INTRODUCTION

This publication had its origin five years ago in a conference on the appraisal of records organized by the Archivists Association of Castile and Lion and the University of Salamanca. While the meeting featured prominent international speakers with often different viewpoints, an overall consensus emerged that the archivist, when making appraisal decisions for documents, will put his or her stamp on the resulting archives. In addition to employing professional norms and standards, archivists will inject their own values and assumptions into this selection process, and through these the values of the broader society in which they are educated, live, love, and work. Some speakers at Salamanca, following the earlier pioneering work of Brien Brothman, invited delegates to think about the values underpinning archival intervention, for all archival functions, not just appraisal. These values – the assumptions and concepts and beliefs by archivists –and all subsequent actions they perform– do not exist in a value-free vacuum, where the archivist is some kind of neutral or objective observer or passive curator. The archivist is an active participant in this decision making, and one shaped by the context of his or her contemporary and historical environment.

Since the Salamanca conference, it is impossible to avoid the challenge posed there to traditional Spanish views about Archival Science. This challenge arises from acknowledging the active mediation by the archivist, not only in appraisal, but also in the ongoing re-contextualization of records across time, and thus the continual re-assignment of varying meanings to individual documents and collective fonds. These reflections about future directions for archival theory and practice are of course part of the broader distrust in society towards notions of objective knowledge, universal truth, and cultural superiority. This general distrust is one aspect the recent intellectual paradigm called postmodernism.

Nevertheless, these postmodern questions about the neutrality and objectivity of the archives and archivists are but a small lagoon in a much larger Spanish archival panorama that is dominated by methodological concerns. In recent decades, the focus of professional discourse has been to move away from the Franco-era manipulation of documents and of history. Attention has been directed instead to developing sound methodologies for making and preserving good archives (or whatever we as Spanish archivists have understood as "good"). We have thus been interested in improving conservation, description, disaster

recovery and public programming or external communication of the documents in the most neutral and antiseptic manner possible. Yet behind this type of rationalizing, modernizing and standardizing of archival activity in more progressive and professional directions, there are some hidden and harmful consequences. While new approaches to appraisal focus on documenting the citizen and not just the state (and its policies and bureaucracies), most archivists do not want to hear what those citizens themselves think about what memories society should retain through its taxpayer-funded public archives. As Eric Ketelaar notes, in a democratic state, the initial selection and later access to archival documents should be issues for public debate. As the archival profession, composed mainly of white, middle-class, well-educated professionals, develops concepts such as the documentary heritage serving as the material testimony or memory of our own civilization, do we ignore those citizens who are not of the same social and economic stature, or not of the same racial/ethnic background as ourselves? To whom do we give voice in our archives and whom do we silence? What archives has consciously planned for the documentation of the gypsies? What archivist is interested by the papers of the Moroccan or sub-Saharan emigrants, or various pan-European transient workers? Where is our professional concern for collecting the records of Spanish gays, or similar marginalized, neglected, non-mainstream groups in our society?

Paradoxically, in Spain, after fighting against the irrationality of the Franco dictatorship and after all the significant efforts to modernize archives and Archival Science, we find ourselves in the difficult situation of questioning ourselves once more, and being questioned by others who hold us accountable, about the values, assumptions, and prejudices that guide our steps. What then should be the fundamental goals of archives in the postmodern era? Having modernized archives, how do we now move on to the next step and add the insights and sensibilities of postmodernism to our institutions, to our theories and strategies and practices, and to our profession?

In light of these challenges and opportunities, this collection of articles has been brought together. Postmodernism by its very nature presents more doubts than certainties, sometimes asks more questions than provides answers. Yet together we must start to ask the right questions before we can hope to discern good answers. These essays together represent a start, in Spanish archival discourse, in asking those questions about the nature of archives and the work of the archivists in the postmodern era.

