The archive and the novel share significant traits: both apply writing to the preservation of knowledge, store the memories of past events, and base their claims to truth on written proofs. Such similarities raise a few questions. How, for instance, does its connection to the archive bear upon the novel? Does it influence its form and content? And in which historical context(s) does this connection most effectively occur? While the link between archives and history has been the object of revealing inquiries, little has emerged on the one tying archives to novels. Investigating this connection may provide a deeper comprehension of the archive as the institution that not only stores society's vital records but also elaborates a viable cognitive paradigm. It is the epistemic significance of archival discourse that emerges from inquiring into the relation between archives and novels.

For purposes of this paper, I am interested in the modern archive, the centralized repository of the nation-state's records created by the French Reform of the National Archives in 1794. This archive has operated within certain technological and material constraints: it has used writing as its chief recording medium and exploited paper as its recording surface. As for the novel, I am concerned with its development in the West after the spread of print and literacy at the end of the eighteenth century. In that age, novelists defined their works as texts that were both truthful, in opposition to romances, and fictional, in contrast to journalism and historiography.

While there are innumerable novels whose stories are based on records—let us say all the fictional works whose authors had to perform research in archives before sitting down at the desk and writing—relatively few of them present this documentary foundation as a constitutive component of the text. These works, which I would like to call "dossier novels," are hybrid forms of literature, which conform to a narrative framework, yet serve to archive historical records. When novels assume, at least partially, the form of a dossier they become self-reflexive works; what they narrate is their genetic relationship with the archive.

Dossier novels have appeared within three different traditions: the historical novel, the realist novel, and the postmodern novel.[1] By definition, the writing of historical fiction is predicated upon the possibility of finding truthful documents in the historical archive, as occurs in Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley,* whose 1829 edition includes footnotes quoting the records the author consulted in preparation for the book. The realist novel of the first part of the nineteenth century aimed at delivering a faithful portrayal of humankind or at copying the entire French society, as Balzac states in the Foreword (1842) to *La Comédie humaine [The Human Comedy]*. Realist writers relied heavily on the archives of courts of law as sources for creating characters and crafting stories. Quite often, their works imitated legal discourse by proving the authenticity of wills, dowry contracts, deeds, or purchase agreements. They proved paternity, first born right,

and identity. They did in fiction what courts of law did in the real world: they used the archive as a tool for backing the truth-value of their propositions. The postmodern novel's connection to the archive depends on its interest in all the discourses that purport to deliver proven knowledge. What fascinates postmodern culture is the archive's capacity to turn disorganized information into intelligible data. Thus, postmodern novelists are never content with storing records in their texts; they also give novelistic representation to the principles that preside over the arrangement and retrieval of documents. In postmodernism, the archive becomes a game that is played according to rules established by the archive itself, a fascinating case of self-reliance and naïve faith in the possibility of imposing order on our messy experience of the world. In their shift from reproducing the archival record to mimicking archival laws, postmodern novels have proceeded toward a radical critique of the archive. Rather than representing the archive as a model of organized and veridical knowledge, as nineteenth-century novels did, their postmodern counterparts portray it as an unreliable institution that cannot sort out its records and too often cheats on its own rules.

Although belonging to distinct traditions, dossier novels possess a number of common features: they loosen up plot links, silence the narrator's voice, and store records. As compared to traditional fiction, they present readers with a richer apparatus of "finding aids," or the instruments used by archivists to facilitate the retrieval of records, such as indexes, tables, calendars, and cross-reference guides. Dossier novels can find a balance between documentation and narrative because both embody their overarching forms, the archive and the narrative, in compatible fashions. In so doing, they foreground the historical and cultural links tying archival and novelistic discourses.

Archives and novels participate in a common enterprise: the transmission of knowledge across generations. As Milan Kundera convincingly argues, since the beginning of Modernity, the "passion to know" drives the novel. It "has compelled the novel to investigate human beings' concrete life so as to protect it from the 'oblivion of the being.' … Knowledge is the only ethics of the novel" (1986, p. 20). Four centuries of history in which novels have effectively performed as cognitive tools support Kundera's argument; however, it does not appear quite so easy to attribute the same function to the archive. Indeed, can an ethics of knowledge inspire the archive? What is the cognitive value of records documenting bureaucratic operations?

