

THE PERSONAL ARCHIVE

ON RETRIEVING A NATIONAL CULTURAL RESOURCE

by Alfred de Grazia

Retrieving The Personal Archive:

On Retrieving A ^{National} Cultural Resource

by Alfred de Grazia *

Watching friends pass, and seeing their personal archives ~~disintegrate~~ ^{dissolve} into oblivion, ~~is one of the least~~ ^{are unhappy} unpleasant concomitants of the creative professional life of scholars and artists. "Their work lives on," but does not. If as much effort were put into carrying a person's work into the future as is put into keeping him breathing a few days longer, the ~~national~~ American cultural heritage would be many times ^{the richer.} ~~more rich.~~ ^{Not that it is} ~~it is not rich~~ ^{such} as "either-or" propositions. It is ^{not} a matter of observing what happens when a ~~scholar~~ ^{not} ~~creative~~ member of the intelligentsia dies, and of ~~developing~~ ^{inventing} a new ~~low-cost~~ ^{low-cost} ~~technology to~~ ^{technology to} ~~reconstructing~~ ^{reconstructing} the typical scenario ^{ease the anxieties of death and survival, and simultaneously to benefit} of the scenario ^{are} well-known; I shall try to typify them. Professor Waldemar Benfait dies. He has taught at Wisdom University for twenty-five years and has been retired for seven years. He was ^{an} ~~the~~ ~~outstanding~~ authority in African labor movements but was also a man of parts, President of the Mycological Society of Charleston, ^{it happens} ~~no less.~~ ~~After~~ his executors and family settle down to enjoy his estate, following a ~~period~~ ^{period} of mourning

Research

*

Alfred Le Gracia is Professor of Social Theory at New York University. ~~In his articles, he draws upon his~~ ^{information} ~~experience in journal and book~~
~~storage and retrieval~~ ^{publishing} and as an editor and ~~an editor and~~ ^{heavily published author, is}
~~drawn on for his article,~~ ^{for this article,} which was inspired ~~recently~~ ^{by the}
~~recent demise~~ ^{in close order} ~~within a few~~ ^{the past year} ~~months~~ ^{of five friends} ~~with~~ ^{archives}
~~equal to or larger than~~ ^{equal to or larger than} ~~his~~ ^{large} ~~archives~~ ^{of the kind} ~~described~~ ^{as much} ~~as~~ ^{large}

and letterwriting to his many colleagues, students, and friends, they ~~are~~ view uncomfortable. The undisposed remnant -- seven file cabinets ~~and~~ of papers going ^{even beyond} back to his first appointment at Hackensack Community College.

His widow prompts the executor who prompts ~~his~~ daughter Lucille who prompts her husband to "Please do something about Waldemar's manuscripts and papers. His ~~entire~~ whole life is in those files." ~~She~~ Her husband ^{writes} Mrs. Benfait to call ^{his colleagues who call} the President of Wisdom University, who is full of sympathy and turns the matter over to ^{the} Dean "for action." "Nobody knows what is really in the files, cannot assess their value if they were to ^{them} enter, and, to tell the truth don't want to ^{do so.} ~~enter them.~~" It's not only that the good professors ~~was~~ ~~specialists~~ write "incomprehensible" but he didn't interest them; ~~he~~ he bored them when he was alive; it is a sad job as well; and handwriting is indecipherable. Besides, they know nothing of ~~the~~ ^{and retrieving} processing, ^{information}, of scholar ~~into~~ networks and outlets, of ~~books~~ publishing or distribution. ~~processing of the files~~

Everyone puts in time, energy, money. Nothing happens. The publisher, who had a contract ^{regarding} ~~with~~ one formless manuscript, thinks he had a

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Everyone puts in time, energy, money. Nothing happens. The publisher, who had a contract regarding one formless manuscript, thinks he had a marginal deal at best with the live author, and no deal with a dead one. The President and the new Dean are preoccupied: Professor Goodfellow just died of a heart attack, and, a month earlier, Dean Highrise bit the dust. They, too, had archives. "Can't we let the matter ride and meanwhile store the stuff with the library?" they say.

