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Seeking Our Critical Vision: Speculations on the Past, Present, and Future of CAIN

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It is critical vision alone which can mitigate the unimpeded operation of the automatic.

Marshall McLuhan, 1951

PREFACE

As part of a series of web publications on archival issues, the Association of Canadian Archivists has commissioned an examination of the nature of the CAIN network – and its future – particularly in relation to archival principles and concepts. In this essay, the author examines the current and future of CAIN in relation to archival theory, in hopes of raising questions and stimulating debate about key issues of interest to the Canadian archival community.

This paper begins with an overview of the CAIN initiative, which one could argue is driven in large part by a fundamentally Canadian philosophy: that coordinated, universally accessible, publicly funded initiatives are necessary in order to create a sense of national identity in a country with a huge geography and fierce regional allegiances. The author then considers a range of questions, and offers some speculation and analysis, on issues that ought to be considered as the CAIN initiative continues to move forward. These issues are theoretical and conceptual, political and practical, and Canadian and global. They include the relationship between CAIN and

- the importance of standards
- the concept of the fonds
- the reality of total archives
- control over content
- control over language
- acquisition
- the continuum
- electronic records



- the users of archives
- the social purpose of archives
- the archives as a place
- the reality of politics.

In truth, each of the topics raised deserves a complete analysis on its own. The author hopes that this piece will serve as a discussion paper, to fuel debate that will lead to further and more formalized research, both theoretical and applied.

INTRODUCTION

On 20 October 2001, as part of the *Giving the Future a Past* conference in Winnipeg, Manitoba, the Canadian Archival Information Network, or CAIN, was officially launched by the Canadian Council on Archives (CCA).¹ According to the CCA, the objectives of CAIN are

to support the preparation and entry of *RAD* compliant descriptions for archival holdings in Canada; to develop a distributed network of networks to integrate and share this information about archival holdings in Canada; to provide information technology (IT) infrastructure to support CAIN; to digitize selected archival holdings; to develop and deliver archival and technical training to support CAIN; and to manage the CAIN programme.²

The concept of CAIN was first articulated in May 1996, at a CCA-hosted roundtable on the possible use of the World Wide Web and the Internet by the Canadian archival community. At this meeting, the participants formulated a vision of

a distributed, searchable network of networks which will link Canadians on the Internet with every Canadian Archives. CAIN will allow access to Canadian archival content through the development of Internet-based archival resources that provide information about each institution, descriptions of archival materials and ultimately even electronic copies of these valuable treasures.³

Following that 1996 meeting, representatives developed a strategy for action, encompassing three stages of description:

- primary descriptions of all Canadian archival collections
- detailed finding aids and descriptions of each collection
- availability of significant items including photographs, documentary art and maps.⁴

At the project's conception, the anticipated budget for the development of the CAIN system was \$15 million. It was intended that about half would come from the federal government and half from matching funds, in both "hard" and "soft" dollars, provided by provinces and territories.⁵

Under the CAIN system, archival institutions across the country have been producing fonds-level descriptions of their holdings, including textual records, maps, artwork, photographs, and other



materials, and sending these descriptions to their provincial or territorial network. That network then makes descriptions accessible through the CAIN national database, which provides searchable access to the entries and links to provincial databases and archival institutions.

Through this tool, users can search for descriptions of archival materials related to their particular area of interest, then link from the description to more detailed electronically accessible finding aids, if they have been mounted on institution's own website. In some instances, users can then directly access facsimile images of the archives themselves.⁶

As of March 2003, close to 30,000 fonds-level descriptions were accessible through the CAIN database. A page on the website provides links to the provincial and territorial councils or to the National Archives and National Library of Canada; another page links users to virtual exhibits housed on servers around the country. The focus for CAIN activities has recently shifted, though, as the federal government is now emphasizing digitization and the inclusion of Canadian content on the web. In the 2003-2004 financial year, therefore, 60 percent of the available CAIN grant funds available to institutions across the country are to be used for digitization projects, and there has been some question about the level of support that will be available for CAIN in future years, particularly for the preparation of fonds-level descriptions.⁷

THE ORIGINS OF CAIN

In order to speculate on the theoretical and conceptual context of CAIN, it is necessary first to consider the particular nature of archival development in Canada. The vision of a coordinated, electronic archival network, as represented by CAIN, has emerged out of Canada's distinctive archival past. This history began with the premise of public responsibility for culture in order to tie together a large and diverse country, and it has evolved into a belief in the importance of continuing public support for society within a framework of public-private partnerships.

Total Archives

The term "total archives" was first coined in Canada in 1972, when Dominion Archivist Wilfred Smith defined as a "total archives" approach the duty of Canada's national and provincial archival institutions

not only for the reception of government records which have historical value but also for the collection of historical material of all kinds and from any source which can help in a significant way to reveal the truth about every aspect of Canadian life.⁸

While no name was given to the concept of total archives before 1972, the belief that the public sector had a direct responsibility for the country's documentary heritage had been a cornerstone of archival practice since the Dominion Archives of Canada had been created one hundred years before, in 1872 (remarkably, only five years after the formation of Canada itself in 1867). Inherent in the total archives philosophy were the following concepts:

1. The government had a central role to play in the culture of the country.



2. The government also had a responsibility to help Canadians foster a sense of their own identity, given the small population and expansive terrain of the country and its proximity to the growing giant south of the border, the United States.
3. Acquiring private-sector records and preserving copies of material from other sources were valid archival activities for publicly funded institutions, in order to support this search for identity.
4. Public institutions had a responsibility to preserve in one place archives created in all media, from print to audiovisual to cartographic.

Total archives meant all records, from all sources, for all people, in a centralized, publicly funded archival repository.⁹

In the early years of archival development, the Dominion Archives and a handful of “total archives” carried the weight of archival responsibility for the country. The Dominion Archives essentially stood alone from 1872 until the early 1900s, but by the 1960s, there were about sixty archival repositories in Canada. These included government archives and university, library, and museum facilities, many established in the regions partly to combat the perceived concentration of archival information and power in Ottawa. By the 1970s, spurred on in part by various provincial and national centennial celebrations and the increase in population in smaller centers, the number of archival institutions in the country had grown to over 200.¹⁰

In the 1980s and 1990s, the total archives concept was overtaken by a belief in an “archival system,” an idea first articulated by the authors of the Wilson Report in 1980.¹¹ The term signaled a redefinition of total archives in the face of three realities: the decentralization of public functions, a growing sense of regional identity and regionalism, and diminished public funding for cultural programs. The essence of the archival system was that responsibility for society’s documentary heritage must now be shared between the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, and the private sector must become more involved. In the vision of an archival system, individual public and private archival repositories would each acquire and preserve aspects of Canada’s documentary heritage. By collaboration and cooperation, these institutions would preserve a balanced record of Canadian society.

The Establishment of the CCA

To foster the development of an archival system, the federal government approved and funded the establishment of the Canadian Council of Archives (CCA), an arms-length archival agency. According to the CCA’s mandate, the organization

- seeks to identify national priorities for archival development
- facilitates the development of programs to assist the archival community
- promotes communications among archives and archivists, and
- advises the National Archivist on priorities and archival needs.¹²

The CCA is structured to allow representation by archivists from all parts of the country. Each province or territory has established its own archival council, which then appoints an individual to represent the region at CCA meetings. The board of directors of the CCA determines funding priorities for the archival community and, according to short- and long-term strategic plans,



develops grant programs to achieve desired goals. The provincial and territorial councils receive money from the CCA for programs, based on funding allocations that reflect the demographic and regional realities of the different parts of the country. The councils then use these funds to support archival activities within their own regions, following priorities set by the national council.¹³

Since the establishment of the CCA, the number of archives in Canada has continued to climb, from over 600 in the 1980s to an estimated 800 at the beginning of the 21st century. These institutions encompass large governments, quasi-government institutions, corporations and businesses, municipalities and local governments, communities and regional districts, universities, academic research facilities, churches and religious groups, associations and clubs, and special interest groups from the mainstream to the eccentric. They may acquire non-institutional archives, or they may only be responsible for the records of their own sponsor agency, depending on their legislative and operational requirements and mandates. They may be open full time or by appointment only. They may permit wide public use of their holdings, or they may restrict access to employees, members of their association or, in rare cases, to “like-minded” researchers or individuals sympathetic to the institution’s cause.¹⁴

This growth in the number and nature of institutions has not been inhibited by any national standards or controls. Archival institutions do not have to belong to a provincial or territorial council to exist. However, they are not eligible for CCA funding unless they are members in good standing of their provincial or territorial council.

An Emerging Archival Network

One of the first priorities for this emerging archival system was the development of *Rules for Archival Description* or *RAD*, Canada’s archival descriptive standard. In 1986, the Bureau of Canadian Archivists published the findings of a Canadian working group established to assess the potential for and scope of archival descriptive standards, and in 1987 the Bureau published *A Call to Action*, which initiated the creation of *RAD*.¹⁵ *Rules for Archival Description* began to be published in French and English in 1990; in 2001 the CCA published *RAD Revealed: A Basic Primer on the Rules for Archival Description* to help explain some of the complexities of the descriptive standard.¹⁶

In 1991, as *RAD* was being developed, one of the provincial councils, the Archives Association of British Columbia (AABC), decided to draw on CCA funds to encourage cooperation among archives in the province. The AABC felt that a first step in archival cooperation and coordination was to implement the descriptive standards outlined in *RAD*, in order to develop “shared concepts and common standards” among archival repositories. The British Columbia Archival Union List, or BCAUL, was to be the tool for this coordination.¹⁷

BCAUL was devised by the AABC as an online union list, describing archival materials held by repositories across the province. Fonds-level descriptions would be prepared of holdings in all participating institutions in British Columbia, using *RAD* as the standard. These descriptions would be added to a centrally managed database, which would be available electronically to the research public.¹⁸



BCAUL was not conceived solely or even primarily as a research tool. The main purpose of the union list was to help standardize archival practices across the province. As project developers Christopher Hives and Blair Taylor argued in 1993, “the informal, ad hoc and idiosyncratic practices of the past should be abandoned in favor of more formalized systems of inter-institutional networks.” BCAUL was to “extend beyond the simple dissemination of information about archival holdings to include facilitating provincial objectives in the areas of acquisition, conservation, and education.” In addition to standardizing archival practices across the province, BCAUL was also to serve as the core of a province-wide acquisition strategy. By using BCAUL “to provide information about records whose location might not be so obvious,” the archival community could then undertake coordinated acquisition planning.¹⁹

Hives and Taylor noted that previous union lists developed in Canada, such as the Public Archives of Canada’s *Union List of Manuscripts*, developed in the 1970s and 1980s, tended to represent the holdings of larger repositories. Smaller repositories often felt their holdings were “too insignificant” to be included in national union lists. Hives and Taylor suggested that the BCAUL list

should be as inclusive as possible in order to represent truly the nature and extent of archival holdings in the province for the benefit of researchers. A comprehensive listing will also be invaluable in laying the foundation for a provincial network of repositories. Institutions will come to view themselves as integral components of a larger archival infrastructure. In attempting to disseminate information about descriptive standards, the project must attempt to involve all repositories in the province.²⁰

In order to help institutions adopt these standards, the project planners sent trained personnel around the province to help archivists create standardized, *RAD*-compliant fonds-level descriptions of holdings. BCAUL staff would visit repositories, “where they would explain the goals of the project, provide information about descriptive standards and compile the required information in consultation with local archivists. This [approach] was deemed necessary in recognition of the already heavy workload of archivists, and the lack of expertise to compile the information in the required format.”²¹

In 1991-92, the first phase of the BCAUL project was completed, and information was entered onto a database housed at the University of British Columbia. In 1993-94 and 1994-95, phases two and three were completed. In 1998-99 the AABC moved to its own server, integrating BCAUL with its other web resources on a new British Columbia Archival Network web site.

The BC Archival Network, or BCAN, took the concept of an online database a step further, making archives “part of a common gateway to a variety of shared resources.”²² BCAN became a host website that not only linked users to the database of fonds-level descriptions but also provided other relevant information, including links to the websites of archives around the province. It also provided lists of and links to online historical photograph and exhibit resources, and included other reference and resource information, such as bibliographies of archival publications and resource tools for archivists.



In 1995, Alberta established a task force to plan its own policy for online archival description, following a successful pilot project to develop an electronic communications network. In 1997, the Archives Society of Alberta established the Archives Network of Alberta or ANA. The ANA database was initially constructed from records that had already been created by a core group of institutions. The provincial archives advisor visited some institutions in the province to help prepare *RAD*-compliant descriptions, after which responsibility was given to institutions to create their own fonds-level descriptions.²³

In 1998 the Alberta and BC databases were linked together in an inter-provincial union list. At the same time, the Yukon Territory and the Northwest Territories started to develop their own union lists, and in 1999-2000 their data were included in the BC Archives Network system and housed on the AABC server, forming part of what became the Canadian Northwest Archival Network or CanWAN.²⁴

Work then began in Saskatchewan and Manitoba to develop the Saskatchewan Archival Information Network and the Manitoba Archival Information Network, or SAIN/MAIN. The two provinces decided to work together to develop their networks, with a focus in each province on assigning responsibility to individual institutions to prepare descriptions.²⁵ The ARCHEION database was developed in Ontario in 2000,²⁶ and the four Atlantic provinces also started developing tools: ArchWay was launched in Nova Scotia in 2000, Prince Edward Island is developing PEIAIN; and Newfoundland has established PLANET. New Brunswick contributes directly to the CAIN database.²⁷ Quebec is developing its own French-language system, and Nunavut is still in the early stages of archival development but plans to participate in CAIN. The National Archives of Canada has developed an online research tool called ArchiviaNet, which provides electronic access to the public and private holdings of the largest and oldest archival institution in the country.²⁸

The CAIN Network

CAIN is constructed on these provincial and territorial initiatives, as a network of networks. To represent both official languages, CAIN is to be bilingual, and it aims to be inclusive, “to acknowledge the particular contributions and needs of indigenous peoples and other cultural minorities across time.” A generic topical/thematic subject authority has been developed and may be used in future, partly with a view to acquisition planning.²⁹

The developers of CAIN began with a vision of a tool that extended far beyond a “simple” online union list: the original plan was to include links to websites, virtual exhibits, and visual images; to allow communications between users and archivists; and to encourage dialogue among members of the archival community. As of 2003, it appears the focus has been on the inclusion of fonds-level descriptions, the creation of links to virtual exhibits, websites, and visual images and the digitization of text and images. Less attention has been paid to communications, dialogue, or acquisition planning. Most recently, CAIN’s orientation has shifted somewhat, to acknowledge the increased government interest in digitization and in the distribution of Canadian content over the Internet.