Archivists refer to the Roman god Janus as their patron: "The god who looks both backwards and forwards in time" (Gränstrom, 1994, p. 11). By storing records of old administrations, the archive journeys towards the past. On the other hand, by saving knowledge that will shape future generations' historical awareness, it builds up the future. Storing a record in the archive implies recognizing its historical value as cultural artifact. An archive "stresses the

historical value of stored records and the process of intentional transference of records from the contexts in which their information was originally valid to a different environment for long-term preservation" (Palaima, 2003, p. 169). We can grasp the cognitive value of records by taking into account the evolving nature of their meaning. It is in the process of aging that records gradually lose their value as proofs of specific operations. Aged records bear witness to the reasons why they were stored in archives, and these reasons are intrinsically cultural. With the passage of time, the meaning of records transcends the referential information they store. History turns records from documents into monuments.[2] Rather than showing a fragment of reality, as the Latin root of the word document, *docere* —to show and to teach—would suggest, they warn us about the cultural gap separating the present from the past, as it is indicated by the Latin root of the word monument, *monere*, to admonish. As an operator dealing with cultural artifacts, the archivist joins with other professionals, such as the annalist, the notary, the historian, and the novelist, in the preservation of our knowledge of the past.[3]

Up until the nineteenth century, novels had represented their role in preserving and passing on knowledge through the literary motif of the found old manuscript. By pretending to be typographic versions of old papers, novels hinted at their own role as written records in the transmission of culture. In so doing, they were also attempting to present the results of their investigations into the human condition as proven truth. An oft-cited example of this practice is Cervantes's *Don Quijote de La Mancha* (1605), the well-known story of an impoverished Spanish nobleman who believes himself to be an errant knight and sets out on an adventurous journey. Cervantes's novel claims to be a "*verdadera historia*" [a true story] that a fictional editor found in an old manuscript after lengthy research. By resting their claim to truth on documents, novels like *Don Quijote* mimic the operational mode of the archive. As archives do, novels pass on knowledge that can be trusted insofar as it originates in a record.

In addition to their common role in the transmission of culture, the archive and the novel connect through the medium both employ, writing. The novel is the sole major literary genre in the Western tradition that does not "retain ancient oral and auditory characteristics" since it is "younger than writing and the book" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 3). Writing as a recording medium is built into the novel since its very inception. Furthermore, the birth and success of the modern novel are tied to the invention of print in the fifteenth century, a technology that raised to a superior degree the recording capacity of writing.[4] As Walter Ong argues, print made obsolete the process of memorization that was still needed in order to remember the contents of handwritten manuscripts (1998, p. 119). Print further enhanced the perception of the book as an external support to the human mind: "once print has been fairly well interiorized, a book was sensed as a kind of object

which 'contained' information, scientific, fictional or other, rather than, as earlier, a recorded utterance" (Ong, 1998, p. 126). One of the technical consequences of print was that novels could take on certain material features that until then had been typical only of archival tools such as dossiers and later, folders. It was the uniform technology of print that made possible dividing novels into parts and chapters, titling and numbering these subdivisions, and adding tables of contents and indexes (Ong, 1998, pp. 123-126). Thus, it became technically feasible to approach a novel as a dossier, by skipping pages, moving back and forth through the various chapters, and considering each chapter as a textual entity endowed with its own meaning. The fact that the modern novel was born as printed text is crucial: its division into (semi)autonomous parts and the possibility of adding indexes and tables were inscribed, as it were, in its DNA. Just as writing as a medium conferred an innate recording ability to the novel, print as technology gave it the instruments for handling data in the same fashion as a dossier does.

