port Phillip District between 1836/8 and 1851 in the finding aids of the three repositories in which those records are now to be found.

I am not here arguing that this is a problem that needs to be rectified. I have in the past drawn attention to its solution as one amongst many benefits of true standardisation. In 1986, I even prepared a report (to no avail) for the Australian Council of Archives on how it could be accomplished by application of a GEMMS methodology (see below). My point now is not that a problem exists that must be attended to. My point now is that the state of affairs I have described illustrates the existence of parallel provenance and assaults notions of impartiality and the single view in archival description.

The finding aids in question represent three possible views (or parallel provenance) of the records. The NSW view is clearly the most orthodox. All of the records are part of the archives of NSW : PP Law, PP Lands and PP Customs being merely *sous-fonds* within NSW Law, NSW Lands, and NSW Customs. The National Archives, inheritors of the Victorian pre-1851 customs records, see them as part of its own inheritance from the Colony of NSW, not as part of the fabric of the archives of Victoria, even though it was from the successor Colony of Victoria that the Commonwealth received them upon federation in 1901.

As the inheritor of the local records, the Victorian view is that these are each a *fonds* in its own right, with a technical connection via the Superintendent to Sydney but descriptively part of the fledgling Victorian administration which continued after separation in 1851. Thus, the Victorian *Digest* shows some administrative units as part of a continuous operation - e.g. VRG 4 Courts (1836 - date) but others split to reflect the centralisation of administration in Sydney :-

#### Lands Records

--: VRG 27 District Land Offices (1836 - date) for operations

--: VRG 18 Lands (1851 - 1983) for departmental control

Even though there is conceptually no material difference between the two. The local coordination of lands was inherited by the Victorian Governor in 1851 and passed onto the embryonic "Minister" of Lands (Surveyor-General) under representative government in 1855. The head of Lands throughout was the Victorian office of Surveyor-General who passed from being a NSW official, to being an officer of the Governor's administration (1851-1855) and thence to a member of the first "ministry" under self-government (post 1855). Curiously, when the inefficacy of combining the technical requirements of the office with ministerial responsibility was realised, the office of Surveyor-General was "degraded" back into the civil service and ministerial power vested in a "Commissioner: of Lands. The decision to date this *fonds* from 1851 and to show no break in 1855 is purely arbitrary. Thus three different views can be (and are) taken of the same set of facts.

### **IN SUMMARY : WHAT IS IT THAT ARCHIVISTS SHOULD DO?**

Let us consider the first requirement of any depiction - what is it that archivists are looking for? How do they know it when they see it? What, in other words, is the *purpose* of archival description? What are finding aids for? Here the ICA standards are worthless. As an act of deliberate policy, the first statement of principles developed to govern the development of international standards was rendered moot by the ICA Ad Hoc Commission (predecessor to the Descriptive Standards Committee) in Stockholm in 1993<sup>60</sup>. Instead of being developed as an agreed basis for the evolution of descriptive

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<sup>60</sup> I can say this because I was there – as the newly appointed Australian representative on that Commission. I had come ready to debate the Statement of Principles (from which we had already registered our dissent) because it did not accommodate Australian practice and to argue

standards, it was abandoned as an historical irrelevance having no continuing application to the subsequent evolution of standards. This was a manoeuvre to cut off further discussion of the principles to which serious objections had been raised and not yet dealt with. To be sure, it facilitated moving quickly onto the drafting of two standards about *how* to do it, but has left the international discourse on their further development and evolution about what is being done rudderless and without direction.

Like old fashioned records management texts that knew nothing about the creation of records and dealt merely with their registration, classification, filing, indexing, storage, and retrieval (the "cabbage patch" school of recordkeeping<sup>61</sup>), archival descriptive standards are dysfunctional when it comes to answering a key question : what is it that you are looking for? Without knowing what it is that you are looking for, you can't possibly know what it is that you see. If you don't know what it is that you are seeing, how can you explain to another observer what it is?