Where, then, is CAIN going? Where should it go? This paper raises questions about the nature, scope, and role of CAIN, in order to encourage a dialogue within the archival community.



CAIN AND THE IMPORTANCE OF STANDARDS

While the future may take CAIN more into the realm of digitization, the most visible component of CAIN in 2003 is the database of archival descriptions. And those descriptions are of fonds, not of discrete items, series or sub-series, filing units, or artificial collections. The developers of the CAIN system determined that compliance with *Rules for Archival Description (RAD)* in the creation of fonds-level descriptions was crucial to the development of a standardized and sustainable tool.

At the heart of *RAD* is the philosophy that “the organization of all descriptive work [should] proceed from the more general to the more specific level of description.”³⁰ The first level of description is to be the fonds, which is defined as

the whole of the records, regardless of form or medium, automatically and organically created and/or accumulated and used by a particular individual, family, or corporate body in the course of that creator’s activities or functions.³¹

As was noted in CAIN planning documents, “projects that would detract from or delay achieving the goal or top priority of having all archival holdings in a province/territory described at the fonds level according to *RAD* ... will be given a lower priority.”³²

The success of these fonds-level descriptions rests in the application of descriptive standards. Today, CAIN funding requires that institutions describe fonds using, at a minimum, the following descriptive elements, prepared according to *RAD* rules:

- title proper
- date(s) of creation
- physical extent
- scope and content
- administrative history / biographical sketch
- restrictions on access, use, and reproduction
- name of repository
- language of description
- availability of finding aid
- provenance access point.

Optional elements approved by the CAIN Steering Committee include

- language of material
- custodial history
- URL for virtual exhibits and/or digitized finding aids
- Call number or institutional identifier for fonds / collection
- any other data elements identified in *RAD*.³³



Institutions funded for CAIN work develop their fonds-level descriptions according to these rules, and then arrange to add their descriptions to their provincial/territorial database or, in some instances, directly to the CAIN database.

Given this scenario, several questions arise. Is it possible to develop and maintain such a strictly standardized descriptive environment? What mechanisms are, or should be, in place to sustain these standards? Is such a consistent level of standardization logical or even desirable?

CAIN AND THE CONCEPT OF THE FONDS

As noted, the CAIN system focuses on the description of fonds, not single items, series, filing units, or artificial collections.³⁴ According to the planners of the BCAUL system (which was the first union list and therefore was taken as the basis for practice in other jurisdictions), “single items are considered as fonds only if they meet the following criteria: whether the item is all that remains of the fonds, whether the item covers a span of years, whether there is evidence of an accumulation.”³⁵

The term “fonds” implies wholeness, completeness, totality.³⁶ But it can be argued that no archival institution has, ever will have, or ever has had, “the whole of the records” of any creating agency. Records are destroyed or lost or transferred or changed even before they get to the archives. Once they are in custody, they may be culled and weeded and selected. Archivists don’t just manage records; they actively decide what will be kept and what will be removed, through the very process of appraisal. Archivists manage the residue, not the entirety.³⁷

It can also be argued that, given the nature of record keeping in Canada, several archival institutions may have parts of a larger “whole”, as the records of one creating agency may be divided, physically and intellectually, over vast distances or different jurisdictions. Consider, for example, the records of the Hudson’s Bay Company. The central archives of the Hudson’s Bay Company, held in Winnipeg, Manitoba, comprise over 3,000 linear meters of holdings. But the CAIN database identifies another 44 fonds or collections with the provenance “Hudson’s Bay Company” and 23 separate entries with the title “Hudson’s Bay Company”. Are these all separate fonds, or are they part of the larger Hudson’s Bay Company archives, which itself is clearly not a “fonds” since it is not the “whole of the records”?

It is possible that the focus on the fonds in *RAD* and CAIN has led institutions to use that term indiscriminately. Perhaps rather than define all discrete “units” of material as fonds, the creating agency – the provenance – should be identified and the relationship among the records – as series or sub-series or items within a fonds – could be documented. This approach would acknowledge the dynamic relationship between records and their creators, rather than categorize records as part of a static, but perhaps unrealistic, organizational structure. This approach relates in part to the Australian series system, discussed below.

It could also be argued that the more important fact is not that the materials are called fonds or that they are reintegrated intellectually with each other to represent different stages in the process of creation and use. It may be more significant to describe the records in order to capture their history beyond their active life: from company headquarters to a clerk’s office or a storage room and then to a community archives or local museum. How did 44 “fonds” called “Hudson’s Bay



Company” end up in cities and archives far from Manitoba? Who had them in their possession? How did they move from active use to their “final” disposition? When? Why?

CAIN AND THE REALITY OF TOTAL ARCHIVES

Ultimately, one wonders if a focus on the fonds reflects either the real nature of archival materials and or the true reality of archival practice in Canada. Historically, archival materials in Canada rarely came into archival institutions as fonds. And today, many archives – especially community and special interest archives – still deal with bits and pieces, not with the “whole” fonds found in corporate or government archives.

In community archives settings, for example, many donors bring materials to the archives one or two items at a time. They bring more and more as they build a relationship with the archivist and come to trust the institution. Over time, sometimes over years of patient negotiations, a community archivist may be able to piece together a fonds from the various accessions brought in by a family or group. And if he or she can’t, the institution usually develops alternate systems, from the creation of artificial collections of photographs to the maintenance of vertical or clippings files to the description and cataloguing of materials as items. These systems have been designed to accommodate the oddities that perhaps will never warrant full archival treatment but nevertheless have been deemed worth preserving.

While perfectly adequate finding aids may exist within an institution to describe these materials, the structure of CAIN does not allow inclusion of this information in the online tool. RAD focuses on the fonds and then on its component parts; if an item is not considered part or all of a fonds it will likely not appear on the CAIN database. But many of the holdings of Canadian archives are not fonds, or if they once were, they are not any more. There is, then, a disparity between the fonds being described on CAIN and the records actually in archival institutions.

The fonds may be a perfectly valid construct, but it is a construct. It is an artificial idea created by archivists for their own use. The fonds is a means of imposing a hierarchical order on the archival environment, in order to understand and, perhaps, control it. Consider the natural world. The rhinoceros has no idea that it forms part of the “order perissodactyla.” A rabbit doesn’t know that it is part of one family in the “order lagomorpha.” Equally, records have no idea that they are fonds. If archival databases rigidly reflect an imposed hierarchy, archivists risk only including information about those archival materials that fit the norm. Perhaps archivists have not incorporated into online networks descriptions of artificial collections or items or discrete “bits and pieces” not because the materials are not fonds but because archivists have not found a rightful place for them in the archival hierarchy. It is possible that there is a danger in attaching too much importance to definitions and classifications?³⁸

If *RAD* is the premise for CAIN descriptions, and if *RAD* focuses on the fonds, what happens to those records that don’t conform to the norm? Ultimately, archivists may find that the extraordinary becomes the ordinary, and the ordinary disappears from view. An inherent danger is not just that materials will not be described, but that *because* they cannot be described according to established rules, they may not even be deemed worthy of preservation. *RAD* may become not just a standard for description but a standard for appraisal. The Vegas Valley leopard



frog didn't know it was classified as an amphibian. But it doesn't matter now, because the Vegas Valley leopard frog is extinct. Will certain types of archival materials become extinct in this structured archival environment?

It is possible that the concept of the fonds is, in fact, inappropriate and misleading. The archival community may wish to reconsider this label and think, instead, about referring to "archives" or "letters" or "photographs" and so describing precisely what is in hand, and how it came to be in the archives, not what it might have been categorized and how it ought to have been managed in theory. At the very least, archivists need to reconcile the role of CAIN as a trusted source of information with the reality of their often idiosyncratic finding aids and their cramped storage rooms.

CONTROLLING THE CONTENT OF CAIN

Another question arises relating to the process by which descriptions are included in the CAIN database, and the question of whether or not there is, or should be, a "gatekeeper" controlling the dissemination of information. Should CAIN be a controlled tool, with firm requirements for the inclusion of information, or should it be a less structured instrument, with few or no restrictions on access or inclusion?

Under the present organizational structure of the CCA, much of the work of helping institutions prepare fonds-level descriptions for electronic distribution has fallen to a small group of archival advisors across the country. The CCA program has provided funds for provincial and territorial councils to hire archives advisors, as well as educators and network coordinators, to serve their community's educational and informational needs.

Many of these archival advisors, educators, and coordinators have become the "help line" for archival institutions in their jurisdictions. They travel around their province or territory, organizing workshops and training sessions, coordinating regional meetings, and generally helping institutions share resources and expertise. What burden of responsibility has been placed on their shoulders? CAIN planners need to think about how much influence these coordinators can, do, and should wield. One wonders if it is fair to them, to archivists, or to the users of archives, to exert such a strong influence on the archival process.³⁹

Look for example at the mechanisms for adding fonds-level descriptions to the provincial/territorial lists and from there to CAIN. In most cases, individual institutions create descriptions using *RAD*, and then send the descriptions to the host server to be added to the database. Someone – the archival advisor, a network coordinator, or a representative of the provincial or territorial council – vets the descriptions before they go on the system. This person looks for errors and inconsistencies, ensures information is coded correctly so that it can be uploaded onto web servers easily, and reviews the descriptions to ensure the materials conform to the criteria established. In the process of doing this job, the coordinators – or gatekeepers – are determining what goes into the system and what is left out. While most regions have established formal criteria or guidelines for practice, the review process is inevitably affected by each individual's knowledge of the system and his or her own pattern of decision making.



In some provinces, for example, strict lines have been drawn excluding all items or artificial collections from online databases. Even if a repository has several thousand discrete photographs which the archivist has organized into an artificial collection, that description will not go in the database, since it is not a fonds or “natural” collection (that is, one created by an agent outside the archives). In other regions, the exclusion of artificial collections or items is an official policy, but unofficially the coordinator or advisor sometimes decides to break the rule.

One province operates on the premise of inclusion: if the records are in an institution, they are to be described on the database, regardless of conformity to rules. Consequently, some of the records described from that institution are not true fonds, and some records have not even been processed. This coordinator’s argument is that in order to get institutions to participate in the network project, there must be leniency about the level of *RAD* compliance required.

In some provinces, the coordinators have helped institutions construct artificial collections from the various items in their repository, so that information about disparate materials can be brought together in one *RAD*-compliant record. In other provinces, the institutions are encouraged to create “historical resources” databases, describing in a general way all the different holdings of the archival repository, so that users can at least know the kinds of materials available. Surely such decisions are at odds with the criteria applied by other coordinators or intended by the developers of CAIN?

In conversations with the author in 2000-2001, some archival network coordinators expressed concern that a large percentage of archival holdings would not be included in the CAIN database. The very real challenges of establishing and adhering to criteria were well expressed by one archivist. “I am finding myself wanting to make some exceptions to my own rules,” this person said, adding that “really great photo collections would be nice to include ... but I have had to make these ‘rules’ so that I do not have to include every collection of royal family memorabilia or genealogical notes etc. I am often torn between serving the users, who don’t care as much about fonds vs. collection, and keeping up our standards of fonds only.”

In 1998, Wendy Duff surveyed Canadian archives to determine their implementation of *RAD*. While she found significant evidence that *RAD* was used by institutions across the country, particularly in smaller communities, she noted that “the actual degree of compliance with the detailed requirements of *RAD* should be studied” and she argued that while “most archives said they used *RAD* ... what was meant by ‘use of *RAD*’ was not defined.” She also noted that many archivists suggested that a lack of “time and money” hindered their use of *RAD*. Studies like this need to be conducted regularly if the archival community is to assess the sustainability, and validity of its work. But this again raises the question of gate keeping versus stewardship, and whether or not the online environment ought to be inclusive or simply representative: a tasty appetizer or a full meal deal.⁴⁰

Inevitably, at least some percentage of the materials sitting in archival repositories, particularly discrete items and artificial collections created by institution itself, may never be described on electronic information networks, and not all descriptions will conform precisely to the desired standards. The archival community has to think about what level of inclusion or exclusion is appropriate, and what level of compliance is required. It also has to consider who gets to make those decisions.



Someone needs to oversee the process of maintaining digital systems, but the public may well be better served if those who monitor the system focus more on the dissemination of information than on the maintenance of standards. As Gary Mitchell of the British Columbia Archives has said, descriptive standards in the hands of gatekeepers set up a barrier; but descriptive standards in the hands of stewards can serve the essence of the archival role: heightened access.⁴¹ The Canadian archival community needs to reconcile *RAD* with the reality of archival institutions and archival holdings in the country.