As for the archive, it is the site where writing was invented: in Ancient Mesopotamia as well as in Pharaonic Egypt, for more than two thousand years, the main use of the written word was the recording of laws, financial records, cadasters, notarial acts, as well as military rolls. As its etymology demonstrates, writing was invented to serve the administrator rather than the man of learning (Casanova, 1928, p. 295; Goody, 1986, p. 49; Posner, 1972, pp. 23-24, 71-79), in classical Greek, the word *γραμμα* stands for letter of the alphabet and document, as well as register, list, and catalog.[5] Those who witnessed the introduction of writing into human civilization immediately understood that the written word was in essence a record. At the root of "record," lies the Latin word *recordari*, "to remember, bring back to mind" (Livelton, 1996, p. 59). It is a peculiar type of memory, however, that functions when records are created, as those man-made instruments which help humans to remember also allow their brains to forget. To ancient scholars, the equation between writing and recording appeared perfectly clear. As Plato argues in his *Phaedrus*, by creating the reminder, writing invents an artificial substitute for human memory: "[those who learn how to write] will put their trust in writing, which is external and depends on signs that belong to others, instead of trying to remember from the inside, completely on their own" (1995, 275A).

Once situated in the context of Plato's theory of knowledge, his mistrust for writing achieves a major epistemic significance. In Plato's philosophy, true knowledge results from an internal process of recognition, whereby the soul remembers ideas that it apprehended at the time of its original vision of the Ideal World. As a consequence, all the cognitive practices that rely on external signs rather than on natural memory cannot lead to an experience of truth. Even those who do not agree with Plato's dualistic approach to knowledge, which opposes the empirical world of opinion to the transcendent realm of the true ideas, must

recognize that his discussion of the relation between signs and truth is to the point. Signs do not generate absolute truth but interpretations. Their world, which comprises written records and novels, is the ground for conjectural truth. We owe to Carlo Ginzburg the discussion of the "conjectural paradigm," a cognitive model based on practical intuition that allows researchers to build up "knowledge of the whole from the parts" (Ginzburg, 1980, p. 15). In the conjectural paradigm, an inquisitive path that starts with the observation of a trace ends up achieving a non-metaphysical, empirical truth. In Modernity, as the record became the trace *par excellence,* the archive functioned as the privileged site for the application of the conjectural paradigm. As he applies the epistemic paradigm of the archive in a clear conjectural mode, the archivist climbs from the record to the record group and from there to the original record-creating agency. While the archive achieves conjectural truth by establishing rigorous protocol for the custody and the arrangement of records, the novel strives to obtain the same result by way of narrative instruments.

The novel is fiction that claims the true-value of the stories it recounts. To do so, it often imitates the chief procedure for establishing conjectural truth in a certain civilization. When Ephraim Mackellar, the narrator of Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Master of Ballantrae*, declares that he will report the story of his Master's tragedy "like a witness in a court" (2002, p. 17), he asks to be trusted by employing the same strategy that the novel as a genre adopts. When novels want to be believed as truthful stories they imitate the most commonly accepted procedures for establishing truth in a certain cultural context. In this respect, I agree with González Echevarría's hypothesis that the novel, "having not fixed form of its own, often assumes that of a given kind of document endowed with truth-bearing power by society at specific moments in time" (1990, p. 8). For this reason, so many novels claim to be not what they are but documents of any type: "the most persistent characteristic of books that have been called novels in the modern era is that they always pretend not to be literature.… Novels are or pretend to be autobiographies, a series of letters, a manuscript found in a trunk, and so forth" (González Echevarría, 1990, p. 7). Strictly speaking, novels cannot prove anything. What they can do, instead, is to shape their narratives in a manner that incorporates the epistemic paradigm of other discourses whose truth-finding ability society recognizes. Historiography, anthropology, and psychoanalysis are examples of such discourses, whose utilization by novelists depends on the cultural setting where they operate. Because of the archive's prestige as an institution and the soundness of its methods, archival discourse has been one of the novel's key epistemic partners in the Modern Age.