Not that Dr. Stores, the Librarian, is pleased. He cannot afford to do much with the material. The microform revolution has not stopped the onrush of bulky acquisitions. He will wedge the files into a cranny and list its availability to scholars. Someday a student will come to awaken the dormant archive.

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The ^{new} Dean ~~is not~~ ^{does more} ~~fairly~~ ~~put out~~ the advice: The widow ~~to~~ ~~send~~ the manuscript that ^{is} ~~is~~ almost ready to ^{various} ~~other~~ publishers, and he hurriedly calls The University Press. With luck, ~~the~~ ^{the} most likely ^{lookup} manuscript will win publication (if all are patronized) ^{and under} some form of ^{direct or} indirect subsidy, ~~a~~ ^a book will greet the public ^{in three years or more} ~~in~~ ^{several years later.}

Dr. Storey, the Librarian, is pleased. He ^{cannot afford} ~~cannot~~ afford to do much with the material. He will ^{wedge} ~~store~~ the files ^{in a} ~~in~~ ^{cranny} and list its ^{availability} ~~availability~~ to scholars. Someday ^a ~~student~~ ^{may} ~~come~~ ⁱⁿ to ~~consult~~ ^{consult} the dormant ~~archive~~.

Professor Benfait's literary estate has cost the family ^{conflict, guilt, and brought small gratification.} ~~time and money~~. It has done the same for the ~~University~~. ^{Something far} ~~far~~ ^{less than} the ^{public} ~~value~~ of his ^{testament} ~~estate~~ has been realized.

How typical is this scenario? ^{How large is the problem?} ~~I~~ ^{have} ~~estimated~~ ^{estimated} made some preliminary estimates. ~~A~~ ^{organized typically} A typical archive will contain a) books, ^{and} ~~and~~ ^{in some cases} ~~articles and clippings~~; b) ^{of lecture or on} ~~notes~~ ^{subjects and discoveries}, including ^a ~~journal~~ ^{interviews}, often containing ~~ideas~~ ^{ideas} that were ~~immediately~~

break new ground

~~part of~~, c) finished or partially finished articles and studies, d) ~~work in progress~~ that are

c1) ~~is~~ suited for ~~being~~ a small circle of specialists

c2) suited for academic publication, c3) can be

completed for commercial publication, ^{or} c4) ~~books and~~ ^{books and}

articles making the rounds of publishers ~~or~~ or in process

of publication. ~~We should mention, even~~

as follows, ~~but~~ ^{or} A purely speculative table can be supported ^{by} ~~literary~~ ^{literary} ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~archival~~ ^{archival}, ~~but~~ ^{but}

~~ignoring~~ ^{embracing} the important categories of creative art works

^{aesthetic and engineering} designs, and musical compositions, which, ^{pari passu} ~~pari passu~~

belong to the discussion. ^{Publicists and politicians} ~~Publicists and politicians~~

can also be fitted to the plan ^{potential} ~~potential~~

art objects
many ~~of~~
musical compositions
and designs ~~will~~
go forever unrecovered
~~or~~ ^{or} ~~are~~ ^{are} ~~lost~~ ^{lost}

^{Examine} ~~Examine~~ ^{them} ~~them~~ according to ^{their} ~~their~~ ^{preferred} ~~preferred~~ ^{potential} ~~potential~~

disposition, ~~we~~ we would like to see some ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~works~~ ^{works} ~~some~~ ^{some}

published commercially, ^{other} ~~other~~ ^{work printed} ~~work printed~~ ^{put out} ~~put out~~

~~a~~ ^{network} ~~network~~ of perhaps 200 scholars, some ^{for} ~~for~~

retention and ~~print~~ ^{reproduction} ~~reproduction~~ on demand, and

The balance ~~given~~ ^{divided in typical lots and} ~~divided in typical lots and~~ advertised as available ~~for~~ ^{for}

~~attention~~ ^{attention} to ~~the~~ ^{persons} ~~persons~~ working ~~on~~ ^{on} the topics.