Archivists who choose to defend the doctrine of the single point of view can only do so on the argument that it is the only possible point of view for the purpose of depicting what you are undertaking to depict. No one, after a moment's reflection, could sanely argue that it is the only possible point of view. The approach cannot even be defended on the grounds that it is the best point of view, since that would acknowledge a multiple view of provenance (albeit presenting less satisfactory views) from amongst which the best must be chosen. That is not allowed. The only viable defence is the proposition that the "archival" view is the only possible or allowable view for the purpose of an archival description. As soon as archival description is defined in non-circular terms, the debate then has to centre on how defensible ideas of "creation" are in meeting the purposes of archival description. That, if it ever takes place, will be a very useful debate.

When the world hears the word "archivist" they think of someone wearing a cardigan and white gloves wheeling great trolley loads of old paper around. This, it is widely believed, is what archivists do. Surgeons take great care to scrub up, but to say that scrubbing up is what surgeons do is ludicrous. It is just as ludicrous to say that what archivists do is handle and write depictions of old paper. Surgeons perform delicate operations with sharp implements inside the human body - that is what they do. Archivists make delicate analyses of structure and context - that is what they do.

What archivists do, what they look for when they set about archival description, is relationships between units of description which document content and structure. Since a record may be defined, in order to distinguish it from other kinds of information, as documentation linked to event or circumstance, a relationship of some kind must be established with events/circumstances; but this is still not the essence of archival description. The link between the document and the event/circumstance which gives it

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that it needed to be revised as Australia (and some others who had made submissions) requested. Fearing, I suspect, the delay in getting on with drafting the Standard, other members simply declined to debate what they referred to as "an historical document". Because time was not taken, at the outset, to settle an agreed view of the principles (or, at least, to clarify the points of difference), the ensuing discussions involved interminable debate over the choice of words to find acceptable verbal formulations to mask fundamental differences. The standards were thus flawed from the start and subsequent tinkering (designed, it is sometimes claimed, to incorporate alternative views initially excluded) have not, in my opinion, succeeded in overcoming the initial absence of agreed purpose from the process. In effect, the standards became a distillation of experience rather than an emanation of thought.

<sup>61</sup> Young records manager : "Please, mummy, where do records come from?" Mummy : "Well, dear, every morning, mummy and daddy go out into the garden and find them under cabbage leaves; then we register, classify, index, etc. etc.". The archival equivalent is the answer to the question : what are we describing? "Well, dear, every morning mummy and daddy go out into the garden and find units of description under cabbage leaves.

evidential value is incidental, not central, to archival description. Any documentation system can do that.

What makes archival description unique (well, almost unique) is that, while the link with event/circumstance is paramount, what we are actually looking for - so that we can accurately represent it - is relationships between events and circumstances *per se*. The linked documents can be viewed, of course, in the sequence or sequences (e.g. a series) which their connection with related events/circumstances gives them. Archival description, however, is **not** primarily the representation of the resulting sequences of documents, but the capture and maintenance of documentation on the relationships between relevant events and circumstances which enables the linked documents to be viewed in this way and organised into the formations ("units of description") we describe.

Provenance is "an organization or individual that created, accumulated and/or maintained or used documents in the conduct of personal or corporate activity" - /SAAR1. Australian archival methods have been separating descriptions of records from descriptions of provenance and documenting relationships between them for fifty years. Traditionally, respect for provenance entails choosing one entity in preference to all others as the creator. Since the 1960s, Australian theory has challenged this principle, by replacing provenance with "multiple provenance" (recognising that documents assembled as records can pass through the hands of several successive creators over time). Multiple provenance still affords a primacy, however, to one creator at any given time - identifying a multiplicity of creators in succession comes with the passage of time, it is not simultaneous. A theory of simultaneous multiple-provenance (allowing two or more creators to be identified at one and the same time) represents a more fundamental challenge to descriptive thinking that has been toyed with - both in theory and in application.

The ICA definition of provenance, however, itself moves the concept of "production" beyond creation to include accumulation, maintenance, and use as well as creation. This list of possible provenance-generating actions is not exhaustive but it allows for different ideas about what provenance comprises to be entertained simultaneously. If accumulating, maintaining, using, and creating are different ways in which documents are "produced" and any two of these actions can occur simultaneously, then by the ICA's own definitions, simultaneous multiple provenance must be possible. The standards fail, however, to address the question directly : can two or more entities be involved simultaneously in creation, accumulation, etc.? Some clarity around these and other ideas is necessary before embarking on an examination of "parallel provenance", including an exploration of the actions (apart from "creation" which itself needs to be more closely defined) which give rise to a provenance relationship with records. Could function, for example, replace actor as the primary source of provenance?