CONTROLLING THE LANGUAGE OF CAIN

Related to the issue of what is included in the CAIN system is the question of how that information is captured and presented. What language is used to describe holdings? Should CAIN be controlled by the establishment of controlled vocabularies? Is it possible to standardize something as complex and ultimately as political as language?

When the BCAUL system was first developed, it was decided to standardize names used as access points according to chosen authorities: *Canadiana Authorities* and the *University of British Columbia Library Name Headings Authority*. Subject access points were not created, and no subject authorities were established. In Alberta, on the other hand, name authorities were not established, but the provincial council did develop a list of generic subjects that could be coded by archivists. A special field was inserted in the database, for archivists only, to earmark by number a generic subject that identified the “primary” research orientation of the archives being described. The idea behind this internal information source was to allow the archival community to “match” similar fonds and so coordinate acquisition planning.⁴²

As the CAIN system developed, there was discussion of the idea of incorporating national authorities. In June 2001, the Authority Sub-committee of the Canadian Committee on Archival Description prepared a discussion paper on a *Canadian Archival Authority System*.⁴³ In this paper, the sub-committee recommended that a national archival authority be established, based on the principles of voluntary participation, and managed and coordinated by the National Archives of Canada.⁴⁴

What exactly would such a tool control? Will it be a name authority only, or will it grow into a controlled vocabulary tool – a national version of the BC Thesaurus?⁴⁵ Is it possible, or logical, to establish a national authority for Canadian archives, to control corporate names, personal names, subjects, or geographic names? Many people might argue that Canada is simply too large and too diverse to allow for such extensive standardization. What is important in one part of the country may be virtually irrelevant in another.

For example, Canadians function in two official languages, French and English, but in parts of the northern territories official communications take place in nine or ten languages, and more people in British Columbia speak Chinese than speak French. In the north, cold is such a pervasive part of life that there are about 30 different Inuit terms for “snow”; in Vancouver, the majority of the population may not have seen a snow shovel in years. Archival materials related to forestry in British Columbia will be much more complex, and require more detailed categorization, than archival materials related to forestry in Manitoba. Fishing in Newfoundland



will be interpreted differently from fishing in Saskatchewan; the fur trade will be understood differently in Ontario and Alberta. The public's perception of transportation or farming or natives or sports will depend entirely on where, in this vast multicultural mosaic that is Canada, they call home.

The differences in archives reach beyond provinces and territories to specific institutions. A university archives may want to describe in detail its materials on academic topics; a municipal archives may be describing exclusively government records. A church archives will need to create access terms related specifically to its pastoral responsibilities, and a sports archives will naturally focus on the details of athletic events. How can Canadian archivists represent all those differences in a national authority? Should they even try?

Language is a political tool, and choices of terminology are a direct reflection of the sociopolitical context of the times. In British Columbia, for example, the card catalogue describing and indexing the contents of British Colonial Office correspondence was created in the early years of the 20th century. Within that catalogue are virtually no references to “women”, even though women did figure – sometimes prominently – in some of the communications of the colonial period. The absence of information about women is not so much a result of events in the 1850s and 1860s as it is a reflection of the priorities of the cataloguers of the 1900s. Similarly, descriptions being prepared in the 21st century of records created in the 20th century may be influenced by the current political context. Are there *more* references to women, or children, or natives, and perhaps fewer to “dead white men” – to use terminology common in academic circles today – because the former now have a higher public profile than they did in years past?⁴⁶

Some have suggested that the records themselves reveal the issues, and that a functional description would best represent the true purpose of the records. It may be more logical to create a range of thesauri for the various functions and activities undertaken in different sectors. For example, the Australian government has developed a function-oriented thesaurus, the Australian Governments' Interactive Functions Thesaurus (AGIFT), which links natural language terms to their bureaucratic equivalents. For example, as the AGIFT description indicates, “AGIFT enables a user interested in government information on ‘kindergartens’ to focus their search on the government term ‘early childhood education’.” Similarly, anyone interested in public land management might also be directed to burial ground management, cultural centre management, recreational park management, or sporting facilities management. The activity in question – not the “subject” – is controlled by specific terminology.⁴⁷

A functional approach works well in a bureaucratic environment, such as a government or organizational archives. But as noted earlier, the reality of Canadian archives – as is often the case in post-Colonial institutions with few records in hand to depict long and complicated histories – is that there has long been a great emphasis on the private record. Personal papers, the records of associations or clubs or groups, private diaries and correspondence and photographs often defy hierarchical classification. Can one establish functional categories for marriage, childbirth, adolescence, community spirit, reminiscences, or romance? The nature of archives is that each item is unique because of its distinct content and context. Some might argue that to establish categories for description or hierarchical classification would eliminate those records



that don't "fit", just as "non-fonds" don't necessarily to "fit" the vision of fonds-level description.

CAIN AND ACQUISITION

As noted, one original intention of the CAIN database was to serve as an acquisition tool. The inclusion of controlled subject terms, as was done in Alberta, was intended part to facilitate a coordinated acquisition process. By identifying who has what, it may be possible to determine gaps and lacunae, and enhance the representation of society across the country through a more systematic approach to acquisition.

So far, it does not appear that CAIN has been used for this purpose. Further if those materials that do not "conform" to the stated norm are not included in the system, and if terminology is not standardized enough to bring together "like items", how can different institutions know what "bits and pieces" they and their counterparts have, and so attempt to create some sort of whole out of the disparate parts? The developers of CAIN need to consider whether relaxing the rules for inclusion of information in CAIN will be detrimental to the system, or whether there are mechanisms for sharing such knowledge, so that the oddities are also accessible to the research public and to the archival community.

No archives will ever preserve everything; much will not survive from the time of creation of the records to their ultimate arrival in some "final" resting place. This reality is uncomfortable to many archivists, but it is reality nonetheless. As Heather MacNeil argues, what gets kept "will always be, to an extent that probably discomfits us, as much a matter of accident as design."⁴⁸ If one of the priorities of the CCA is to share information among archives, CAIN could be developed as a central gateway for communications and networking. For instance, CAIN could include databases that hold information not about materials already in archival institutions but about records that have not yet been acquired.⁴⁹ Such databases could also include snippets of leads, pseudo-fonds-level descriptions, and even just questions and queries, that might help archivists all know what records are out there, so they can assess whether they ought to be acquired, consolidated with other holdings, managed differently, or disposed of.

Looking even further, CAIN could include databases of researcher requests, or acquisition tips and leads. It could also include "chat rooms" for archivists interested in different professional issues, or for genealogists or school teachers to access relevant resources or share information. In the National Archives of Canada, for example, one of the most useful "finding aids" for years has been the reference files of answers to written requests for information. Every time someone asked about the history of their family name or sought information about their ancestors, the correspondence was kept on file. Archivists could then refer to this information again and again, sometimes shortcutting the reference process or enhancing their reply. Could CAIN offer the same kind of service and so be more than a static information base?

CAIN AND THE CONTINUUM

The question above is whether CAIN is to be a trusted authority, depicting a complete universe of archives, or an ever-changing information center, representing a dynamic record-keeping



environment. But perhaps neither is the appropriate role for a descriptive tool. A consideration of the continuum approach, first introduced by the Australian archival community, opens up a very different perspective on CAIN.

CAIN was created in a very Canadian context, where public and private archives are found within the same institution, where the acquisition of historical records has long been a priority, and where outreach and public service are central tenets of archival practice. But there is a growing focus now around the world on archives as evidence. Archival services are increasingly viewed as essential for the maintenance of transparent, accountable, and efficient government or corporate services. In this universe, archives are not historical relics or cultural objects; they are the heart of organizational actions and transactions. Their management, many argue, ought to be part of an ongoing business program: in the words of the Australians, a continuum of care.

It may be that tools such as CAIN, with its focus on the description of historical records deposited in archival institutions, will become less and less relevant in relation to current record-keeping systems, especially in the public sector. How does online description of archival materials relate to the idea of record keeping? What is the ultimate purpose of description?

The Australian Approach

Australian archivists have examined this issue in great depth and have suggested that the concept of the fonds does not accurately represent the multi-dimensional reality of provenance and the complexity of the record-keeping process. As Chris Hurley notes,

Is the purpose of description to provide a documentary representation or descriptive surrogate for a record or a body of records (fonds) which has passed out of the record-keeping process across an “archival boundary”? Or, is it to capture such knowledge of creation, management, and use as may be needed for records to exist?

Are finding aids composed, in other words, of data input into a finding aids system or data output from a record-keeping system?⁵⁰

Hurley has suggested that in the traditional world of the life cycle management of paper records, the process of preparing finding aids was separated in time and place from the creation and use of records. Archivists acquired custody of records after the fact and described them according to their last “practical use” and in relation to their physical arrangement and, ultimately, to their storage in boxes and on shelves. The finding aids created, Hurley argued, were useful for the retrieval of records, but the focus was on the researchers, not on the creating agency.⁵¹ Hurley proposed that, while the archivist documented a “documentation process,” the record maker documented the actual business process. In order to make description most useful in the long term, it was necessary to approach the activity from the point of view of this continuum of care, not from specific stages of a life cycle.⁵²

In his examination of the Australian perspective, Terry Cook highlighted the key change in vision, which was first articulated by Peter Scott in 1966 when he proposed the acceptance of the “Australian series system.” As Cook noted, “Scott’s fundamental insight was that the traditional archival assumption of a one-to-one relationship between the record and its creating



administration was no longer valid.” Rather, administrations were multi-layered, not rigidly hierarchical; they were complex, not static; and they were better defined in terms of the inter-relationships among activities and functions, rather than in terms of the records created at a specific time and place.⁵³

In Australia, the model has been adopted in many quarters as the central approach to record keeping, and description has been interpreted as part of that record-keeping process, not an after-the-fact activity. The continuum model grew out of the idea that records were best managed according to functions, not creators. Based on this vision of a continuity of activity, the Australian Records Continuum Research Group defined the records continuum as

a complex multi-layered [record-keeping](#) function that is carried out through a series of parallel and iterative processes that capture and manage [record-keeping metadata](#). Description-related processes begin at or before [records](#) creation and continue throughout the lifespan of the records. Their primary aim is to provide the intellectual controls that enable reliable, authentic, meaningful and accessible records to be carried forward through time within and beyond organisational boundaries for as long as they are needed for the multiple purposes they serve.⁵⁴

The Continuum and Description

This continuum approach to description has also been recognized, implicitly, by the international archival community, through enhancements to the definition and interpretation of archival description. The *International Standard on Archival Description (ISAD (G))* has defined the purpose of archival description as

[to] identify and explain the context and content of archival material in order to promote its accessibility. This is achieved by creating accurate and appropriate representations and by organizing them in accordance with predetermined models.⁵⁵

In its 2000 edition of the standard, *ISAD (G)* has added the following significant statement.

Description-related processes may begin at or before records creation and continue throughout the life of the records. These processes make it possible to institute the intellectual controls necessary for reliable, authentic, meaningful and accessible descriptive records to be carried forward through time.⁵⁶

Such a statement portrays description as an iterative, creative process, one that progresses through time and is not stagnant. This is the Australian view, based on the belief, as articulated by Adrian Cunningham, that “records are not entirely self-contained or disconnected objects or packages of information,” but rather are aggregations which may enjoy varying provenance, custody, and record-keeping systems.⁵⁷

The Australian approach to description, then, is to produce separate but linked descriptions of records and records creators that allow users to relate information about creators and records in diverse ways. Ultimately, the Australians are focusing on capturing record-keeping metadata, or “structured or semi-structured information which enables the creation, management and use of



records through time and across domains.”⁵⁸ Rather than create what Cunningham calls “post-hoc” descriptions – such as the fonds-level descriptions found in CAIN – the appropriate goal, he argues, should be to capture metadata at the point of creation so that critical record-keeping information is carried forward in a dynamic fashion throughout time.

This vision of archival description is not universally accepted, of course, and the debate about the purpose of descriptive standards continues. For example, in an e-mail message sent on March 20, 2003 to the Australian archival listserv, Chris Hurley discussed the problem of clarifying the purpose of description and the relationship between description, descriptive standards, and computer applications. He wrote that

archivists haven’t yet got a good fix on descriptive standards or functional requirements for implementing them because they haven’t yet got a good fix on what descriptive standards are for.... The standards have to reinvent themselves so that they do not become irrelevant, trying to keep up with the applications instead of (as it should be) the other way round.⁵⁹

As various institutions in Canada revisit the nature of description and descriptive standards, it may be necessary to reconsider the structure of systems such as CAIN. Consider, for example, the move at the Archives of Ontario to series-oriented management of records, rather than a fonds-oriented approach. Other governments and organizations are also changing their approach to the management of their institutional records, and these changes will inevitably affect how those materials are handled once they move to an archival environment. How will such public records – current and non-current – be described in a CAIN descriptive record? Or will they be included at all, given CAIN’s focus on materials already in custody in established archival institutions?⁶⁰

CAIN and the Custodial Environment

At the heart of CAIN is the idea that records must be in archival custody before description commences. *RAD* focuses on the fonds as a complete and whole unit, arranged, physically protected, and safe – a “permanent” record. The administrative structure of CAIN does not, in fact, allow for the inclusion of the current records of the sponsor agency. Projects to appraise, arrange, or describe active or semi-active records are not eligible for funding, and holdings to be digitized must be over five years old.⁶¹

With the growing focus, however, on metadata, ISO standards, records management, and the continuum approach, there is increasing concern on the business aspects of records control versus the descriptive activities of traditional repositories. In the records continuum, description is much more about the development and documentation of record keeping systems and the capturing of metadata. This focus is institutional and inward looking, not external. One could argue it is client centered if one accepted that the institution – or the record – is the client. Should the Canadian archival community look again at the concept of life cycle versus continuum, especially in relation to online descriptions? Should Canadian archivists focus on capturing metadata about institutional records, instead of creating post-hoc descriptions of custodial holdings?