Annual Heritage of Archives

Suitable Potential Media Outlet for Archive (in page equivalents)	Nature of Archive Average Personal Archive, number of pages		
	<u>Great Archive</u>	<u>Substantial Archive</u>	<u>Small Archive</u>
Published Before Demise (# pages)	3500	800	300 300
Suitable Outlet for Balance (pages)			
1) Commercial publication	1000	200	0
2) Academic publication	1500	500	150
3) Research publication	2000	800	500
4) Research depot repro.	2000	1000	500
5) Gifts to Workers	5000	2000	1000
Number cases per year (deceased leaving archives for processing)	20	200	10,000 10,000
Volume of Material for processing	230,000	900,000	21,500,000

Publication (as above) Gift	Supplementary (number of persons)			
	<u>Artists</u>	<u>Publicists, etc.</u>	<u>Designers</u>	<u>Composers</u>
	100	200	50	10

(Note: ~~Perhaps~~ ~~to~~ The archives of perhaps 400 artists, composers, designers, and publicists are not included.)

It may be a fair ~~to~~ guess that only one-hundredth of the cultural ~~resources~~ ^{heritage} ~~afforded~~ represented in the archives of ~~the~~ American intellectuals and artists is ~~to~~ ^{realized} under the existing system of ~~the~~ ^{assuming creative work is external} disposition of the value ~~lost~~

in a decade must reach into the hundreds of millions of dollars. "The wheel will be reinvented" countless times.

The situation invites ~~an~~ ^{embarrassing} comparison ~~of~~ ^{defended} ~~the~~ ^{value to be measured} ~~of~~ ^{fruit} ~~with~~ ^{with} ~~the~~ ^{of} ~~great~~ ^{of} expenditures that go into ~~retaining~~ ^{with} trivial business, ~~and~~ government, and institutional documents. That are ~~practically~~ ^{practically} useless. Thousands of acres of space, ~~hundreds of thousands~~ ^{many} millions of files, ~~and~~ ^{and} many billions of pages, ~~are~~ ^{are} managed by many thousands of employees. The ~~files are enough~~ ^{files are enough} to wind around the Earth's equator several times. It is ~~not~~ ^{not} one more big ~~are~~ ^{are} face of the same ~~society~~ ^{society} that spends on armament ~~enough~~ ^{enough} to feed the whole ~~world~~ ^{population of the world}.

~~But let us~~
Should one take comfort in scepticism: "Isn't ~~too~~ too much being published already?" This argument is easily countered by "Yes, but not the ~~best~~ ^{better} stuff," and then debate is engaged. Who is to say "better"? Isn't it more likely ^{Often} older scholars and artists are less pressed to ~~publish~~ ^{produce} more modest, and then finally diffident and discouraged. But the work is there, and precisely

in this case will a posthumous push be needed. Actually, ~~the~~ ~~situation~~ is described by and the ~~the~~ solution emerges, ~~the~~ posthumous evaluation and management ~~are~~ likely to be more straightforward and ^{efficient} (use-rational) than ~~can be~~ ^{those accomplished}. The case of a living person, ~~with~~ ^{whose} ambition, ~~and~~ fame and money play hot with ~~the~~ ^{while} intellectual ~~and~~ the ~~the~~ ^{so maladapted} maladaptation of the publishing industry, ~~to~~ scientific, scholarly, and artistic needs, ~~we~~ ^{we} have.

~~Let us~~ ^{Let us} ~~examine~~ ^{examine} one of ~~the~~ ^{the} poorest cases, ~~let us~~ ^{let us} ~~take~~ ^{take} an extreme instance, a ~~small~~ tiny

archive of dear Professor Chipz, arriving in a ~~small~~ ^{small} carton at our office, ^{after a call from his department chair} ~~with~~ ^{accompanied by} a grateful note from his widow. It falls to Ms Zamen to sort ~~it~~ ^{out} and prove to contain ^{appropriate} ~~valuable~~ letters from former students, course outlines in American history, ^{brief manuscript and complete bibliography and} and a set of notes on the invention of the tricycle. ^(and scanning report its inventory) The ~~archive~~ ^{archive} comes before ~~the~~ ^{the} committee on Thursday, between 11⁰⁰ and 12⁰⁰ hours. ~~The~~ ^{The} ~~committee~~ ^{committee} decides to ~~offer~~ ^{offer} list ^{as free offerings in relevant} ~~the~~ ^{bulletin} letters ^(Is someone studying teacher-student relations?) and the course outlines; ^{to} ~~asap~~ ^{asap} ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~edit~~ ^{edit} to ^{get an} ~~dress~~ ^{evaluation and possibly} up the manuscript for ~~offer~~ ^{offer} publication; finally, to ^{announce} ~~offer~~ ^{offer} the bibliography and notes ⁱⁿ ~~to~~ ^{listing} ~~some~~ ^{some} interested scholar. The total ⁱⁿ ~~cost~~ ^{cost} of ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~handling~~ ^{handling} Professor Chipz's literary estate comes to \$180 plus 20% overhead allowance