In the history of the archive, Modernity, which means centralization, public access, and the development of a legal and professional infrastructure, begins in revolutionary France with the issuing of the law of the 7th of Messidor II

[June 25, 1794] (Casanova, 1928, p. 387; Posner, 1967, p. 25; Schellenberg 1956, p. 4). With this law, the Revolutionary Convention granted the National Archives jurisdiction over all public archives in the whole territory of the French Republic. For the first time in Western history, "an organic administration of archives covering the whole extent of existent depositories of older materials and of record-producing public agencies was established" (Posner, 1967, p. 25). In so doing, the bourgeois state elevated the archive's status, making it one of the most crucial branches of the administration. There were many reasons for such formal recognition. Since the Revolution ended nobility's rule over society, tradition ceased being a legitimate instrument for asserting rights on land. All the feudal privileges that coexisted side by side with legal ownership were canceled. Now, only written documents could entitle people to exploit natural resources. The same development also affected politics, as a written document symbolically kept in the Ark of the nation, the Constitution, spelled out the rules that allowed the new sovereign, the people, to exercise its power. Both the right to own and the right to rule, i.e., private property and public power, drew on records stored in archives. The law of the 7th Messidor officially legislated the inception of the era of the document. In that age, in politics as well as human sciences—i.e., outside of domains such as religion, philosophy, or magic—no one could claim power, display knowledge, or establish truth without substantiating his/her words with some type of written proof. Therefore, the archive became the ultimate source of power and knowledge. The discourse of the novel, which had aimed at truth since Cervantes' *verdadera historia*, had to pass through the test of the archive. Dossier novels, or fictional works that verify their truth-value by way of archival instruments, were the result of this test. For novelists, achieving this result was a demanding task, as novels and archives, despite all their commonalities, were still separated by evident contradictions.

Archives and novels privilege different dimensions (the former space and the latter time) utilize distinct structuring tools (the record series and the plot respectively) and utilize specific technical instruments (the paginated book and archival hardware) that lead their users towards specific, divergent experiences. In order to analyze these contradictions, I will briefly discuss the organizational principles as well as the practical functioning of the archive. From a theoretical point of view, modern archives apply the Principle of Provenance, first known as *Provenienzprinzip* because of its German origin. The Principle of Provenance states that documents generated by the same agency form a group and must lie side by side on the shelf. According to this norm, homogeneity of origin, rather than of content, is the criterion for the grouping of records. Once the records have been grouped into a series they must be arranged in a way that respects the filing order established by the originating agency (Casanova, 1928, p. 392 Gränström, 1994, p, 14; Horsman, 1994, p. 56-60).[6] In this archive, time becomes a secondary

dimension.[7] As a network of spatial relations corresponding to bureaucratic relationships, the modern archive aims at reconstructing the maps of a record-creating administration rather than the calendars of its activities. Researchers can still discover the temporal sequence of a series of documents, but only after piercing through the first layer of archival organization. Indeed, in the archive, space becomes a tool for storing time. Events that developed in time, such as the day-to-day operations of a given administration, are turned into files or folders and placed in spatial locations on shelves.

As for novels, they simply reverse the relation between space and time that functions in the archive; they utilize time in order to represent space. Novelistic heroes develop in a temporal dimension. They are born, grow up, and get older. During their adventures they visit places. They function as the chronological tie connecting disparate locales. While it makes sense, as M.M. Bakhtin does, to talk of *chronotope*, time that becomes space, in novels (1981, p. 84), we should perhaps coin a term such as *topochrone*, space that stores time, in order to describe the archives' operational method. As they assign specific roles to space and time, novels and archives apply distinct tools, the plot and the record series respectively, to the structuring of their contents. Different degrees of intentionality separate these two instruments. Writing a novel amounts to imposing a certain arrangement upon otherwise disorganized events. Paul Ricœur maintains that narrating consists in creating connections among events [*agencement des faits*] (1983, p. 66-71). These connections are the result of the emplotment [*mise en intrigue*], by which the writer imposes a logical order on the events (p. 82). The same concept is stressed by Peter Brooks when he maintains that the plot is "the principle of interconnectedness and intention which we cannot do without in moving through the discrete elements—incidents, episodes, actions—of a narrative" (1984, p. 5). Clearly, this imposition of a premeditated arrangement is absent in the record series, wherein order originates, as it were, from within, from the records themselves as they accumulate through the daily routine of the bureaucracy.