However provenance is understood, entities establishing the provenance of records are usually treated as having a single ambience. Ambience is the context of provenance, just as provenance is the context of records. The theoretical discussion of the place of provenance in archival description, however *avant garde*, rests on a shared assumption that multiple provenance entities all reside within a common ambience. Parallel provenance describes a situation where two or more entities are identified as establishing the provenance of records where each resides in a different ambience. Two possibilities exist :

- Two (or more) entities having different ambience are involved in the same kind of action (e.g. creation)
- Two (or more) such entities are involved in different kinds of action (e.g. creation and control).

It must be stressed here that I am not propounding that parallel provenance involves two different entities being involved simultaneously in the same kind of creating/producing relationship with the same document(s) - that would be joint creation. Of course, if the simultaneous creators belonged to different ambient environments an element of parallel provenance would be involved.

Archival description must necessarily be grounded in a point of view (an ambience). Often, the ambience is unstated - implicit rather than explicit. Different points of view establish an alternative context. Archival theory can be developed to allow the simultaneous documentation of these alternative (parallel) points of view in a single descriptive system or statement. A system is to be preferred because it allows for on-going management of collective knowledge. Post-modernist critics have challenged archival theory to provide for an articulation of different voices in the way records are preserved and described. Parallel provenance provides an acceptable method for meeting this challenge without disturbing respect for provenance.

Parallel provenance also operates at the granular level. All description is scaleable. The provenance of a single document or (trans)action can be dealt with using the same methods applicable to a whole series or *fonds*. In the world of cyberspace, networked activity opens up business processes so that shared workspace increases participation by numerous actors in a single workflow regardless of organisational structures (which have hitherto provided the source of ideas about creation and provenance) and decreases communication as a step dissociating one phase of a workflow from another. Electronic records have less well defined boundaries establishing "creation", "control", "maintenance", etc. Ideas about parallel contextual worlds that establish the evidential meaning of such records regardless of organisational boundaries can help illuminate how current recordkeeping can be developed to meet new challenges.

The contextual meaning of recordkeeping entities must not be built into the captured view of them. It follows that contextual meaning must be documented not in entity-description but in the crafting of relationships. If two different entities (not necessarily two different entity types) are involved in "producing" documents or sets of documents in different ways (i.e. not as joint creators) then it will be necessary to develop a methodology for depicting the different ways in which contextual and functional entities can relate to units of description - in short, relationship types. In my series of articles entitled "Relationships in records" I have already postulated a universal entity-type definition (the HERO<sup>62</sup>). The next step, as yet unrealised in that series, will be to postulate a universal relationship-type (the HERA?<sup>63</sup>) and a standardised way of formulating relationships. I think it will go something like this :

**HERO Type + HERO Code**  
**--: is (HERA Type + HERA Code)**  
**--: of (HERO Type + HERO Code)**  
**--: between/at (date or date + date)**

The development of these ideas clearly owes something to both archival politics and to real politics.

## **AND FINALLY : THE POLITICS OF PARALLEL PROVENANCE**

The archival politics are the attacks on description from some post-custodialists and their ilk undermining the cherished notion of impartiality. I do not quarrel with their attacks on delusions of impartiality *per se*. It is the challenge to come up with a technical method that will accommodate contested views of the provenance of units of description that

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<sup>62</sup> Hurley's Enduring Recordkeeping Object (the HERO) is explained in Part 7 of "Relationships in Records" *op cit*.

<sup>63</sup> Hurley's Enduring Recordkeeping Association (the HERA).

stimulates me. I take it as an insult to my professional ingenuity when they suggest it cannot be done. I say nothing about the validity of the several views that parallel provenance provides for, only that it is technically possible to provide for them. I stress that this approach does not involve substituting alternative views for the *fonds*, only broadening the total view by adding different views to the traditional one.

The real politics are those that support what Terry Cook has (in the passage already quoted) called the "silenced voices" in appraisal -

Ascribing appraisal "value" to records would be based on **the contextual narrativity found within the records-creation process** rather than on anticipated uses of the records' subject content. Appraisal would attend as carefully to the marginalized and even silenced voices as it now does to the powerful voices found in official institutional records. This can be done even when appraising the records of powerful entities like the state (in its various levels of government) or business corporations ...