available ~~free~~ ^{free}

There is ^{direct} no dollar income, although ^{for a moment it seemed that} American Heritage magazine might buy the article for \$800 (~~the~~ half of which would have gone to ~~the estate of the~~ ^{widow had she not released} the archive ~~had not come~~ free of encumbrances). Five years later, the definitive work on the history of transportation ^{will carry some paragraphs, citing} Professor Chaps, on the ~~subject of~~ ^{social movement} ~~development~~ ^{into bicycles} and side-car motorcycles. A cute design ^{among} the notes features an early tri-cycle for ^{an} elderly person and ^{it was} its appearance in a Department of Energy pamphlet ^{the gift pack} is ^{is} knowledge ~~recycled~~.

At the other extreme there are great archives like those of ~~the~~ Picasso and ~~Velthor~~ ^{friend} ~~which~~ ^{which} are so well preserved and husbanded that ~~they will be~~ achieve full utilization. Yet even for great archives of distinguished men, ^{such expense} ~~experience~~ are exceptional. The Archive of Charles Merriam, ~~the~~ ^{leader of the new} political science at the University of Chicago, a founder of the Social Science Research Council, an advisor to Presidents, and a great human being, ^{has been} ~~has been~~ ^{quite} ~~centrally~~ neglected. His case ^{is} ~~is~~ ^{of the} ~~among~~ ^{most} ~~the~~ ^{among} ~~majority~~ ^{of} great archives ~~whose~~ ~~contributions~~ ~~has~~ ~~been~~ ~~neglected~~.

CS

^{hypothetical}

The ~~table~~ ~~gives~~ not only some idea of the bulk of the archival problem, but also ~~a~~ ~~idea~~ a conception of its range. The ^{net} cost of handling ^{an average} a great archive may be ~~only~~ no more than \$6000 plus overhead, that is, some thirty times the smallest archive. Hence ~~it is~~ ~~would be little reason~~ ^{not be necessary} to make ^{different} elaborate ~~and~~ ~~different~~ projections for the one as opposed to the other; they could be ~~processed~~ ^{through phases of} ~~screening~~ screening, judging, negotiating, announcing, reproducing, ^{and} shipping. There would appear to be little ~~reason~~ in the system to encourage the useless production of ~~literary~~ ^{journalistic} artistic, and ~~scientific~~ scientific product per se. On the other hand, the prospect, if such there were, that a person's creation would ^{ultimately} be communicated, would lead ^{to one} to ~~the~~ completion of more ~~of his~~ work, ~~at a~~ ~~smaller~~ senior scholars ~~the~~ ~~of~~ ~~such~~ ~~an~~ ~~extent~~, the work load of the archive's executor would ^{perhaps} ~~be~~ ~~lessen~~ ~~rather~~ ~~than~~ ~~increase~~.

The volume of work involved in all would be considerable. ~~\$2,000,000~~ Some ~~at~~ 900 commercial ^{contracts might} ~~be~~ ~~dealt~~ ~~or~~ ~~published~~ ^{and published} by the archive's foundation as "literary executor" (They would add about four per cent to all books published annually.) More would emerge from academic presses. Most of these costs would be borne by the publishers. The research publications, ^{appearing in informal format} with distributions in the low hundreds would cost less; but over 30,000 would be produced perhaps ~~\$2,000,000~~ ^{thirty million dollars} ~~plus~~ ~~would~~ ~~be~~ ~~required~~ ~~for~~ ~~duplication~~ ~~and~~ ~~hand~~.

and pay for themselves.