Finally, archives and novels sharply differ in the hardware they utilize. The rich array of hardware pieces—shelves, files, folders, and tags—of the archive stands in contrast to the paginated book of the typographic age. Here, what matters most is the different experiences that the hardware of the archive and that of the novel provoke in their respective users. While researchers in the archive can enjoy flexibility of approach in their handling of records, the same cannot be said of readers of novels. Despite the options introduced by typography, such as skipping parts and moving back and forth between the pages of a text, readers of novels cannot really behave like researchers in an archive. The fact is that the paginated book, in its very essence, implies sequence. It respectfully but intentionally asks readers to follow the numeric order of its pages from the first to

the last. On the contrary, researchers looking up information in a file folder determine their own path of inquiry in complete independence. They are not compelled to follow the particular order that is suggested by the very object they are investigating, as occurs with the numbered pages of a printed book.

The contradictions separating archives and novels originate in the two different principles, documentation and narrative that inform their discourses. Space, accumulation, and a greater freedom of movement lie on the side of documentation, while time, intentionality, and guided approach remain on the side of narrative. Furthermore, documentation exists as an essentially anonymous activity. The same is not true of narrative. By definition, narrating implies a narrator, an agent who can be held accountable for the story he/she recounts.

By maintaining that documentation and narrative can coexist in the novel insofar as they are inscribed in its genetic code, this paper argues for approaching novelistic discourse as a hybrid. Historically, while the dominant character of the novel has been narration, the recessive trait of documentation has been often hidden but never eliminated. It has been, and still is, a threatening trait, however. To be sure, the discourse of the archive disturbs that of the novel. When documentation becomes dominant, the voice of the narrator becomes silent, plot vanishes, and time stops. The principle of documentation peeps out in the literary motif of the retrieved manuscript, in the imitation of legal and scientific prose, in the private archives of epistolary novels, in historical and realist novels' ambition to behave as documents, and in the imitation of the archive in postmodern fiction. I would like to argue that by writing dossier novels, authors were able to give explicit form to the relation tying documents to narrative in fiction. Proving that dossier novels have effectively managed to find an operational balance between narrative as their formal framework and documentation as their content will indeed demonstrate that storing and exhibiting records does represent a crucial component of novelistic discourse.

Muller, Feith, & Fruin's *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* defines a dossier as "a group of documents on the same subject brought together on a certain definite occasion to serve a definite purpose by the body which produced the archival collection" (1940, p. 83). The dossier focuses on a specific subject, thus having a much narrower scope than the archive, which can store records dealing with any subject whatsoever. Secondly, a dossier is the result of a deliberate decision by an administrative body. In this respect, the dossier differs from the archive's chief structuring instrument, the record group, which is almost automatically generated by the daily routine of a bureaucratic administration. Dossiers are put together through a more intentional act than other archival tools. Finally, the dossier is a material object that users, even those lacking professional expertise as archivists, can handle quite easily. It offers a friendly interface, to borrow a term from computer lingo, to human eyes. In a

computer, the "Human Computer Interface," the screen with its menu, icons, and metaphors—the desktop, the folders, and the trash bin—functions as a mediator between the data stored in the machine and the human user. In the same fashion, as "Human Archive Interface," the dossier—with its cover, handwritten or printed pages, titles, and indexes—mediates between the records stored in the archive and a human researcher.

These three traits—focus on a specific topic, intentionality, and a friendly interface—contribute to the transformation of the dossier into an entity homologous to the novel. To begin with, the novel functions by concentrating on a well-defined segment of reality. One of the meanings of "plot," as Peter Brooks notes, is: "1. (a) A small piece of ground generally used for a specific purpose. (b) A measured area of land; lot" (1984, p. 11); the mapping out of a piece of reality considered of some interest represents the initial stage for the writing of a novel. Furthermore, narrating a novel clearly reveals an intentional act. Novelists can be more or less original when they compose a novel; nevertheless, novelistic writing remains a much more intentional practice than the daily functioning of the archive. For this reason, it is important that the dossier be assembled through the deliberate action of an office or a body. Finally, the friendly interface of the dossier, or its features as material object, can agree without difficulty with the traditional vehicle of the novel, the printed book. A novel can assume the traits of a dossier without causing, either at a formal or at a material level, irredeemable conflicts with its fundamental characteristics as a genre.