One could argue that CAIN accommodates the traditional Canadian and North American method of archival management: acquisition and appraisal first, then arrangement, description, and preservation for public use. It may be that Canadian archivists need to rethink this focus and move toward institutional record keeping, if they accept, as Australian Barbara Reed asserts, that “records are not passive objects to be described retrospectively. Rather, they are agents of action, active participants in business activity that can only be described through a series of parallel and iterative processes.”⁶²

CAIN and Electronic Records

The vision of a continuum of care for records arose in part as an answer to the challenge of managing electronic records. As Barbara Reed argues, “electronic transactions are the stuff of the future and integrating them into our business systems is imperative ... for the survival of all businesses in the electronic world.”⁶³

The argument presented is that the client, the public service, and the records will all be better protected by an activist continuum approach to information management than by a passive, custodial approach to archives care. The “centrality of the customer” will be paramount, Reed argues. She also proposes that record keepers will be “meta metadata managers.” The business of managing business systems is the record keepers’ sphere, she says, and record keepers had better be prepared.⁶⁴ Her colleague Chris Hurley agrees, noting that the integrity of electronic records must be protected throughout their life. This integrity is best ensured, he suggests, by requiring the creating agency to take responsibility for their reliability and requiring the preservation agency – the archives – to take responsibility for their authenticity.⁶⁵

The focus on the electronic record is a pressing issue in many parts of the world. But there is some question of whether it is, ought to be, or can be, the focus for an online descriptive tool such as CAIN. CAIN evolved from the quintessentially Canadian desire to document a past. CAIN exists in the form it is in because Canadians believed in total archives, believed in the concept of acquisition, in public access to archives, and in the importance of documenting the lives and work not just of organizations or governments but also of groups and individuals and societies and communities. Just as there are over 800 archival repositories in Canada, each acquiring and preserving its own community’s records, there are thousands of records on the CAIN database that depict not the evidence of the governments of Canada but the stories of the people of Canada.

It is quite possible – and quite logical – that the Canadian archival community will have to rethink its vision for CAIN, in order to encompass the reality of corporate record keeping, the quest for accountability, authenticity, and transparency in government, and the need to make the evidence of government available to the public. Perhaps tools such as CAIN should help municipalities not just to manage their backlogs of historical materials but also to protect their electronic records so that they do not become backlogs in future.

Changing CAIN to a continuum approach and so to a focus on the institutional record would fundamentally alter the purpose, scope, and nature of the tool. As it stands now, CAIN is serving neither the vision of a continuum-oriented record-keeping function nor the community-oriented custodial, curatorial role. CAIN does not describe active or semi-active records, making it an



“after the fact” descriptive tool. Yet, as noted earlier in this essay, CAIN also does not include the disparate fragments that people value so highly despite the loss of context and continuity: the single items, the artificial collections, and the materials that come without provenance but that become well known to the community.

What, then, is the role of the archival institution: keeper or documenter? And what is the role of online description: public reference service, acquisition coordination tool, business system? Perhaps CAIN should define itself as the public face of archives, to be joined eventually by an administrative face. Perhaps tools should be developed to allow institutions and governments to expand the descriptive and informative elements of CAIN into a customized, interactive tool valuable for their own organizational purposes and ultimately integrated into a larger archival and information network across the country.

In order to determine the most appropriate role for a tool such as CAIN, the next question should perhaps not be what would archivists like it to do, but, rather, what do the users want it to do? After all, as Brian Speirs, the Provincial Archivist of Nova Scotia and a strong supporter of the CAIN system, has acknowledged, “we sometimes lose sight of the fundamental premise that CAIN is for the Canadian public and only secondarily for archivists.”⁶⁶

CAIN AND THE USERS OF ARCHIVES

When researchers come to an archival institution in Canada (as, no doubt in other parts of the world), they face a myriad of descriptive systems. Inventories describe whole fonds and collections; photograph catalogues allow item-by-item searches; map indexes follow cartographic rules for description; oral history transcriptions offer line-by-line access; film summaries offer shot lists and synopses of action. A kaleidoscope of systems accommodates both the wide variety of materials in hand and the diversity of researcher needs.

While these systems are gradually being replaced by online tools and standardized descriptions, the archivist in the repository still often serves as the walking finding aid, physically leading the user through the different descriptive tools and ultimately to the desired records. A dialogue will often take place to help the user get the information he or she wants, or at least to determine that it won't be found in that institution. There is no question that the very eccentricity of the total archives system encouraged the development of contorted information tools, and archivists have had to accommodate to that reality, offering interpretations and explanations as required.⁶⁷

With the emergence of CAIN and the rise of provincial and territorial networks, this quaint total archives universe is being replaced by a coordinated network of distinct repositories, with structured databases providing logical and uniform descriptions of holdings. But the databases are not, it seems, always logical. Search tools may find “hits” for a search on logging but nothing under forestry. Sometimes “fonds-level” descriptions are in fact listings of only one or two items. Materials physically found in the repository may not be described on the database, and records described may not actually be organized or available. But there is no reference archivist in this virtual universe, standing beside the user, explaining and interpreting the idiosyncrasies in the system. The remote user does not know what he or she does not know, and the “walking finding aid” is not there to offer much-needed advice.



CAIN, the User, and the Internet

With the proliferation of online information resources, and the increased use of Internet technologies by the general public, it seems that people are becoming more and more “wired” in their approach to information. More and more, the public look to electronic technologies to provide answers – easy and quick answers – to their questions. In Canada in 2001, nearly 50 percent of households accessed the Internet from their homes, and the numbers are rising dramatically. Terms such as “log on,” “link,” and “download” are commonplace in the North American lexicon.⁶⁸

There is still a myth surrounding the nature of the Internet, however, one that may never go away. Many people assume that digital systems are comprehensive and coordinated. They search for information and expect a fast and accurate answer. If they do not get the answer they wanted, they may assume there is no relevant information in the system, but in fact their question may have been too narrow in scope. Similarly, they could be faced with a plethora of answers, which may mean that their question was too broad. But users rarely wade through the hundreds of results from a Google search and assess the quality of the information; rather, instead, they accept the “first” answer as the best answer, assume they found out what they wanted to know, and look no further.

It is not clear if users of archives search for archival information in the same way. One would assume that there is a great level of complexity in the archival research process, and so the user will apply more sophisticated and subtle search methods. But if archivists are going to make electronic systems such as CAIN really useful, they need to understand who uses such systems, how, and for what. Further, they need to compare online search strategies with the process of in-person research and consider why users come to archives, what they look for, and how they process the information found.

As institutional and inter-institutional access tools such as online finding aids, image databases, or descriptive networks are developed, it is increasingly important to assess not only what information users want but also the ways in which users access libraries and archives and how they understand and make use of the information gleaned from their searches. Information professionals have a responsibility to their public, and to their funders, to assess more systematically the ways in which users use – and want to use – the information held by libraries and archives.⁶⁹

CAIN, the Internet, and the Nature of Reference

If CAIN is to serve its purpose as an “Internet-based archival resource,”⁷⁰ its planners need to think about the nature of reference and the role of online tools – and human mediators – in the provision of access to information in and about archives.⁷¹

In her study of the future of reference libraries, librarian Myoung Wilson argues that there are three important components to reference service. The first is to provide information about information, such as factual information from sources and information about services provided. This kind of reference service, she suggests, is easily replaced by the Internet and does not



require the unique intervention of individual reference librarians. This service can easily go online.⁷²

The CAIN system is an ideal tool for this kind of reference service. It can provide “yes/no” answers easily and quickly. Are there any archival materials relating to “hiking”? Yes, there are; CAIN will pull up a list of twenty or thirty entries, and the user can then decide if he needs to narrow his search parameters, perhaps to “hiking” and “Rockies”. He can then scan through the fifteen or so entries found and see if the materials appear sufficiently relevant to warrant further investigation. (Of course, this success presumes the accuracy of the search terms and their relevance to the culture in question, as discussed earlier.)⁷³

The second type of reference service is education: training users to access and evaluate information sources. In a library, the reference librarian may help the user not only to find a particular body of information but also to determine if the information is reliable. Does the description of the symptoms of a disease come from a bona fide medical resource or from an unqualified “advisor” or alternate practitioner? The librarian may also help the user determine when it is wise to accept information from one source and not another, or how to look for more – and more comprehensive – data.

The reference archivist performs a somewhat different function, since the user of archives often arrives in the repository seeking institution-specific information. If a researcher arrives in the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies seeking information about hiking in the Rockies, he has narrowed his search parameters simply by virtue of being in the institution. But perhaps he does not realize how many records in the institution relate to “hiking”, including those of people who hiked regularly but whose “claim to fame” was something completely different, such as running a local business or participating in community politics. In the facility, the reference archivist can help educate to the user about how to find such materials, how to translate a subject-oriented request into a provenance-oriented search, and how to understand the origins, nature, and authenticity of the records found. This kind of reference function cannot easily be put online, as it involves an interactive relationship.

The third component of reference service is the “invisible” function, which Wilson refers to as the service of the “information therapist.” In this instance the reference librarian helps define the user’s precise needs and steer the user in the right direction. A visitor to a library may ask if there are books on financial issues, when really he or she wants to determine the best way to negotiate a mortgage. The librarian needs to communicate with the user to reach beyond the first question to the “real” question.⁷⁴

In the archives, the user may come in asking for records of hiking when in fact he wants to know about a particular trail that his grandmother hiked. He may have photographs of the trail he would like to identify, or perhaps donate to the institution. In the archives, a relationship would evolve through the reference interview, which may be an informal conversation, and which may ultimately take place over more than one visit. Is it possible to structure online reference tools to allow for that interactivity in the search process? Or is it the nature of an online environment that it is difficult, if not impossible, to replicate the process of dialogue and discussion?



Wilson believes that in libraries, this information therapy work will become the most important aspect of reference service in the future. Librarians, she suggests, can use automation to provide this service but they need to consider the importance of mediated access and intervention. Reference librarians need to be flexible, adaptable, and creative in the use of new technologies but also in their understanding of the nature of the user who comes to libraries, virtually or in person.

Archivists also need to be flexible in the approach to reference. Can CAIN replicate this third component of reference service? In the online environment, as presently constructed, the user will not have the opportunity for interaction, which is a large component of archival service. How can archivists ensure that actual and potential users do not stop at the first stage, the yes/no question, and instead move on to more in depth research that, one hopes, leads to success.

Wilson suggests that the emergence of online technologies has temporarily unhinged the reference librarian-user relationship, one that has been stable for a hundred years. Reference librarians need to adapt to the changing online environment. Archivists also need to rethink the reference relationship. They need to clarify, particularly within the context of online tools such as CAIN, the best and most appropriate methods for providing different types and levels of reference service. Librarians talk of “directional” and “factual” reference versus more complex reference. Is it also possible to distinguish “easy” and “complex” archival reference questions and so develop online tools that divide them and so channel resources and efforts more efficiently?

A number of other sociopolitical issues arise when one considers working in an online environment. Consider the following:

- Who owns the Internet, including access privileges and content, and how might changes in ownership affect people’s right to access information and records?
- How accurate and reliable is the Internet, and how will users know whether to trust databases such as CAIN?
- Who has the right to control access to space on an online network? Will public sector tools such as CAIN always remain freely available or will costs someday be levied on some or all parts of such Internet-based tools?
- How can the rights of the creators of information – including the creators of archival materials – be protected in an online environment?
- How will the “information poor” access information from tools such as CAIN? Will manual systems be phased out over time, requiring the public to be computer literate and have access to information technologies in order to use the tools?
- Is a tool such as CAIN understandable and usable outside of the Canadian environment or does it need to be recontextualized for an international audience?

CAIN and the Nature of Users

A more fundamental question arises. Who precisely is CAIN intended to serve? Who is the user of archives? There have been long debates in the archival literature about who exactly is the primary “audience” for archival services: the general public, the genealogist, the academic historian, the government agency, the creator of the records, the records themselves?



CAIN developers have encouraged the archival community to “engage its users in an open dialogue regarding the nature of information to be included on the network to ensure that CAIN is a useful and productive research tool.” They also suggest that archival institutions should undertake user studies “to ensure that the content of the network remains relevant.”⁷⁵

The CAIN site now includes an optional user survey that gathers information about the types of users of the system and whether or not they found the information they wanted. In March 2003, a statistical report was compiled of survey results on CAIN to date. Out of 92 survey forms completed (16 percent in French and 84 percent in English), the following information was obtained. The two largest groups using the CAIN website were genealogists (21 percent) and retirees (19 percent). (Since more than one box can be ticked, there is no doubt overlap here.) The next largest group was archivists, at 16 percent.⁷⁶

From this data, it is clear that a great majority of users of the CAIN database appear to be genealogists and amateur researchers (in the true sense of the word “amateur” as a person who engages in an activity as a pastime or out of personal interest rather than as a profession). The archival community should consider the nature of these users, and their needs and wants, in relation to the services CAIN provides.⁷⁷

In the library world, users often seek answers to specific questions. They want to find a book or a video tape or a newspaper. But users of libraries also seek the experience of the library, not just the information it contains. They are often comfortable with the library environment; schools start bringing children to libraries when they are very young, and by the time they are adolescents they see the library as a comfortable and welcoming place, or at least as a place where they can do their homework and find answers to their questions. Adults may go to enjoy a quiet hour with a book, or to attend a lecture or other public program.