While there are many definitions of postmodernism, and postmodernism can mean different things in different disciplines and different cultures, it is perhaps easiest to being by stating what postmodernism is not, rather than what it is. What does the postmodern era as a new epoch leave behind? First, there is a rejection of the Enlightenment rationality that sought to naturalize the meaning

of inherited cultural structures and traditional intellectual frameworks. Secondly, there is a distrust of meta-narratives, that is, a continual questioning of those grand universal explanations of trends in history, gender, ethnicity, race, religion, culture, nationalism, imperialism, and colonialism. Thirdly, there is a deep suspicion of all orthodoxies, all monolithic assertions that there is only one right way, one method, one view, one cause, one truth. Such orthodoxies are seen as not inherently or essentially true in themselves, but rather as historical constructions of those in power wishing to gain or solidify their own positions in society. By contrast, attitudes in the postmodern era are inclined toward heterodoxy, diversity, multiple views, and complexity. Postmodernism celebrates many stories and numerous narratives, and gives multiple voices to many sectors in society, rather than enshrining one dominant voice or one perspective or point of view. Following Jacques Derrida, and his leading archival disciple, Verne Harris, postmodernism deconstructs the orthodoxies that have been accepted for decades, sometimes centuries, as normal, natural, true, just the way things are, and reveals them to be exercises in the construction and maintenance of power.

In terms of archives, the first point postmodern archivists make is that power over memory, over who and what is remembered and who or what is forgotten, is an enormously potent force in society. Archivists have a major role in making that determination of memory versus forgetting. Postmodern archivists also reject therefore many of the supposed features of the characteristics of documents and archival fonds that came with modernity, especially Hilary Jenkinson's nostrums that archives are impartial and the evidence they bear contains the truth. Rather, records are now seen instruments of power, and it is archivists who control many of those instruments. Moreover, records are considered to be something dynamic, in constant evolution over time, ever changing by the interventions of the professionals and researchers, even after they are in the custody of the historical archives. The older view that archival documents are fixed, static, unalterable artifacts simply breaks down before the realities of appraisal, new approaches to description, and the digital revolution. As Verne Harris affirms, archives must no longer speak with one voice for power, but with many voices expressing the grand diversity and complexities of our contemporary societies. The postmodern archivist does not contextualize the document by simple provenance connected to a single office or person of origin, as traditionally, but rather explores a much more complex process of contextualization, placing the documents in functional systems, historicizing the activity of records creation and contemporary use, exploring the culture of record keeping, and documenting, accountably, the many interventions made by archivists themselves that will in turn further change the perception, representation, and use of documents.

The selection of the ten articles for inclusion (and translation) for this collection to support the forgoing assertions was for the editors a very difficult

choice. As outlined in an extended footnote (#14) in the second of Terry Cook's two articles that follow, which was itself originally published in 2001, there were even then several dozen fine essays published by archivists on postmodernism and the archives. While the first voices were raised in Canada, active thinkers in addressing the implications of postmodernism for archives have come from South Africa, the Netherlands, the United States of America, and Australia, and now increasingly many other countries. In addition to a large number of new journal articles published since Cook's listing, there are also four major book-length collections of essays: Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris et al, eds., *Refiguring the Archive* (Cape Town, 2002); Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz, eds., *Archives, Records, and Power* (two double-length special thematic issues of *Archival Science: International Journal on Recorded Information*, vol. 2, nos. 1/2 and 3/4, 2002); Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G Rosenberg, eds., *Archives, Documentation and the Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006); and Verne Harris, *Archives and Justice: A South African Perspective* (Chicago, 2007). Taken together, there are well over one-hundred articles in English alone that could have been included. And that does not begin to count many hundreds of articles by postmodern academics in many other disciplines increasingly interested in the "archive," and in related questions of memory, identity, representation, and power, many of which works have important insights for archivists too. Coming up with only ten articles, even limited to those written by archivists, was, therefore, no easy task.

The decision was reached and the articles are presented more or less in chronological order, so that the reader may appreciate the cumulative discourse taking place within the profession. There is no reason to summarize the articles here, for that is done in the analytical summaries section of abstracts. But their variety may be indicated briefly here, and thus *inter alia* the reasons for their selection. Although there were some important Canadian precedents in the 1980s, especially the work of Hugh Taylor, Brien Brothman was the first archivist to question in a fundamental, philosophical way, in his "Orders of Value," the basic assumptions and theories of traditional archival thinking and practice. He thus deservedly leads off this collection. Drawing on a rich range of writers from many disciplines, especially philosophy, Brothman powerfully outlined how the archival profession failed to grasp the deeper realities of records creation and the multiple and virtual contexts of provenance. Terry Cook follows, with what is essentially a two-part article, that serves as an overview general introduction to the topic of archives and postmodernism. The first sets forth the basic tenets of postmodernism, and then explores how these challenge almost all the traditional approaches of archival science, and offers new definitions for the core archival functions and the nature of records for the postmodern era. The second outlines the