In dossier novels, the coexistence of narrative and documentary components, a crucial trait unto itself in novelistic discourse, comes to the fore in full evidence. This occurs as the usually recessive trait of documentation can develop outside the customary constraints it meets in non-archival fiction. As a consequence, the practice of the novel and that of the archive can collide in an overt manner, otherwise unknown to traditional fiction. The fact is that the archive and the novel present two conflicting types of totality. In *archival fiction*, as it arranges records through rules that do not admit any exception, the archive invariably threatens to take over the novel. Facing the prosaic but efficient totality of the archive, the ambitious totality of the novel, which aims at the integration of the individual into the world, falters. When novels begin to display records, the atmosphere changes, as if recess were over: the narrative game must end, while more pragmatic discourses—law, history, economy, and politics—begin to speak.

This is what occurs in Alessandro Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* [The Betrothed] (1840), a historical novel that narrates the story of two young peasants who have to fight against powerful enemies in order to get married. Manzoni systematically stops the plot of this classical historical novel to produce the legal and historical records that support his narrative. While *I promessi sposi* undoubtedly tells a story, it also assembles an accurate dossier regarding laws,

institutions, and historical events in seventeenth-century Lombardy. As he believed that historical truth existed and could be found in historical documents, Manzoni did not mind sacrificing his readers' appetite for excitement and happily stuffed his novel with boring records. Written in the age in which historiography was claiming the status of scientific discipline, *I promessi sposi* displays the absolute trust in the epistemic value of records that characterized the first half of the nineteenth century.

A different cultural environment affects Gustave Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1880), the story of two Parisian copyists who move to the countryside upon their retirement. Caught by an authentic passion to know, the two clerks spend their time studying all the disciplines comprising nineteenth-century science. Because of their professional experience as clerks, Bouvard and Pécuchet transform their studying into compulsive notetaking. As their notes end up on the novel's page, *Bouvard et Pécuchet* takes the form of a dossier on contemporary science. At the end of the day, in the second part of the novel that Flaubert did not complete, they copy a disparate range of materials that even include random old papers bought by weight from a paper mill.[8] *Bouvard et Pécuchet* conveys the late nineteenth century fatigue with positive science, which entailed certain mistrust in the epistemic value of archives and records. Flaubert's two heroes build a parody of the archive, in which records accumulate without coalescing in an organic knowledge. The end of realism that *Bouvard et Pécuchet* signals paves the way to twentieth-century modernism, which extolled the work of art as a self-contained reality that did not need any validation from outside agents; the approach to truth of writers such as Manzoni became a thing of the past.

In the second half of the twentieth century, as modernism came to an end, the archive played a crucial role in novels written in Latin America, where the novelistic discourse possessed a type of freshness that was unknown to the rest of the West. The archive was also instrumental in the reshaping of the historical novel, a genre that renewed the popularity it had enjoyed in the nineteenth century. In a typical postmodern stance, the dossier novel of the last decades of the twentieth century challenged the objectivity of the archive's procedures for storing, arranging, and retrieving records. Once represented as the institution for verifying truth, the archive became a synonym of subjectivity. Novels such as Augusto Roa Bastos's *Yo el supremo* [*I the Supreme*] (1974), and Georges Perec's *La Vie mode d'emploi* [*Life: a User's Manual*] (1978), for example, utilize fiction as a tool for corroding the archive's authority.

Yo el supremo, an epic novel on Paraguay's history, amounts to a massive dossier of notes, quotations from other books, letters, and historical documents. In a "Nota final del compilador," Roa Bastos maintains that the book does not contain a single word that he has not copied from either oral or written sources. As the fictional author of this dossier is José Gaspar Rodriguez de Francia,

Paraguay's dictator in the early nineteenth century, the novel's point becomes clear: power controls the archive and its offshoots such as dossiers. The truth of the archive is political, and it is up to the novel to denounce this reality.