... [by deliberately seeking] to give voice to the marginalized, to the "Other," to losers as well as winners, to the disadvantaged and underprivileged as well as the powerful and articulate, which is accomplished through new ways of looking at case files and electronic data and then choosing the most succinct record in the best medium for documenting these diverse voices.<sup>64</sup>

Our archives represent the products of actions (processes) in which others than the traditional "creators" of records have been involved. The Aborigines of the Stolen Generation and their families and descendants were participants in the process which produced official records of what was done. Some of them describe those government files as "our" family histories<sup>65</sup>. The provenance, from their point of view, extends beyond the government records-producing process to include those of missions, churches, and welfare agencies as well. Their "archive" contains many documents that are legitimately seen also as part of the archive of the various government and private enterprises involved. In the world of 2005, it is unlikely, I think, that these parallel views have yet been adequately contextualised into a single ambience. Until that is done, they must be treated using the methods of parallel provenance.

For some all this may seem ridiculously theoretical. Let me illustrate how and why it is not. In a recent issue of *Archives & Manuscripts*, Ross Gibbs enthused that a report proposing a digital Archival Gateway in the UK was "inspiring and timely"<sup>66</sup>. Inspiring, presumably, because its recommendations fit in with the reviewer's own ideas and timely because he, along with other government archivists, is promoting a similar proposal here in Australia - the National Online Archival Network (NOAN). Consider how the idea of parallel provenance politicises (in every possible meaning of the word) that proposal.

As Gibbs acknowledges, such gateways require additional allocation of public funds. If extra public money is to be applied, who is to control its use and disposition? The government archivists perhaps - because they developed it. But should government archivists, with their hopelessly fractured and partial view of the archives of the nation, be allowed to spend taxpayers' money supporting such a view? Should special interest groups be given the task instead. But we have seen how the politics of cultural institutions have poisoned the management of museums, galleries, and archives at the national and local levels. In those politics, there are no parallel views - just winners and

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<sup>64</sup> Terry Cook, "Fashionable nonsense or professional rebirth : postmodernism and the practice of archives" *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001), pp. 30-31.

<sup>65</sup> In Australia, Aborigines are sometimes referred to as traditional owners of the land while Europeans settlers are called the new owners. In the case of records, roles might be reversed, with European governments assuming the role of traditional owners of records and, under parallel provenance, Aborigines and others of silenced voice becoming their "new" owners!

<sup>66</sup> Ross Gibbs, review of "Listening to the Past, Speaking to the Future : Report of the Archives Task Force [of] Museums, Libraries and Archives Council [of the United Kingdom]", *Archives and Manuscripts* Vol. 32, No. 2 (November 2004), pp. 192-194.

losers. What view should the ASA take in formulating a submission to government? Should they argue for the establishment of some body apart from the government archives - not only separate but out of their reach - that should be given carriage and management of such a project?

Nor is this something that can be dealt with by the familiar "consultation" mechanisms established by the government archives to deal with community unrest. Those who are consulted become mere clients of those who do the consulting. The power in such a relationship comes from the fact that the archives programmes are funded to think about the issues all the time and to develop a consistent and well-thought through perspective (provenance). The power comes also from the way matters for consideration are presented - from the provenance of the governor not the governed. It comes about that, as a result of all that concentration of effort (and power), the very agenda, the questions upon which consultation is sought, are developed by the archives programmes and do not admit of fruitful answers outside their imposed frame of reference. Similar experiences arise in the failed attempts to get "users"<sup>67</sup> to comment on disposal before decisions are implemented but **after** they have been formulated. Such "consultations" cannot function well, as Terry Cook reminds us, so long as they are articulated solely within the world-view of the "creator" of the records.