The microform handling of deposits from which reproductions could be obtained would cost nearly the same. ~~It is~~ ^{to thirty thousand} The gifts would require advertising, decisions and shipping, amounting to perhaps two million dollars. A total budget for ^{an} archival operation ~~is against the~~

for the whole country would then be ~~in the nature of~~ approaching \$150,000,000. ~~The~~ ^{But} ~~total~~ Cash outlays of ^{no more than ten millions} ~~half a million~~ would be required.

Receipts would come from publishing contracts, ~~from institutions of prior connections~~ ^{from states and individuals}; ~~from~~ cash sales; ~~and~~ from cash gifts ~~from~~ foundation and government grants. If the scheme

were concerned ⁱⁿ a form of ^{term} insurance, premiums ^{with age} would be paid ^{in by} individuals, who would hold ~~the same level~~ the same level

payable after death. In ~~this last case~~ possibly, with a insurance system, a person's ~~institutional affiliation~~ ^{other institutional affiliation} might divide the cost of his posthumous archival management. ~~A variation of~~

Alternatively one might designate the archival ~~manipulation~~ ^{from his estate} foundation to receive a payment or request a sum of money ~~to~~ to be applied to management his archive, the sum (as in the case of the premium) be adjusted to the estimated size and character of the archive. It is possible that ^{senior} ~~the~~ creative people are more modest, or perhaps more intelligent, than the young

and would ~~perhaps~~ prefer to spend their lives creatively, leaving ~~it to~~ professional managers to take ^{up} the burden of assuring their gifts to posterity. We ~~should~~ ^{ought} not underestimate the ~~effects of~~ ^{extent to which} the burden of managing one's own ~~literary~~ ^{creative} production ~~and~~ reduces morale and production. ~~Our late lamented~~ Benfait, Goodfellow, and Higginie might have been more ~~productive~~ creative in their later lives had they not ~~become~~ become disgusted with ~~setting themselves to~~ editors, publishers, ^{foundations} and public.

Let us summarize what might be ^{the balance sheet of operation offering} a ~~possible~~ ^{preliminary} solution to the ~~current~~ personal archive problem:

COSTS (in \$ millions)

Commercial publication (assumed here)	40,000,000
Academic presses " "	40,000,000
Research publication	30,000,000
Microform publication	30,000,000
Gifts management	3
Books All other management and overhead	7
Total	150