historical evolution of postmodernism and how we now all live in conditions where it is impossible to escape postmodern influences, and then suggests, to make all this practical, and not just a theoretical debate, how postmodern ideas would change the actual practice of archival appraisal, description, and the archivist's own accountability. In the first of Verne Harris' two essay, he continues this practical dimension, showing how in the new, exciting democracy of South Africa after the election of Nelson Mandela, the old positivist approaches to archives were revealed as deeply flawed, and indeed unsuitable for the diverse, complex society of the post-apartheid era. In the second, Harris analyses (and makes clear) the powerful insights that Jacques Derrida has for reinventing archives; indeed, Harris grew uncomfortable with "postmodernism" as a term and prefers Derridean "deconstruction," as a way of opening up the archives, making them a dynamic part of society's call for and craving after justice. Eric Ketelaar reminds us that archives are about the exercise of power, are themselves as institutions symbols of power, and their contents are the recorded legacy of the powerful. Despite archivists' traditional claims to neutrality and objectivity, there are tacit narratives, that is, implicit and often subconscious stories, that archivists privilege in how they appraise, acquire, arrange, describe, and make accessible their archival holdings. One such holding is the archival photograph, which again brings postmodernism right to a practical level of how well archivists understand the various recording media in their institutions. Joan M. Schwartz shows how these apparently problem-free documents (the camera just captures the subject placed in front of it, many have long believed) are in fact highly problematic, with multiple contexts and varying functionalities, and thus archival photographs are far from being "records of simple truth and precision." She asserts that what is true of photography is equally true for all archival recording media, and indeed for archival science itself. As did Cook in "Fashionable Nonsense," Mark A. Greene argues that postmodernism offers the chance for a professional rebirth, a chance to find and promote deeper meanings in archives as records and thus of the sociocultural significance of archives as institutions in society. He criticizes some of the leading archival thinkers who deal with electronic or digital records for narrowing the definitions of records and archives, in almost a neo-positivist way, at the very time that postmodernism cries out for their broadening. The last two articles, by Tom Nesmith and Randall Jimerson, build of the discourse of the preceding eight articles, and many others like them, and present the most up-to-date analysis of the meaning of postmodernism for archives and archivists. Nesmith focuses on new ways of seeing archives as vital contributors to knowledge, culture, and society by accepting (and augmenting) the role of the archivist as mediator and interpreter of much deeper contexts surrounding records than the profession has traditionally recognized. And Jimerson brings postmodernism to the mainstream by making it the centrepiece of his presidential address to the Society of American

Archivists. Explicitly drawing on the writing of several of the other authors in this collection, Jimerson challenges archivists to accept their moral or ethical responsibility to embrace the power of archives (rather than deny it as they heretofore have done) and to use it for good in society.

With these articles, translated from English, we are hoping that Spanish-speaking archivists will discover a suggestive alliance between postmodernism and archives, both practical and theoretical. Postmodernism is not a simple panacea to solve all the problems facing archives, and we must be critical in our assessment of its merits. But postmodernism does offer perspectives that allow archivists to re-imagine their profession in exciting new ways to meet the challenges of the postmodern era in which we live, the digital records revolution that we face, and the diversity in our societies and among our researchers that is our reality. As Ketelaar says, archives can be part of the democratic fight for justice in our societies by the choices made in gathering documentation of all social groups, excluding none, so that archives may be of the people, for the people and by the people. The postmodern challenge, as Cook asserts, is unavoidable, for it is inherent now in the very makeup of the societies in which we live. As Nesmith concludes, we need to see archives anew. And facing this challenge, as Harris states, is not one where you can wash your hands and walk away, pretending nothing has changed; everything has changed and now is the time for getting our hands dirty – and for fighting for a new profession and a new social relevance for archives and archivists.

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