Why do people go to archives? For information? For an experience? Can some or all of their needs be served in an online environment? The developers of CAIN have assumed that users of archives want information about archival holdings, which is why there is an emphasis on fonds-level descriptions and increasingly on digital facsimiles. Indeed, a total of 81 percent identified the inclusion of more descriptions as a priority for development of the site. But one could ask if they understand what they mean by “descriptions”; surely if one is asked if they want more information, they will naturally answer yes.

What else do users want from an archival institution – or an archival network? Can they get what they want through CAIN? What kinds of descriptions do they want? If a high percentage of users are genealogist and retirees, are they researching their family histories? If so, perhaps the information they want includes lists of names, birth and death records, and ship’s registers, not descriptions of fonds or photographs of historical buildings. On a purely statistical level, one could suggest that CAIN is not serving its largest stakeholder community. Archivists have long argued that quantity is not a measure of success – one cannot equate visits to an archives with visits to a sports facility – but the public, and government funding agencies, may look at the issue differently.

On the other hand, one could also ask if archives should concentrate on giving people what they “want” or focus on what they “need”. For instance, libraries bring children in to story time and



visits, not because the children ask for it but because the society has decided that such activities increase children's level of literacy and expose them to a valuable community resource. Archives could choose to develop services that expose the public—including children – to the value found within documentary materials, increasing their level of “archival literacy”. The benefits of such activities may not be reaped for generations, but if archives have a wider social purpose than just sources of information and evidence, perhaps they need to reshape at their services accordingly.⁷⁸

Another, more complex question, relates to the type of person who uses a tool such as CAIN, or who goes into an archival repository. In a very provocative article about information processes and culture, Katarina Steinwachs examines different ways in which people in different societies use information systems. She describes “high-context cultures” as environments where the individual has to pay more attention to the milieu and where non-verbal behavior affects communication. She also discusses “low-context cultures”, where communication is more direct and there is little scope for interpretation. Africa and Japan, she argues, are high-context cultures: physical gestures and external cues are an integral part of communication. The United Kingdom or Canada, on the other hand, are low-context cultures, where people take messages at face value more easily and rely less often on non-verbal cues.

Steinwachs suggests that institutions such as libraries and archives may be presenting information and providing references services in a way familiar to one culture in society, such as citizens of North American or European origin, whose citizens may be comfortable with independent research. Other citizens, however, such as those with Asian or African backgrounds, may not use the archives so readily. Their reluctance may not be because the records in the facility are not relevant to them. Rather, their reluctance may be because the way in which information is accessed and used in that institution run counter to the methods of communication and learning they are familiar with in their own cultures.

CAIN developers have recognized the need for inclusion and sensitivity to diversity. But perhaps work needs to be done to address more clearly the variety of citizens' cultural backgrounds in the development of user systems and the provision of reference services. Archival researchers should examine the nature and process of reference – in person and online – in more depth. Surveys of who uses archives, when, how, and why could then be linked to the demographics of the community and the holdings of the institution. Ultimately, archives need to determine

1. which sectors of the society are or are not using the institution's services,
2. the methods of service that best or least help the population, and
3. any gaps in or duplication of holdings that might be corrected to seek a more representative documentation of the society.⁷⁹

Only then can they see if their tools, including CAIN, are in fact serving society in the broadest sense possible.

Archivists also need to look more closely at the concept of reference as a distinct archival service. Librarians provide access to materials both within and outside their institutions; archivists tend to provide access to materials within their institutions only. And librarians consider reference to be a distinct and formal component of librarianship, one worthy of



academic and applied research and study. Archivists tend not to recognize reference services as distinct, except in very large institutions. Few articles are written on the topic, and little research has been done into the nature and scope of archival reference work.

CAIN AND THE SOCIAL PURPOSE OF ARCHIVES

Related to the type of user, and the nature of archival use, is the wider question of the purpose of an archives for its society. Is an archives a trusted source, a memory house, an organizational information centre, a treasure room, or a meeting place? Is it all of these? Perhaps the answer depends on the types of records being managed: organizational versus personal; public versus private.

Archival educator Eric Ketelaar has examined the impetus for “archivalisation.” He suggests that records have to be created and kept – and valued – by their creators before they can be acquired and preserved by an archival institution and used by the larger society. Archivists need to acknowledge the disconnect between the reality of records in the hands of their creators and those same records in an archival institution. The concept of the fonds tries, in part, to replicate the first reality, by focusing on the archival vision of provenance and original order. In doing so, perhaps it negates the validity of the second reality: the path records take from creator to archives.⁸⁰

In this context, not only is the donor, and his or her donation, important to the archival institution; the archival institution is also vitally important to the donor. Some people want to see their records in an archives because it means a little piece of them survives after they are gone. They want to see “their” item on display, or in a filing system. As Sue McKemmish has suggested, people’s records become “evidence of me.” Archivists need to understand the reasons for preserving records, so that they may manage the records in their institutions in the most appropriate way possible.⁸¹ Corporate requirements for accountability are vastly different from a personal need for identity and memory.

By applying global standards such as those that drive the CAIN system, it is possible that the records that are the “evidence of me” do not all become part of the online network. People cannot find their piece of history if that piece does not conform to archival standards. If government records are left out because they are not yet “historical,” and if personal materials are left out because they are not part of a “fonds”, then the gaps in system will grow wider and wider. Is this serving the diverse range of creators and users in the best way possible?

This issue reaches beyond description and reaches back to Steinwachs’ comments on information and culture. Archivists strive to preserve the record of all facets of their society. If they have an overabundance of records from one group or sector and a dearth of archives from another, should they redress the balance? How? Urging an acceptance of “social inclusion” in archival management, Ian Johnston has argued that the records of black and Asian Britons are under-represented in archival repositories in the United Kingdom. Because “their” records are not in archives, members of these ethnic groups are not regular visitors to archival repositories. As a result, they may not appreciate the role of archives in their lives. So they don’t donate records. It is a vicious circle, broken only when someone identifies the void and takes action. Do the



records held by institutions across the country reflect the population and entice researchers into the virtual environment? Is the purpose of CAIN to reflect the reality of existing holdings or to highlight specific holdings, or gaps in holdings, in order to generate interest, acquisitions, and broader appeal?⁸²

If online descriptions focus on the fonds without acknowledging the personal and cultural influences on the creation of records, archivists may by default exclude the records of those people who do not create or use records in such a way that the materials come to archival repositories as fonds. For example, native groups rely on oral traditions as much as written records. Are these archives? Are they fonds? How do Asian Britons create records, and does that affect the acquisition of them as archives? How do Asian Canadians, or senior citizens, or women or children or the disabled create and use records? How do archivists relate those record-keeping processes to the identification, acquisition, and management of the fonds?

CAIN AND THE ARCHIVES AS A PLACE

The question of the role of archives in society leads to the issue of the archives as a physical place. Some have suggested that CAIN might evolve into a “virtual archives” and so provide information to users without requiring them to step across the threshold of an archival institution. Indeed, CAIN includes specific links to virtual exhibits across the country, and it is intended that the tool could become the gateway to a virtual research environment: from fonds-level description to more detailed finding aid and from there to transcriptions, scanned images, or facsimiles of records. Should it be a goal of CAIN to create a virtual archives? What is gained in the process, and what is lost? Given the current political pressure to place Canadian content on the Internet, archivists need to consider these issues in more depth than ever before.

Clifford Lynch has raised important questions about the purpose of digitization. Digitization can be a means of reproducing in electronic form raw content, accessible through fairly simple access tools. The most common example may be thumbnails of photographs linked to *RAD*-compliant descriptions. Description and image are shown together, and the user can decide if he or she finds the image suitable for her needs.

But as Lynch argues, the public – and particularly the funders of digitization projects, such as Canadian governments – seem to be much more interested in the creation of interpreted collections, “curated” virtual exhibits, or amalgamations of like materials, in order to offer “added value” to the raw content. As Lynch says,

we need to study the lines of demarcation between raw cultural heritage materials, if you will, and interpretation or teaching, or presentations of these materials. This is a boundary line that I don’t think we really have a very clear understanding of. It gets to the historic mission differences among museums, libraries and archives, and the growing confusion about those distinctions in the digital world; it involves the historical and perhaps changing roles of scholars, teachers, curators, and librarians. It invites questions about which audiences or user communities we are teaching to use uninterpreted databases of raw cultural heritage materials, and the methods we are teaching them to use in exploiting these resources.⁸³



Archivists have traditionally argued that they are “interpretation neutral,” as Lynch says. But interpretation no doubt enters into the process when some archival materials are included in virtual exhibits and others are not. Indeed, the very task of selecting some for digitization instead of others is a value judgment, one with tremendous implications for the representation of archives and history in society. Indeed, as suggested earlier, the very decision to include some descriptions in a database and not to include others is a value judgment that affects the public’s understanding of the holdings of an institution and, ultimately, their sense of the nature and scope of the documentary evidence about their society.

The very nature of CAIN as a virtual tool means that it is an interpretation of reality. The question is whether the archival community should embrace that interpretive role and expand it, or hold fast to the vision that they offer a resource, not an experience, and that it is up to other agencies and individuals to layer onto the raw materials the interpretations and nuances that expand insights and challenge assumptions. After all, as Lynch argues, interpretations are relevant for the moment but do not have as long a “shelf life” as the raw materials. As Lynch argues,

if you look at the processes of scholarship they include a continual reinterpretation of established source material (as well as the continued appraisal of new source materials). Source material persists and generation after generation of scholars and students engage it, yet we typically rewrite textbooks every generation or so at least.⁸⁴

There is no question that CAIN can offer a service by providing electronic access to the virtual exhibits being created around the country. But whether or not CAIN should make this a priority, or should contribute to the creation of such exhibits, is an issue worth debating. Should CAIN even be digitizing images and making them available online? Clearly this is a political priority, but is it – and should it be – a professional priority? Or do archives, like other agencies reliant on public funds, have to go “where the money is”? If CAIN is funding the digitization of photographs, decisions about what to digitize should be made according to some established nationally relevant criteria, but how should such criteria be determined? And is the push to digitization moving CAIN into the realm of becoming, in effect, a digital archives?

CAIN and the Digital Archives

Archivists have not yet grappled with the concept of a digital archives. It is not yet clear if a digital archives is, or should be, simply a virtual replication of the physical reality of the institution or whether it is, or should be, a “value-added” interpretive resource or other tool. That is, is everything in the building in the database, or has someone selected and included only certain materials? Are descriptions attached and context added? Are the criteria for selection included? What happens when new records are acquired, processed, and incorporated? Will they be “flagged” as new so a user is aware that there may be something additional to consider? Is there an “announcements” component advising of changes and updates?

In 2003, it appears close to impossible to have an entirely digital archives, but someday perhaps all “born digital” records will be online at the time of creation and such an idea of a Star Trek-style archival resource will not be so far fetched. If one sees such a future, then the digital



archives can become a tool for communication and information sharing. As Lynch suggests in his analysis of digital libraries, the computerized environment can allow users to “share” information and ideas. For example, Lynch notes that just as online sales tools such as Amazon.com can track users’ search patterns to recommend additional items that may be of interest, a digital archives environment could, ultimately, track users’ searches and offer “intelligent” feedback about alternative terms to use or institutions or collections to consider. The digital archives could even put users in touch with each other, to create an electronic forum whereby people of like interest could share ideas.⁸⁵

Such an idea may be stimulating and exciting to some; it may be horrifying to others. The idea that someone might be able to find out about an individual’s research into, for example, residential school treatment, adoption and birth information, or medical data, could be seen as a gross invasion of privacy. As Lynch notes,

we’re confronting a new set of questions about what are we comfortable having public. There’s public and there’s really public. There’s a difference between things that are public for inspection if you go down to the courthouse and do a lot of digging around, as opposed to digital documents that pop up on Google when you’re killing time plugging people’s names into the search box.⁸⁶

Whether or not a tool such as CAIN should open up such a world is a question not to dismiss.

A broader question also emerges. As Heather MacNeil notes, writer and philosopher Walter Benjamin – discussing the world of art – argued that reproductions lacked the “aura” of originals because they were not fixed in a specific time and space. Uniqueness and permanence were being replaced by transitoriness and reproducibility. Are virtual images in fact as “valuable” as originals? What is the effect on the public of seeing their history, as depicted in archival materials, through a computer screen?⁸⁷ Do they value their past if they cannot touch it, or, more importantly perhaps, if they cannot stand close to it and know it is too valuable to be touched? And what will happen when, some day, we do live in a Star Trek world and all our information – all our “evidence of me” – is digital? Perhaps we will lose our sense of touch.⁸⁸

How can archivists relate tools such as CAIN to the physical experience of visiting an archives? As MacNeil suggests, the increasing emphasis on digitization is evidence of a great urge to expand the quantity of information available for the public. But the costs associated with such digitization efforts are enormous and, worse, there is great danger that the effort to “democratize” access ends up degrading the meaning of archives and archival institutions. As she writes,

The incorporation of virtual archives into contemporary documentary culture does not obviate or lessen the significance of and need for real archives, i.e., archives as public, communal spaces for research and reflection. Though it is honoured in the breach than the observance, archival institutions serve an essential symbolic function as monumental sites of cultural remembrance (with all the attendant ambiguities of meaning that such function implies) and as visible expressions of a culture’s depth and continuity.”⁸⁹



As MacNeil argues, there is a moral value to that function that archivists must strive to support. The developers of CAIN need to consider the role of that tool and then decide whether it exists to support, enhance, or replace the users' physical experience of archives.