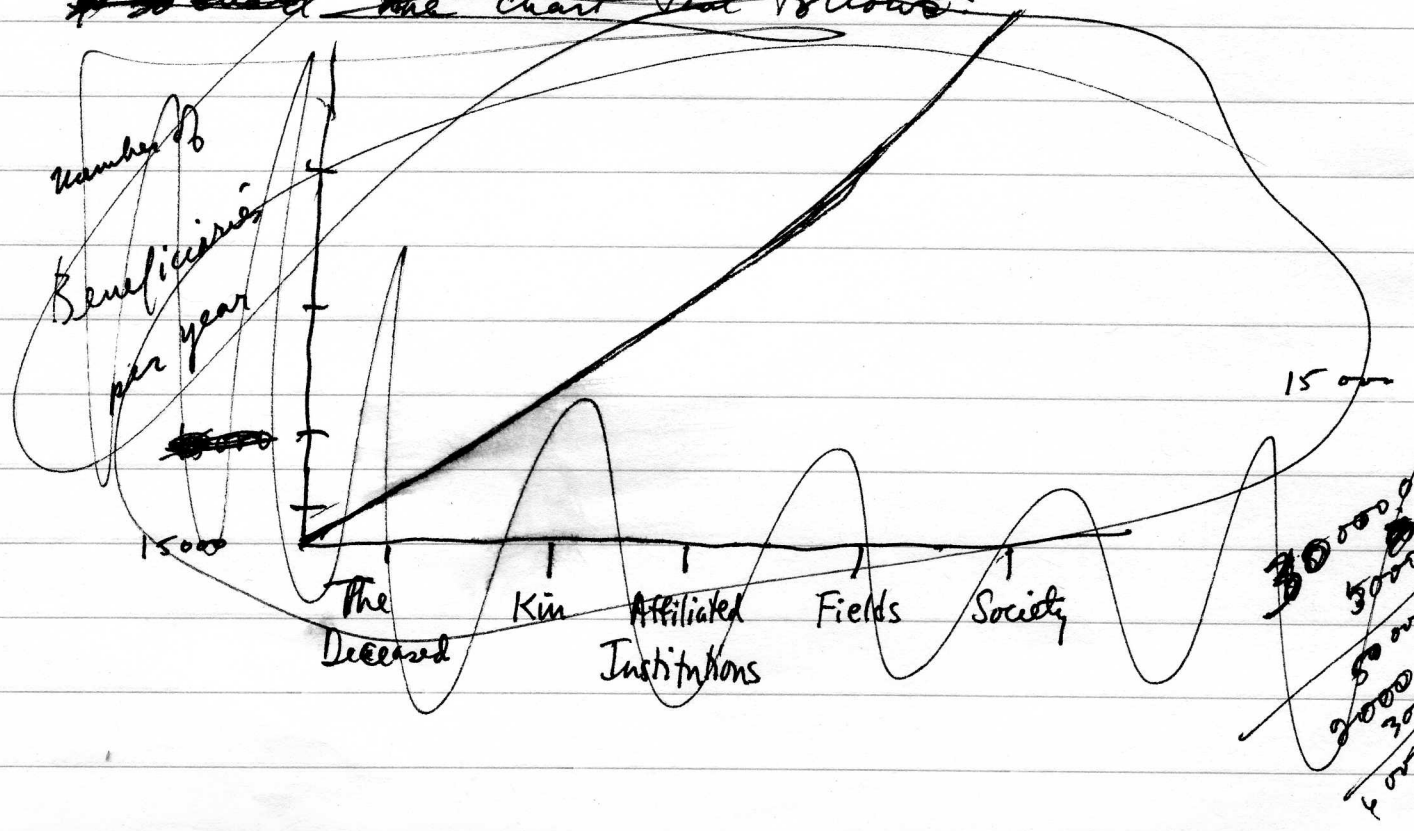
Receipts ~~likely~~ more than

- 1) Commercial Publishers (~~likely~~ break-even) 44, ~~000~~
- 2) Academic Publishers (~~likely~~ less than break-even ~~payments~~, i.e. with small subsidies) 36
- 3-4) Cash sales (research publications & microforms) 60
- 5) Gifts of Affiliated Institutions of Deceased 3
- 6) Gifts from estates and individuals 3
- 7) Foundation grants 2
- 8) Government grants (foundations ~~and~~ agencies) 2

The system might be "go" with any ~~simple~~ ¹⁵⁰ list of checks ^{analyzed} ~~of~~ ^{per} ~~one~~ ^{hundred}, representing about \$100,000 in debts and revenues.

The beneficiaries of ~~a~~ such an archival plan would be numerous. If we may continue to invent figures for illustrative purposes, we can conjecture

~~to show the chart that follows:~~



benefits to the deceased (15×10^3 per year);
 their families (10^4 per year); ~~their~~ ^{these} ~~affiliated~~ institutional
 affiliates (~~10^6~~ per yr); and ~~the nation~~ ^{the nation} (2.5×10^8).

~~Substitution~~

Employment of an insurance system would
 reduce ~~greatly~~ the coverage of the creative population.

Although
 a sales
 campaign
 has not
 been tested,

~~Assuming that a person has full coverage for~~
~~It might be~~
~~the~~ ~~would~~ ~~be~~ ~~difficult~~ ~~to~~ ~~sell~~ ~~an~~ ~~additional~~ ~~coverage~~
 of insurance coverage to ~~a~~ ~~worker~~ ~~under~~
 an academic employee or ~~for~~ independent
 artist and writer. (The term life insurance, which

uses annually, and most sharply in late life
 would ~~seems~~ to appear to be the best model.) Not only

would ~~many~~ ^{some} ~~that~~ ~~many~~ ~~would~~ ~~never~~ ~~initiate~~ ~~a~~ ~~policy~~ ~~that~~ ~~is~~ ~~equivalent~~
 be unable to ~~pay~~, but many would be
 characterologically disinclined to ~~enter~~ ~~an~~ ~~insurance~~
~~They would regard such an initiative as~~ ~~admittedly~~ ~~flat~~, or as egotistical.