A contested answer can only ever be formulated within a contested view of the issues. A government archivist's view of disposal can only be judged in one of two ways - by someone who audits the archivist's compliance with agreed and testable policies and procedures or by someone who evaluates the archivist's judgement by contextualising the records differently and comparing the two results. But parallel provenance is never going to be an answer to any question set by a government archives. It may be the correct response, however, to a national need. A programme committed to -

- documenting the whole ambience of Australian society, not merely the detritus left behind by governmental functionaries as portrayed for us by government archives programmes, and
- then offering the resulting description as a gateway which government (and other) archives programmes plugged into but did not shape or control

would display in all its richness and power the records of the whole nation, not just official records or collected records. Parallel provenance is neither a partial, nor a compromised, nor a winner's view. It recognises wholeness, contestation and ambiguity.

Different perspectives on the past - contrasting, conflicting even, but nevertheless authentic - would provide (or, at least, attempt to provide) the whole contextual meaning, as well as enriched discovery pathways, of the records thus displayed. Should the ASA argue that NOAN be developed not as a tool of the government archivists but as a national resource - to represent a national not a governmental view of the past? Should that view be founded on the existing partial provenance represented by finding aids in government archives authorities and of any other institutions whose "holdings" might be included or upon a more satisfactory holdings-free view based on a sound understanding of parallel provenance? We cannot expect that questions like these will be discussed calmly (if at all).

## **POSTSCRIPT : GEMMS**

I have refrained here from exploring one method by which parallel provenance can be recontextualised into a single ambience and I have already used up too much space. That is another discussion, requiring assent to the notion of parallel provenance before it

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<sup>67</sup> Someone has wittily remarked that the only two professions that refer to "users" are IT and drug trafficking, but I think archives management is a third.

can be sensibly undertaken<sup>68</sup>. For the purpose of bringing this discussion to a point of rest, let me quote at some length from another piece of mine in which I outline a tentative solution : the General-purpose Extensible Metadata Management Schema (GEMMS). Simply put, this would be a methodology or schema whereby provenance entities could be related (using the scalability principle<sup>69</sup>) into a single ambient view without losing their connections with the host ambience in which they are originally depicted. It would involve giving a single entity two (or more) parallel identities linked to a multiplicity of ambient meanings.

7.08 When we explore the intricacies of recordkeeping, we are exploring the deliberate intent the recordkeeper to capture, manage and preserve evidence - from the point of view of the creator of the system, usually the creator of the records. This is what we have been taught to do. But if contextual knowledge means more than that metadata which is inscribed on the record by the creator, we may have to consider the status of metadata embodying contextual knowledge from other points of view. A's deliberate records may be the accidental records of B.

7.09 The same materials may have evidential value independent of the creator's intent (or at least not co-extensive with it). The intervention of the traditional archivist documents metadata essential to the support of evidential meaning not hitherto captured, but usually this is only from a single point of view, by capturing (or, more correctly, recapturing) contextual knowledge pertaining to one view of creation...

7.12 Nothing prevents us from documenting relationships from alternative points of view [about the creation] to that of the creator - not at the expense of those from the creator's point of view, but in addition. This is the essence of parallel provenance ... Acceptance of the notion of parallel provenance opens a door into a new world of relationships hitherto not dealt with in the traditional way - viz. relationships divined from other points of view....

7.17 This is ... GEMMS - which is a perspective encompassing different views of the same context and structure into a single, comprehensive, and broader view. It is not about making up different alternative views of the same records, but of recognising that other views of the materials we handle are possible (and true) and seeking to use our traditional tools to document them. Parallel provenance exists with or without GEMMS, but it remains undocumented by us. To implement GEMMS, we will need to reconceptualise what we mean by relationships in records and develop a new set of implementation rules, but our most pressing need will for an obelisk<sup>70</sup>. The relevance of this to the cultural mission of archivists should be apparent. At a more granular level its relevance to electronic recordkeeping in shared workspace is just as important.

7.26 ... When archives programmes give up (or are forced to give up) their partial views of the data they manage and submit to a more inclusive (and accurate) documentation of contextual frameworks than they are singly capable of dealing with, perhaps it can also include the Aboriginal view of the Protectorate records.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> It may never be undertaken as part of the discourse on "archival description". I remain convinced, however, that it is equally relevant to electronic recordkeeping apart from any narrow "archival" considerations.

<sup>69</sup> See footnote 7.

<sup>70</sup> A reference to the role of a *datum* in orienting geospatial data.

<sup>71</sup> Chris Hurley ★, "Relationships in Records...: a Retrospective" *New Zealand Archivist* (Summer 2004), pp. 9-13.