CAIN AND THE REALITY OF POLITICS

Ultimately, regardless of the theoretical or conceptual priorities of the archival community, tools such as CAIN will be developed in light of political and economic realities. Decisions about the future of CAIN will be ultimately be made by politicians, as long as the system remains part of the public sector. Thus the future of CAIN will perhaps rest not on theory but on reality. And the political reality in Canada in 2003 is one of budget cuts to cultural and heritage programs, an increased focus on public-private partnerships, and the search for creative solutions to financial challenges.

In September 2002, the federal funding for the CAIN program was cut by 26 per cent, and, as noted earlier, 60 percent of the funds in the 2003-2004 fiscal year are to be allocated to digitization projects. According to the Chair of the CCA in 2003, Mr. Fred Farrell, instability of funding for CAIN is at the heart of current problems with administration of the program. The CCA has been seeking stable funding for its description initiatives for years but since it is not a federal agency, it is, as Farrell notes, "a square peg in a round hole" and the council has found it difficult to demonstrate its relevance to the federal government.⁹⁰

Presently, he said, digitization initiatives and "Canadian content" are a major focus of federal information and culture initiatives, and the CCA has been pressed to make major changes in its activities – away from description and toward digitization and virtual exhibits – in order to retain meaningful financial support. The council is seeking a formal and secure stream of public funds and has not been able to develop a private funding plan. He suggested there is at present great uncertainty about the future of the program and that, while the archival community has argued for the value of focusing on the production of electronically accessible fonds-level descriptions, funders are more attracted to digitization and virtual representations of records and information. As a result, CAIN has had to adapt to the political and financial realities within which the archival community operates.⁹¹

The situation in one Canadian community offers a practical example of the conundrum faced. In a municipality of about 50,000 people, the community archives has established a project to digitize historical photographs, using grant funds which help support the archivist's slim salary. The images are prepared, described according to *RAD*, and added to the database; as of 2002, approximately 500 images had been processed. Down the street, the community library is also digitizing its collection of historical photographs, using student assistants, and is describing these images according to MARC requirements. The two databases are both accessible through the municipality's website but they are not related to each other in any way.

Meanwhile, the head of the information technology division for the municipality is contemplating a purge of large data files in the network server. Among the files to be destroyed are over 40,000 digital images, taken by municipal employees and stored on the network for business purposes; images include pictures of buildings under construction, street works and paving projects, traffic accidents and fire scenes, and municipal meetings, social events,



fundraisers, and so on. The IT head says that in the absence of clear guidance from the archives about which images should be kept and which should be destroyed, he must protect valuable space on his server and remove anything that does not seem necessary. Because the archivist's position is dependent on grant funds, the archivist can only focus on grant-funded projects, such as the digitization of historical photographs. The archivist has no authority to assist with records scheduling, appraisal, or classification, even though he is a municipal employee with the expertise and ability.

This institution has become so reliant on grant funds that its own sponsor agency has not set adequate resources aside to support the management of its own records. While the archives has tried to "sell" itself as part of corporate administration, the reality is that grant funds are for community work, the public is interested in the community archives, not the government records, and the municipality has chosen to sustain the community activities with federal and provincial funds, rather than commit its own money to administrative work. One can question the logic of emphasizing detailed archival descriptions and scanning of historical photographs over the management of the organization's own electronic records. But one can also wonder if the reliance on grant funds is truly helping archival institutions protect all their community's archives, or if grants are giving organizations and local governments an easy way out of accepting responsibility for their own administrative duties.

Public Funding for CAIN

In Canada, total archives, *Rules for Archival Description*, the archival system, and the fledgling archival network have always depended on public funding. And grant-funded efforts are, by definition, project oriented. Project-based management, while it can result in significant short-term achievements, does not lay the groundwork for long-term sustainability. The reduction in funds to the CAIN network is a clear sign that the system is in some jeopardy. It is possible that the way in which the CAIN system was established means it may not be sustainable in the long term. The *Union List of Manuscripts* was ultimately abandoned, for a variety of reasons, and now remains a relic of the past; will CAIN go the same way?

For example, consider the process for the creation of *RAD*-compliant descriptions. When the program first began, funds were used to send project staff to visit archivists, to help institutions prepare descriptions for the database, and to raise awareness of *RAD* and the concept of the fonds. As this initial work was completed in each jurisdiction, funds were often shifted to new priorities, on the assumption that archives would have achieved a new level of management and would maintain their descriptive practices over time. Have they? Have institutions formalized this work as part of their core responsibilities? It is like that larger institutions have, but it is possible that smaller institutions have not, since they relied on the grant funds simply to keep them functioning.

In one province, for example, when funds came available to create *RAD*-compliant descriptions in the 1990s, there was an increase in the number of institutions belonging to the provincial council dispersing the monies. Once the initial descriptive work was finished, some institutions let their membership in CCA lapse. No need for more grants, no need to belong. Does the archival council have an obligation to maintain links to these institutions or require them to



update their descriptive records when they receive new acquisitions? Or should the descriptive records from these institutions be removed, so as not to set up blind leads for users? Surely the records still exist, and the institution still operates, even if the information is not visible on an online tool. If institutions do not maintain their descriptive systems, the network will suffer. On the other hand, centralized control of the system could violate the democratic idea that regions or institutions can choose to participate in networked systems, or not, as they wish.⁹² If CAIN is a comprehensive and trusted authority, this matters. If it is a gateway to an ever-changing pool of information, perhaps such control is not an issue.

In another example, one institution's fonds-level descriptions were prepared with the help of advisors from the provincial council, but for various reasons the archives themselves were not actually ever processed. Today, the records remain unprocessed, awaiting conservation treatment at some undetermined point in the future. The archivist in charge is scrambling to find whatever grants are available, just to keep the institution operating. He does not know how he will find the resources to bring these materials under even minimal control in the near future. Users of the database see a neat and tidy fonds-level description, but users in the archives see the reality: an unprocessed pile of boxes on the floor. In this case, the picture of coordination and control presented by the electronic fonds-level description is not matched by the reality of the storage vault.⁹³

The Potential for Collaboration

If one accepts the premise that its goal is public outreach and the description of historical records, and not institutional systems management and care of current records, then perhaps one option for the success of CAIN is to work collaboratively with other like-minded agencies, such as libraries or museums. There are signs of a coming trend towards cooperative endeavors and partnerships. Witness, for example, the merger of the National Archives and National Library of Canada or the establishment in British Columbia of a Cultural Precinct incorporating the provincial museum, provincial archives, and other cultural facilities.⁹⁴ Inevitable in such mergers will be the need to blend information and outreach systems. Should there be a holistic approach to managing knowledge about a society's heritage, history, and past? How would such an approach manifest itself in an electronic environment?

The National Library of Canada manages AMICUS, an online search tool. AMICUS allows users to search over 25 million records from 1,300 Canadian libraries, access all the National Library's holdings, and save search results in order to create bibliographies on chosen topics. The managers of AMICUS follow established library cataloguing rules for the inclusion of information in the database.⁹⁵

The museums community has also established an online search tool, the Canadian Heritage Information Network. CHIN provides access to extensive information about artifacts in museums across the country. The CHIN system also includes reference resources, guides to museums management, advice on digitization and web site development, and other tools. As well, the Virtual Museum of Canada also features visual displays much like CAIN, but in a more coordinated fashion. What kind of duplication takes place between these systems? Would it be better to relate them more closely, so that they are not competing or overlapping unnecessarily?⁹⁶



What about sites such as Images Canada, which provide a central search access to thousands of images held by cultural institutions across Canada, such as the Glenbow Library and Archives, the National Library of Canada, and the Canadian Aviation Museum. How many images are duplicated throughout these sites, and what gaps are there in the kinds of images being disseminated? Digitization is clearly a popular activity at the moment, but the archival community will want to consider carefully the nature and extent of its involvement, and the potential for constructive partnerships, in order to use precious resources wisely.⁹⁷

In the United States, projects such as the Museums and the Online Archive of California (MOAC) aim to provide access to materials such as manuscripts, photographs, and works of art held in libraries, museums, archives, and other institutions across California. In this instance, Encoded Archival Description or EAD is the core standard, but as Richard Rinehart notes, the greater challenge is in defining the concept of a collection in the museums and archives environments. As he suggests,

Perhaps one way to allow different communities (such as museums and archives) to reap the benefits of sharing a standard such as the EAD is to define different content standards for each community.⁹⁸

It might be worth investigating ways in which tools such as AMICUS, CHIN, CAIN, the Virtual Museum, and Images Canada, operate. Consideration may be given to coordination of efforts, either in content or presentation or scope, to provide a more holistic resource for the public. Recognizing that the materials being described are managed in different ways, it is nevertheless possible to rationalize such tools as thesauri, authorities, or access information. Equally, it should be possible to create links between the different resources and incorporate information that will lead users from one environment to the other, so that they are presented with the full potential of information for their investigations.

For example, the CHIN database includes descriptions of photographs, catalogued according to the following data elements: title, object, name, object type, artist/maker, support, accession number, institution. In archives, photographs would be described according to *RAD*; in libraries, they may be catalogued according to MARC. It is impossible to know what images and information are being duplicated. Consider the confusion for the users of these databases. It would behoove all cultural institutions to integrate their systems, or at least to explain their differences in approach – to provide the contextual information about their operations – so that users can at least understand why they may need to use different search methods to find information. Cooperation among the various “heritage” and “content” providers would no doubt make life easier for the public, but such collaboration would require significant compromise in terms of methodology, purpose, and – perhaps – status and authority.

Further, what is or should be the relationship between public sector initiatives, which operate on a shoestring, and commercial sites, which may make use of copyright-free materials to generate profits? Several commercial and non-commercial sites provide access to such materials as maps, photographs, and publications, sometimes with a fee attached. Will tools such as CAIN supplant private-sector initiatives? Or will they put at risk the intellectual property of institutions or people by making them readily available for potentially indiscriminate use? One wonders,



ultimately, if it is the business of managers of tools such as CAIN to be concerned about how people use materials accessed through such sites.

As Lynch notes, archives, libraries, and museums may best serve their primary function by focusing not on the creation and then maintenance of “interpretations” or “presentations” but rather on the preservation of the original records. He suggests that

for primary material, often the main ongoing cost is preserving the digital content and operating access systems; for interpretive materials we face all of those costs plus the costs of intellectually refreshing the interpretations periodically if they are going to remain relevant and responsive to their primary intended audiences.... it may be unrealistic to expect libraries, archives and museums to take on primary roles in sustaining interpretative material (though presumably they will continue to be heavily involved in ensuring its preservation).⁹⁹

As he suggests, there is a gap between what the public may expect from digitization and projects and what institutions can and should provide. For example, if public institutions pay for the preservation of materials through tax dollars, one must ask if it is also appropriate for the public to pay for the creation of interpretations and learning resources, or if those activities are more appropriately financed by public-private partnerships or by the private sector. In such a situation, the tools created may then not be “free” to the public.

There is also a question of archival priorities. Faced with a choice of digitizing records, creating a virtual exhibit, preserving materials, or establishing a records management program, the archivist must ask which is the core function. But he will also have to determine which is the affordable activity, and, more pressing, which is the activity most likely to receive money. Archivists are the baby in a Solomon-like struggle. On the one side, they are accommodating their outreach activities – such as CAIN – to serve political agendas, and on the other side, they are struggling to convince their sponsor agencies that they have a crucial role to play in administration and accountability. This contortion is perhaps the ultimate downfall of archival work. The role of archives is not clear enough in the minds of funders, governments, or perhaps even archivists themselves, to sustain operations through inevitable changes in government priorities and directions.

CAIN and the Image of the Archives

Ultimately, the political challenge archivists face in obtaining support for online initiatives is in explaining to funders the role and purpose of archival work. And since it can be argued the archival community itself is not clear on its role and purpose in society, there will inevitably be challenges in conveying a coherent vision to politicians and the public. Archivists complain – sometimes bitterly – about the lack of understanding of archival work, yet they are not vocal in promoting what they believe to be the core responsibilities of archives.

One of the problems is that most archival practitioners are government employees and so they are not always able to advocate for improved status or recognition of their professional qualifications. After all, as public employees, archivists are responsible first to the public, through their government. It often falls to the provincial, territorial, or national archival



associations to advocate on behalf of the profession. There have been recent successes in archival outreach programs but the associations suffer from shrinking resources, fewer and fewer active volunteers, and a lack of clarity about their purpose and scope.¹⁰⁰ The lack of a shared vision of archival work, ultimately, seems to be leaving the archival community behind as politicians move forward with the priorities of the moment, including digitization and the distribution of “content” to the Canadian people.

What, then, is the role of the archives? Many would argue that the archives is the keeper of historical records; others that the archives is the manager of current records; and still others that the archives is the organizer of business systems and information processes. Because the nature of communications is so varied, the nature of archival work will always change. As long as the core responsibility of the archives is to preserve and make available the documentary memory of a society, then the archives will have to shape its functions and priorities to accommodate the changing nature of that memory. What was once documented in stories and stone is now captured in film and photographs, in digital cameras and computer disks.