In *La Vie mode d'emploi*, the archive informs the structure of the text to such an extent that it makes summarizing the novel impossible. Since space substitutes for time as the novel's chief organizing dimension, describing this spatial structure is the only way in which to synthesize the text. The basic figure for the spatial arrangement of *La Vie mode d'emploi* is a 10 x 10 grid, which represents the vertical plan of an apartment building situated at 11 Rue Simon-Crubellier, Paris. Each of the ten floors of this structure contains ten locations, with each location corresponding to one square of the 10 x 10 grid. Through a mathematical system elaborated by Perec, these squares are matched to the ninety-nine chapters, of *La Vie mode d'emploi*. Each chapter may narrate a complete story, the section of a story, or a mere description of objects and characters. As each chapter of *La Vie mode d'emploi* both describes a specific location and narrates the life story of its resident(s), the map of the building also determines the subject matter of the novel's chapters. This splendid dossier is the novelistic representation of the Principle of Provenance: it situates each story in a different physical location just as a good archivist must connect its record to the particular office that created it. But the dossier *La Vie mode d'emploi* is also the only archive that functions in the novel. The numerous stories of archivists and archives that it recounts all end up in failures. In the repositories of *La Vie mode d'emploi*, researchers find a deceitful type of knowledge that invariably escapes its pursuers. Archives are alienating places that force their users to repeat long sequences of painful and time-consuming operations. Quite often Perec's characters conclude their archival endeavors by dumping records as trash, thus returning them to that very original chaos that the archive hoped to tame.

The archival strand that is part and parcel of novelistic discourse tends to destabilize the novel's narrative structures. I would like to argue that fictional dossiers openly expose the precarious equilibrium between the archive and narrative in modern fiction. Rather than being typical of dossier novels alone, the uneasy coexistence of the archive and narrative is a defining trait of the novel as a genre. We can detect this ambiguity in so many novels' pretension to conveying truth in the form of records, while at the same time catering to readers as pieces of fiction. As for the archive, dossier novels question the archive's ability to guarantee that a record conveys the truth simply because it has been arranged according to proper archival procedures. In point of fact, the archive is a self-validating discourse, which stores authentic records that receive the patent of their authenticity from the archive itself. Significantly, the notions of authority and originality combine in the etymology of the word "authenticity;" the Greek term for "authentic," *αυθεντης* can mean both "somebody who enjoys absolute

power," and "made by one's own hand." Conferring authenticity is a privilege enjoyed by an authority that is completely free from any external constraint. But in novels, we can see how *authentic* documents that were stored by following the rules of the archive may convey evident lies. Or, as occurs in *La Vie mode d'emploi*, archival procedures help people to store meaningless records whose truthfulness or falseness does not really matter. By becoming dossiers, novels expose the self-validating and ultimately literary nature of archival discourse. Just as narrative structures are destabilized by archival order, so archival rules are questioned by novelistic mimesis. In order to support the truthfulness of their stories, novels imitate the archive, while, through this very imitation, they challenge the authority of the archive as a keeper of the truth. From this ambiguity stems the consideration that novels, stirred as they are by the conflicting needs to rely on, and to escape from, the archive, are an unstable genre. Novels need to rest their claim to truth on archival records. However, once placed in a novelistic context, records are submitted to conflicting interpretations, as novels consist in the encounter between disparate, disagreeing voices. The dialogic discourse of the novel invalidates the idea that a thing such as the truth of the record might exist. In so doing, the novel ends up questioning its very foundation, i.e., the archival record as the proven evidence that the conjectural truth exists and can be both preserved and shared.

The novel's problems, comprising its precarious mixing of records and narrative, are historically situated in the Paper Age. As such, they belong to an epoch that is already seeing its horizon. For the foreseeable future, the development of fiction will largely depend on the interaction between the novel and the digital database. In the Modern Age, historiography and historical fiction, law and realist novels, all relied on documents kept in paper archives. In the Digital Age, administrative and legal records are increasingly stored in electronic databases, where it becomes hard to accomplish the two classic goals of the paper archive, proving the authenticity of records and verifying their provenance. In *Webster's New World Computer Dictionary*, databases are "collections of related information about a subject organized in a useful manner that provides a base or foundation for procedures, such as retrieving information, drawing conclusions, and making decisions" (p. 100). In their digital versions, databases represent the "remediation" of instruments that were already in place in the paper age, when they applied, for example, index cards to the management of information.[9] Establishing relations between records so as to help their users to easily access data is the key operation in databases. As narratives created within this environment will substitute a network of links for plot and emphasize paradigm over syntagm (Manovich, 2001), their readers will enjoy the opportunity to create their own path through a database of stories.