~~System for the purpose of~~ ~~the~~ ~~total~~ ~~glance~~ ~~at~~
 (to replace top income tax 5+8%)
 the \$10 million required annually, and at ~~the~~ ^{if}
~~about~~ ^{insured} ~~20,000~~ ~~persons~~ ~~were~~ ~~covered~~, ^(deceased annually) suggests

that an ~~annual~~ ^{in the seventieth year} premium of around ~~\$1000~~ ^{\$800} would
 required at ~~the~~ ^{in the seventieth year} ~~age~~ ~~of~~ ~~70~~. (That is, the insurance actuary
 would be betting the insured would die at ~~73~~ ^{had a 1/3 chance of paying} to pay
 his ~~share~~ ^{average share of} ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~premium~~ ~~communication~~
 and perpetration of his ~~creative~~ ^{insurance} ~~work~~.) A ~~10~~ ¹⁰-payment

insurance
 scheme might also be adopted, requiring some
 \$200 per year, at any time of life.

It might seem that ^{an} insurance company ~~and~~ would ~~be~~ economically inefficient at, say, 10,000 clients. Obviously that would not be true historically. Nor is it true today ~~of~~ numerous special types of corporate insurance, ^{an airline} ~~and~~ ~~aircraft~~ ~~aircraft~~, for example. ~~One~~ ~~cannot~~ discount the possibility that ^{many} ~~universities~~ and other institutions ~~would~~ decide

to pay for archival insurance to their ~~professors~~ faculty. The ~~if~~ if an average of ten members of the faculty die ~~in the~~ ^{in the} course of a year, the ~~university~~ university

may pay in some \$25,000 ~~per~~ annually. ~~The~~ ~~same~~ ~~payments~~ ~~could~~ be made ~~as~~ a simple purchase. ^{The archival managers would} ~~the~~ ~~system~~ ~~delivering~~ ~~procedures~~ ~~letting~~ ~~people~~ be obligated ~~to~~ ~~perform~~ undertake ~~copy~~ to a certain sum ~~or~~ all necessary ~~services~~ for persons leaving archives in the course of the year. Also, the transaction could be on a simple purchase-upon-decease basis.

Putting aside any insurance plan,

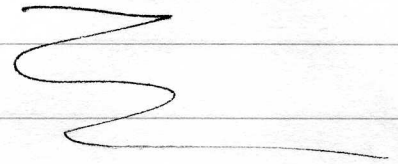
All of the ~~the~~ foregoing makes sense if the professional archives managers are well-organized, well-educated in scientific and humanistic thought patterns, ~~well~~ ~~and~~ well-audited, and technologically alert. ^{and a system can develop and prosper} The ^{total} system might be "go" with ~~as few as~~ ^{as few as} a hundred client archives a year, representing about \$100,000 in costs and revenues. This ^{profitability} brings the operation within reach of a consortium of ~~of~~ colleges, ~~or~~ a foundation experiment,

test

or apply the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities;

In retrospect, now that the concept is made explicit and its possibilities ~~and~~ examined in a preliminary fashion, we may wonder ~~why~~ that the creative institutions of our country have never ~~driven systematically into the area~~ taken systematic action. ^{to develop personal archives} It would ~~be~~ too much ^{add} to ~~analyze~~ ^{add} ~~the problem this~~ ^{the matter} question here, for it has to do with myths about publishing, about age and creativity, and other matters.

~~A better~~ ^{is it} I think ~~to~~ leave ^{unsaid} such reflections; they ~~which~~ can, after all, be published ~~in~~ ^{by} ~~the~~ ^{the} professional managers who will be charged with the disposing ^{from} of my archive.



end

~~We~~ would need to expose the self-delusory and collective illusions ~~concerning that range~~ ⁱⁿ ~~regard~~ to conventional publishing systems ^{and} scientific communication networks.

We would have to show how, in this large area, we ^{so to speak} ~~are~~ ^{expensive and inadequate} ~~using~~ ^{deceitful} when baking soda would do as well. better. I think it prudent to