To remain viable, and therefore to ensure the archival record is protected, archives need to accommodate to changing realities. They need to clarify their vision and then promote their role in society actively and widely. CAIN can be seen as a means of adapting information about existing archival records to the present reality of online communications in order to make archival information available. But archival institutions will want to be cautious and keep their focus on core responsibilities. Just because the means are available to digitize all records does not mean that they should all be digitized. And just because other information and cultural agencies have developed innovative online tools does not mean those tools are equally relevant in the archival environment.

Much as the archival community would like to believe that sponsor agencies need their archival records on a regular basis, the truth is more likely that those agencies rarely use historical materials for current business purposes. If archivists have argued for ten years that their sponsors need archives, and after ten years the sponsors have not used those records, has the archivist lost the battle? Perhaps the archivist can demonstrate increased public use – through tools such as CAIN – of the historical records of the agency, but that is not the platform on which he has sold an archival program, will his sponsors listen? And if his archival program does not involve adding information to CAIN, will the funders support him?

Archival work will always be Janus-faced. Electronic records require significant intervention for their protection, but paper-based records will always be part of society, just as stone tablets and papyrus and parchment are still part of the archival sphere. As suggested earlier, archives perhaps need to consider not an “either-or” approach but to create a vision of integrated systems, offering a continuum of care but acknowledging the change in the purpose and value of records over time.



CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF CAIN?

An essay such as this offers no easy solutions. There are more question marks in this piece than exclamation points! To guide debate on key topics, it might be useful to recap some of the issues raised throughout this piece.

- Is CAIN intended to be a comprehensive data source or an illustrative example of resources available?
- Should CAIN be expanded to serve as an interactive acquisitions or communications tool or remain a dedicated information source?
- Can CAIN be standardized according to content, structure, or language? Should it be?
- Who should be in charge of controlling the input of data into CAIN, if controls should be in place?
- Is the fonds an appropriate concept for archival management or, more specifically, for the description of materials on CAIN?
- Should CAIN include information about current or semi-current records? If so, how should the descriptive elements be changed to reflect the different place of those records in a continuum of care?
- What is the purpose of archival description and how does CAIN fit with that purpose?
- What is the nature of archival use and how can CAIN best serve the needs and wants of archival users?
- What is the relationship between CAIN and the social purpose of archives, and the idea of an archival institution as a “place” in society?
- How do or should archivists respond to key stakeholders in order to ensure CAIN can remain relevant and valuable in Canada’s current political climate of changed priorities for heritage and cultural funding?

Ultimately, the archival community may need to reassess its scope and purpose and develop a vision that reaches beyond CAIN to address the future of archives in Canada. Questions that might be asked include the following:

- What are the basic social needs archivists exist to meet?
- How should archivists recognize and respond to these needs or problems?
- What is or should be the philosophy, purpose, and culture of archival work?
- What is the role of archives in society?

When archivists can answer these questions comfortably, they will, one hopes, have little difficulty shaping tools such as CAIN to serve society’s needs in the best manner possible.

Many would argue that the essence of archival work is, simply, to protect society’s documentary memory, no matter its age, location, medium, shape, or form. If this is true, then tools such as CAIN will naturally have to change and evolve as society’s methods of communication and



documentation change. Technology is not static, and the ways in which humans communicate with each other do not remain constant over time. It would be valuable, then, to create tools that remain flexible and adaptable, sustainable and useful, for all manner of user in society. A challenge indeed, but one the Canadian archival community will meet with creativity and innovation.¹⁰¹



- ¹ CAIN has been developed by the archival community across Canada with support from the National Archives of Canada and the Department of Canadian Heritage through the Canadian Culture Online Program. The objectives of the Canadian Council of Archives are to preserve Canada's national heritage by improving the administration, effectiveness, and efficiency of the archival system and to recommend on national priorities, policies, and programs for the development and operation of a Canadian archival system. See the CCA website for more information, at http://www.cain-rcia.ca/cain/e_home.html.
- ² This information was originally gathered from the CCA website in January 2001, at <http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/financial6.html>. As of March 2003 the CCA web site had been redeveloped, with several reference documents no longer available.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ CCA, "Raising CAIN: Exploring the Collective Memory of our Nation," report October 1998. This site was accessed electronically on 5 June 1999 at www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/cain_e.html but as of March 2003 the CCA web site had been redeveloped, with several reference documents no longer available.
- ⁵ CCA, *Blueprint for the Canadian Archival Information Network (CAIN): Report of the Implementation Planning Committee* (revised October 1998). This information was available in January 2001 at http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/cain_ip.html, p. 7. As noted earlier, as of March 2003 the CCA web site had been redeveloped, with several reference documents no longer available.
- ⁶ See the new and revised CAIN website, available electronically at http://www.cain-rcia.ca/cain/e_about.html.
- ⁷ Ibid. Information also provided by Fred Farrell, telephone interview, 4 February 2003.
- ⁸ W.I. Smith, "Introduction," *Archives: Mirror of Canada Past* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1972), pp. 9-10.
- ⁹ For more on the concept of total archives, see Laura Millar, "Discharging our Debt: The Evolution of the Total Archives Concept in English Canada," *Archivaria* 46 (Fall 1998): 103-46 and "The Spirit of Total Archives: Seeking a Sustainable Archival System," *Archivaria* 47 (Spring 1999): 46-65.
- ¹⁰ This growth is traced in detail in Laura Millar, *The End of "Total Archives"?: An Analysis of Changing Acquisition Practices in Canadian Archival Repositories* (Ph.D. dissertation, University College London, 1996).
- ¹¹ Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Consultative Group on Canadian Archives, *Canadian Archives* (Ottawa: SSHRCC, 1980).
- ¹² In January 2001, the CCA website included a range of background documents on the role and mandate of the organisation at http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/rai_cain.html. As of March 2003 the CCA web site had been redeveloped, with several reference documents no longer available.
- ¹³ The National Archivist of Canada participates in the CCA as an ex-officio member, along with representatives of the national Association of Canadian Archivists and French-language Association des archivistes du Québec. Observers include representatives from the National Library of Canada, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Canada's primary humanities-oriented funding agency), the Canadian Conservation Institute, and the Bureau of Canadian Archivists (established in 1976 to coordinate joint projects undertaken by the Association des archivistes du Québec and the Association of Canadian Archivists). Because one of the objectives of the Bureau of Canadian Archivists is to ensure the professional development of Canadian archivists, it has undertaken a range of joint French/English initiatives in training, development, and standards, including the development of *Rules for Archival Description*, discussed later. Because Canada is an officially bilingual country at the federal level, publications produced by agencies such as the BCA must be in both official languages: French and English. See the Bureau's web page, and particularly its historical section, for more information: http://bca.archives.ca/BCA_en.html. For



- information on the AAQ, go to <http://www.archivistes.qc.ca/>; for information on the ACA, go to <http://archivists.ca/index.htm>.
- 14 The CCA's *Directory of Archival Institutions*, gives a detailed listing of the different types of archives existing around the country, at least those that are council members. The site – at <http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/directory.html> – was under construction as of April 2003.
- 15 Bureau of Canadian Archivists, *Toward Descriptive Standards: Report and Recommendations of the Canadian Working Group on Archival Descriptive Standards* (Ottawa, 1986) and Jean E. Dryden and Kent M. Haworth, *Developing Descriptive Standards: A Call to Action* (Ottawa, 1987).
- 16 Wendy M. Duff and Marlene van Ballegoie, *RAD Revealed: A Basic Primer on the Rules for Archival Description* (Ottawa, Canadian Council on Archives, 2001). For more information, see <http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/public.html>.
- 17 AABC, *British Columbia Archival Union List – Background Report* (Revised May 1999), available at <http://aabc.bc.ca/aabc/bcaulbac.html>. By the time the CCA was established, many provinces had already established archival associations. Given the small population in the Canadian archival community some provinces decided to combine their associations and councils into one organization. So, for example, the Archives Association of British Columbia represents both individuals and institutions, and administers funds from the council for archival development projects. While individuals may participate in the council-related work of the association, only member institutions can receive CCA funds for projects such as arrangement or description. References in this paper to “councils” include professional associations that also have council responsibilities.
- 18 The database can be accessed at <http://aabc.bc.ca/aabc/bcaul.html>.
- 19 Christopher Hives and Blair Taylor, “Using Descriptive Standards as a Basis for Cooperation: The British Columbia Archival Union List,” *Archivaria* 35, Spring 1993: 71-72, 85. See also AABC, *British Columbia Archival Union List – Background Report*.
- 20 Ibid, 73.
- 21 Hives and Taylor, “Using Descriptive Standards as a Basis for Cooperation: The British Columbia Archival Union List,” 85. See also AABC, *British Columbia Archival Union List – Background Report*, and Bill Purver, “British Columbia Archival Network, parts 1 and 2,” *AABC Newsletter*, Vol. 10, no 1, Winter 2000 and Vol. 10, no. 2, Spring 2000. These last two articles are available electronically at http://aabc.bc.ca/aabc/newsletter/10_1/bcanret1.htm and at http://aabc.bc.ca/aabc/newsletter/10_2/british_columbia_archival_network.htm. Information was also provided through electronic communications with the AABC network coordinator in 2000, Bill Purver.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Information about Alberta's activities was provided in conversation with Susan Kooyman of the Glenbow Archives of Alberta and from Janet McMaster's report to the Archives Society of Alberta on the CAIN implementation study, 31 March 1999 (copy provided to the author in January 2001).
- 24 To see the CanWAN system, go to the CAIN site and follow the links to the network sites; go to http://www.cain-rcia.ca/cain/e_network.html.
- 25 Again, go to the CAIN site and follow the links to the network sites; go to http://www.cain-rcia.ca/cain/e_network.html. See also the data entry guidelines, available in January 2001 at <http://www.usask.ca/archives/sain-demo/dataentry.html>. Information also provided by Tim Hutchinson in Saskatchewan.
- 26 See the ARCHEION website by accessing through the CAIN site at http://www.cain-rcia.ca/cain/e_network.html.
- 27 See the CAIN network site at http://www.cain-rcia.ca/cain/e_network.html.
- 28 See the CAIN links; go to http://www.cain-rcia.ca/cain/e_network.html and access the other networks across the country.



- 29 CCA Information Highway Task Force, *Raising CAIN: Building Canada's Archival Information Network*, draft report, 15 November 1997. This report was originally accessed in November 2000 at http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/rai_cain.html. As of March 2003 the CCA web site had been redeveloped, with several reference documents no longer available. The topical list apparently draws at least in part on the Alberta example but it seems has not yet been examined in detail for its national applicability. This work is still to come; additional information on the present status of the topical list was not available to the author at the time of writing.
- 30 Bureau of Canadian Archivists, *Toward Descriptive Standards*, p. 59.
- 3131 Bureau of Canadian Archivists, *Rules for Archival Description* (Ottawa, 1993): D-3.
- 32 CCA, *Blueprint for the Canadian Archival Information Network*, p. 10.
- 33 See the funding criteria outlined on the CAIN website, accessed electronically on 21 March 2003 at <http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/financia6.html>.
- 34 It is recognized that the term "collection" is used extensively in descriptions, particularly when referring to deliberate collections of archival materials brought together by one creator for a specific purpose. As will be discussed below, the very concept of the "collection" and its interpretation for the purposes of description – sometimes as a "fonds" and sometimes not – is one of the complexities that makes consistency within CAIN so challenging.
- 35 Hives and Taylor, "Using Descriptive Standards as a Basis for Cooperation: The British Columbia Archival Union List," *Archivaria* 35, Spring 1993: 74.
- 36 The author has examined this topic in greater detail in "The Death of the Fonds and the Resurrection of Provenance: Archival Context in Space and Time," *Archivaria* 53 (Spring 2002): 1-15. For a discussion of the conceptual principle of the fonds, see also Terry Cook's argument in "The Concept of the Archival Fonds: Theory, Description, and Provenance in the Post-Custodial Era," in Terry Eastwood, ed., *The Archival Fonds: From Theory to Practice* (Ottawa: Bureau of Canadian Archivists, 1992), pp. 52-64.
- 37 MacNeil, "The Context is All: Describing a Fonds and its Parts in Accordance with the Rules for Archival Description," in Eastwood, *The Archival Fonds: From Theory to Practice*, p. 203.
- 38 Finding aids such as fonds-level descriptions are narratives, and so are created with inherent biases and orientations relating to their form and structure. There is scope for investigation of the concept of narrative theory and the study of reference materials as a genre. Heather MacNeil is pursuing studies in this area and the author is grateful to her for valuable ideas offered during discussions on this topic.
- 39 Much of the information presented in this section of the paper was researched in 2000-2001, when the author communicated by telephone or email with many of the people involved at that time in coordinating union list or network initiatives in their provinces and territories. The author very much appreciates their rapid and comprehensive answers to questions and their interest in the research underway. Below is a specific acknowledgement of the people who helped at that time: in British Columbia, Ann Carroll, Heather Gordon, and Bill Purver, from the Archives Association of British Columbia, and Gary Mitchell from the British Columbia Archives and Records Service; from Alberta, Michael Gourlie, Susan Kooyman, and Janet McMaster of the Archives Society of Alberta; from Saskatchewan, Tim Hutchinson, of the University of Saskatchewan Archives, discussing the Saskatchewan and Manitoba Information Networks (SAIN/MAIN); from Ontario, Loren Fantin from the Archives Association of Ontario about ARCHEION; from Nova Scotia, Meghan Hallett of the Council of Nova Scotia Archives about ArchWay; and from the Northwest Territories, Richard Valpy of the Northwest Territories Archives, about the NWT databases and union list. Contact was also made with Diane Chisholm from the Yukon Territorial Archives and, in Ottawa, the CAIN coordinator, Kristina Aston. Given the anecdotal nature of the information, and the fact that it was gathered in 2000 and 2001, the author has rendered anonymous any personal comments, opinions, or anecdotes offered in conversations, the purpose being not to critique individual examples but rather to study the larger issues.
- 40 Wendy Duff, "The Acceptance and Implementation of Rules for Archival Description by Canadian Archives: A Survey," *Archivaria* 47 (Spring 1999): 41.