Fictions such as *La Vie mode d'emploi*, written on the eve of the digital age, show that the novel can carry out certain archival functions, such as storing and retrieving records, all while dismissing the (chrono)logical plot as the chief device for structuring its contents. These dossier novels promote a type of reading that anticipates the reader's approach to the narratives of the digital age. The idea that readers/users must create their own fiction by traveling through various frames/records/lexias lies at the core of both dossier novels such as *La Vie mode d'emploi* and hypertexts created with digital technology. [10] By assuming the form of a dossier in order to interact with larger archives, certain novels become flexible mutants. Achieving this flexibility represents a crucial step in the novel's evolution from the continuous, linear stories of the paper age to the interactive, relational narratives of the digital era.

Notes

[1] The historical novel blossomed in the first half of the nineteenth century following the publication of Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* in 1814. Since 1970, the genre has known a new popularity, in particular in Latin American literature. The realist novel was a product of the nineteenth-century scientific approach to novelistic writing; the publication of Flaubert's Bouvard et Pécuchet in 1880 signaled the crisis of the realist paradigm. Postmodern novels have appeared since the 1970s. In postmodernism, the archive is a system for organizing information that stands for humans' attempts to impose some order on the outer reality.

[2] In this article, I use the term, "document" as a synonym of "record." Archival theory employs stricter categories than mine: in Richard Pearce-Moses's *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*, documents and records overlap only when "'record' connotes an official document, especially the final version of one created in the routine course of business." Instead, documents may also be drafts or duplicates of record copies.

[3] An annalist records the events occurred in given territory year by year.

[4] Lennard J. Davis makes a compelling case for the connection between the English novel and print. In Davis' theory, print was the trait separating news ballads, the ancestors of novels, from other forms of prose in sixteenth-century England. Thus, it becomes possible to define the discourse of the novel, as it appeared in the following century, as "prose narrative in print" (1983, p. 44).

[5] The existence of non-written records, such as maps, drawings, photographs, and films, does not contradict the reality of writing as the quintessential archival medium. The paper archive stored items other than the written documents that constituted the bulk of its records. However, whenever finding aids, such as tables, inventories, calendars, and lists, needed to be prepared, writing remained

the chief medium of the archive. In short, record arrangement has one medium--writing.

[6] The Provenienzprinzip emanates from "Le Respect des fonds," a principle that was established in France in 1841 by Natalis de Wailly (Horsman, 1994, p. 53). The Regulations of July 1, 1881 of the Privy State Archives in Berlin, which first formulated the Provenienzprinzip, prescribed "respect for every original order, for every original designation" (Posner, 1967, p. 37).

[7] Muller, Feith, & Fruin reject the chronological classification as detrimental to the natural order of the archive. As archivists must separate bound volumes into their parts in order to chronologically arrange documents, "the natural relation of the documents is destroyed" (1998, p. 50).

[8] Gustave Flaubert died suddenly in 1880, without finishing *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. Writing this novel became an eight-year-long struggle because of the enormous amount of knowledge that Flaubert had to transcribe into Bouvard et Pécuchet.

[9] I am borrowing the concept of "remediation" from Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's *Remediation; Understanding New Media*. Remediation is the process whereby the new media of the digital age recycles old cultural products by appropriating their "techniques and forms" (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 65). For instance, hypertext is the remediation of the novel, email of the letter, and blog of the journal.

[10] As in Roland Barthes' theory, a "lexia" is a unit of reading, or a textual fragment that readers can perceive as a block of signification (1970, p. 18). The term is also used in new media theory in order to signify one of the units linked together in the hypertext (Landow, 1992, p. 64).

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