- 41 Personal communication with Gary Mitchell, 5 January 2001.
- 42 As noted earlier, an original purpose of the British Columbia system was also to encourage acquisition planning. Standardized subject terms have been considered a valuable tool for such acquisition planning, as recognized by the developers in Alberta, but it does not seem that acquisition is a priority for the national archival community in 2003. See Hives and Taylor, “Using Descriptive Standards as a Basis for Cooperation: The British Columbia Archival Union List,” 85. See also AABC, *British Columbia Archival Union List – Background Report*, and Purver, “British Columbia Archival Network, parts 1 and 2.” Information was also provided through electronic communications with the AABC network coordinator, Bill Purver.
- 43 Canadian Council of Archives, Canadian Committee on Archival Description, Authority Sub-committee, “Canadian Archival Authority System,” Discussion Paper presented June 2001 (reference DP 2000-01). This paper is available electronically at <http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/archdescauthority.pdf>.
- 44 Interestingly, while the authors of the discussion paper noted specifically the existence of the Canadian Council of Archives and the Canadian Heritage Information Network, they did not suggest that either of these bodies be responsible for an archival authority. The CCA was seen as not having the skilled staff or information technology infrastructure to support a national authority initiative. While CHIN manages a national database for the Canadian museum community and supports the development of controlled vocabulary tools, including the *Union List of Artists* and the *Art and Architecture Thesaurus*, the CCA – the archival equivalent of CHIN – was not considered as an appropriate centre for the development of a national archival authority. Rather, the authors recommended that the national archival authority file be established and maintained by the National Archives of Canada, with input from the archival community. So far no further action appears to have been taken as a result of this report. Canadian Council of Archives, Canadian Committee on Archival Description, Authority Sub-committee, “Canadian Archival Authority System,” Discussion Paper, p. 7.
- 45 To see the pdf. version of the *British Columbia Thesaurus*, go to <http://aabc.bc.ca/aabc/publicat.html>.
- 46 The Colonial Office correspondence is identified as GR 1486: Great Britain, Colonial Office, microfilm (1858-1871) (CO 60/1 – 60/44).
- 47 See the summary of the Australian thesaurus, available electronically at http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/gov_online/agift/summary.html.
- 48 Heather MacNeil, Review, Albert Borgmann, *Holding on to Reality: The Nature of Information at the Turn of the Millenium*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999): 10. Unpublished review, forthcoming in *Archival Science*, 2003.
- 49 Consider the model established at Simon Fraser University, in British Columbia. The Canadian Publishers’ Records Database (CPRD) was created in the early 1990s as an online guide to archival records relating to English-language book publishing in Canada. As the initial research progressed, organizers realized that a great quantity of publishing records had not yet made their way into archives; to include in the database only those materials already in archival repositories was to exclude a vast portion of Canada’s publishing history. Ignoring records still in publishers’ offices left the records at risk of loss or neglect, further diminishing the resource base for information about publishing in Canada. The project organizers decided that the database would document not only archives found in archives and libraries but also records still in publishers’ offices. The CPRD database now serves not only as a finding aid but also as a networking tool. Researchers can find information on publishers’ archives; archivists can find out if other institutions have acquired complementary records; and publishers can identify archival institutions that might be interested in their records. More information on the CPRD database is at www.sfu.ca under the Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing.



- 50 Chris Hurley, "The Making and Keeping of Records: (1) What are Finding Aids For?" *Archives and Manuscripts*, 26 (1) 1998, available electronically at <http://rcrg.dstc.edu.au/publications/makingkeeping1.html>.
- 51 Chris Hurley, "The Making and the Keeping of Records : (2) The Tyranny of Listing " *Archives and Manuscripts* 28 (1) 2000, available electronically at <http://rcrg.dstc.edu.au/publications/makingkeeping2.html>.
- 52 Hurley, "The Making and Keeping of Records: (1) What are Finding Aids For?"
- 53 Terry Cook, "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift", *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997): 38-39.
- 54 See the findings of the Records Continuum Research Group, an Australian-based research group based at Monash University, Victoria, Australia. This group is studying the methods involved with controlling records at different points in their life and with the application of the continuum model of records care to information management and data archiving. See their website at <http://rcrg.dstc.edu.au/index.html>.
- 55 International Council on Archives, *International Standard for Archival Description (General)*, 2d ed., Ottawa, 2000, section I2, available electronically at http://www.ica.org/biblio/cds/isad_g_2e.pdf.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Adrian Cunningham, "Recent Developments in Standards for Archival Description and Metadata," presentation to the International Seminar on Archival Descriptive Standards, University of Toronto, March 2001, available electronically at <http://www.archivists.org.au/cds/cunningham.html>), p. 7.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 Electronic listserv message, from: Chris Hurley to aus-archivists@asap.unimelb.edu.au, sent Thursday, March 20, 2003 10:54 PM, Subject: RE: software for describing and controlling archives. Forwarded to the ACA listserv (ARCAN-L@majordomo.srv.ualberta.ca) by Terry Cook on Monday, March 24, 2003, 1:03 PM.
- 60 See, for example, Bob Krawczyk, "Cross Reference Heaven: The Abandonment of the Fonds as the Primary Level of Arrangement for Ontario Government Records," *Archivaria* 48 (Fall 1999): 131-53, for more on the approach in Ontario.
- 61 See the CAIN website at <http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/financial6.html>.
- 62 Barbara Reed, "Metadata: Core Record or Core Business?" *Archives and Manuscripts* 25, 2 (November 1997): 218-41, quoted in Cunningham, "Recent Developments in Standards for Archival Description," p. 8.
- 63 Barbara Reed, Keynote Address, RMAA Conference, e-Business Transactions: Providing Accountability through Effective Recordkeeping, March 2000, available electronically at http://www.recordkeeping.com.au/pub_RMAA_Canberra.html.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Hurley, "The Making and the Keeping of Records : (2) The Tyranny of Listing." In this section of his paper, Hurley refers directly to the UBC research conducted in the late 1990s. See the research data and discussion at <http://www.interpares.org/UBCProject/index.htm>.
- 66 Brian Speirs, Canadian Archival Information Network Update," *Council of Nova Scotia Archives Newsletter*, online updated June 2000 (ISSN 0829-7142), accessed electronically at <http://fox.nstn.ca/~cnsa/news/confiss2/confcain.html> in February 2001; site no longer accessible as of April 2003.
- 67 In some instances, such as at the Public Archives of Canada in Ottawa in the late 1970s, the media element of the total archives orientation became a source of conflict among professionals, as debates raged over the relative value of provenance versus pertinence and medium versus content. See, for example, Terry Cook,



“The Tyranny of the Medium: A Comment on ‘Total Archives’,” *Archivaria* 9 (Winter 1979-80): 141-49; A. Birrell, “The Tyranny of Tradition,” *Archivaria* 10 (Spring 1980): 248-52, and Terry Cook, “Media Myopia,” *Archivaria* 12 (Summer 1981): 146-57.

- 68 Sites such as “Substance Consulting” track such Internet statistics and provide regular updates. For more information, see their website at <http://www.gdsourcing.ca/substance/datac.htm>.
- 69 For a valuable analysis of this issue, see Christie Stephenson, “Recent Developments in Cultural Heritage Image Databases: Directions for User-centered Design,” *Library Trends* 48, 2 (Fall 1999): 410-37.
- 70 CCA, “Raising CAIN: Exploring the Collective Memory of our Nation,” report October 1998, accessed electronically on 5 June 1999 at www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/cain_e.html. As of March 2003 the CCA web site had been redeveloped, with several reference documents no longer available.
- 71 For an interesting analysis of user needs in the online environment, see Laverna M. Saunders, “The Human Element in the Virtual Library,” *Library Trends* 47, 4 (Spring 1999): 771-87.
- 72 See Myoung C. Wilson, “Evolution or Entropy? The Changing Reference Culture and the Future of Reference Librarians,” in R. David Lankes, John W. Collins III, and Abby S. Kasowitz, eds., *Digital Reference Service in the New Millennium: Planning, Management, and Evaluation* (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2000): 13-24.
- 73 In the United Kingdom, for example, one talks of “walking” – not “hiking” – when one is referring to a life-threatening climb up a 90 degree slope. A search for “hiking” records in the UK may indeed lead to a dead end, but how would a non-English researcher know such subtleties, without having gone “walking” himself?
- 74 See Wilson, “Evolution or Entropy?,” p. 20ff.
- 75 CCA Information Highway Task Force, *Raising CAIN: Building Canada’s Archival Information Network*, p. 13.
- 76 To see the CAIN user survey, go to http://www.cain-rcia.ca/cain/e_survey.html. The survey asks questions such as type of user (student, genealogist, archivist, historian), age group, type of information sought (photographs, maps, corporate information, government information), ease of use of the site, suggestions for improvement, and priorities for development. The survey results were emailed to selected individuals, including the author, by the CAIN office on 27 March 2003. It was not clear from the survey data or the emails when the survey was first mounted and so what time span the statistics covered. Email from Juanita Rossignol, A/CAIN Coordinator, to Laura Millar and others, 27 March 2003, titled “CAIN Survey Form.” Additional information included the fact that over 60 percent of users were over 46 years old, and half of all users found out about the website from another electronic search engine, site, or portal.
- 77 It is hoped that the CAIN planners gather and disseminate information such as this as widely as possible so that it may help archivists across the country assess their reference systems and priorities.
- 78 For a discussion of different types of “archival literacy,” see, for example, Elisabeth Kaplan and Jeffrey Mifflin, “Mind and Sight: Visual Literacy and the Archivist,” *Archival Issues: Journal of the Midwest Archives Conference*, 2, no. 2 (1997); republished in Randall C. Jimerson, ed., *American Archival Studies: Readings in Theory and Practice*, (Chicago: Scarecrow Press, 2000).
- 79 Katarina Steinwachs, “Information and Culture – the Impact of National Culture on Information Processes,” *Journal of Information Science* 25, 3 (1999): 193-204.
- 80 See Eric Ketelaar, “Archivalisation and Archiving,” *Archives & Manuscripts*, 26, 1, pp. 54-61.
- 81 Sue McKemmish, “Evidence of Me...” *Archives & Manuscripts*, 24, 1 (May 1996): 28-45.
- 82 See also Ian Johnston, *Whose History Is It Anyway?: The Need for UK Archives to Undertake Pro-Active Acquisition* (University College London: MA in Archives and Records Management, September 2000). The author is grateful to Ian Johnston for sharing his thesis and for offering valuable insights during the author’s research.



- 83 Clifford Lynch, "Digital Collections, Digital Libraries, and the Digitization of Cultural Heritage Information," *First Monday* 7 (5), available electronically at http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue7_5/index.html.
- 84 Ibid.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 Ibid.
- 87 MacNeil, Review, Albert Borgmann, *Holding on to Reality*: 8.
- 88 One cannot help but think of the world-wide outrage in April 2003 at the looting and destruction of artifacts in the National Museum in Iraq and the global acknowledgement of the value of "originals" as precious treasures, items which remain irreplaceable and priceless and which cannot be equated in any way with digital representations.
- 89 Ibid., pp. 12-13.
- 90 See the CAIN website at <http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/financial6.html>. Information also provided in telephone interview with Fred Farrell, 4 February 2003. Additional information about the financial situation with CAIN and the CCA was not available to the author and so could not be included in this paper.
- 91 Ibid.
- 92 As mentioned earlier, much of this information came from interviews by the author with provincial and territorial network coordinators and visits to archival facilities in British Columbia in 2000 and 2001.
- 93 Ibid.
- 94 For more on the merger of the national library and archives, see the press releases available electronically at <http://www.archives.ca/q11-099-e.html>. For more on the British Columbia Archives and Royal British Columbia Museum, see the announcement available electronically at <http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/general/bcarbcm.htm>.
- 95 See the National Library's web pages about AMICUS at <http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/amicus/index-e.html>.
- 96 See the CHIN database at <http://www.chin.gc.ca/English/index.html> for more information.
- 97 See Images Canada at www.imagescanada.ca, and the Virtual Museum of Canada at www.virtualmuseum.ca. The author is grateful to Heather Leduc for providing valuable information about Images Canada.
- 98 Richard Rinehart, "Museums and the Online Archive of California," *First Monday*, volume 7, number 5 (May 2002), available electronically at http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue7_5/rinehart/index.html.
- 99 Lynch, "Digital Collections, Digital Libraries, and the Digitization of Cultural Heritage Information."
- 100 See the announcements about the AABC's "Archives in your Attic" event in 2002, for example, at http://aabc.bc.ca/aabc/newsletter/13_1/archives_in_your_attic.htm. See also the websites of different associations, available through the archival networks page of CAIN, for information on provincial activities.
- 101 A last, provocative, question comes to mind. Will CAIN itself someday become a record, an archival acquisition? If so, how will it be preserved and made available? Such an "Alice through the Looking Glass" thought is daunting, to say the least.