Variegated Order: Making Space for Neurodiverse Perspectives in Archives

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Cover Page Footnote

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Introduction

Archivists, whether consciously or not, impose order and norms on the records we work with. When making decisions on everything from titling individual files to deciding what will be selected for inclusion, archivists operate from a set of both explicit rules and inherent assumptions.[1] This can get complicated, however, when bodies of records resist wholeness and completeness. When the minds from which these records originate do not ascribe to prevailing notions of archival order, the archivist must choose whether to enforce a standardized structure on the records' arrangement. If appropriate care is not taken, these practices of imposing order can flatten or obscure the creator's personal identity.[2] This is especially true in the case of neurodivergent archival creators, who are more likely to differ in their recordkeeping practices from the norms of government and institutional archives that are codified in description standards like RAD and DACS. If a creator's methods of organization or creation are a direct extension of their neurodivergence, what is erased when their records' rough edges are smoothed to fit into a Hollinger box? One possible consequence is that neurodivergent people may be left out of the historical record. Researchers may reach the conclusion that people in the past all thought in similar ways, not because they actually did but because the contents and arrangement of their records were homogenized.

This article seeks to apply current conversations around original order and provenance to the records of neurodivergent people, a subject that is notably absent from the current archival discourse. It examines the effects of shoehorning nontraditional recordkeeping approaches to be more (neuro)typical, and it explores the implications for archives that have already been substantially reordered by custodians or archivists. Finally, it aims to envision ways in which archival theory can accommodate these differing perspectives. As a neurodivergent archivist I have often struggled to see this aspect of myself reflected in archival scholarship and curriculums, and I hope to help lay the groundwork for further research and discussion so that neurodiverse representation in archives may one day improve. I believe that an examination of how to best represent neurodiverse records benefits not just neurodivergent people but everyone—after all, messiness and alternative recordkeeping practices are common in records of neurotypical people too. Archives (specifically personal and nongovernmental archives) do not need to always be organized in specific, linear, neurotypical ways. Archivists can expand the principle of provenance to accommodate, represent, and celebrate different ways of thinking and knowing, and we must be doing that in order to make archives places where not just one kind of person belongs.

When setting out to create this article, I quickly discovered that the dearth of sources about neurodiversity in archives meant that I could not tell one single narrative drawing from archival scholarship about neurodiverse records creation. I instead had to combine a number of disparate sources, many from outside of archival studies, to begin to conceptualize a framework for imagining neurodiverse perspectives in archives. This article, then, functions in many ways as a

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[1] Archives, in other words, are not neutral.
[2] Hobbs, "Personal Ethics," 185.

collage. Specifically, I was inspired by the idea of bricolage, or of creating something new from a broad range of available materials. I have woven, taped, and glued together ideas from fiction and nonacademic writing; from disability studies, feminist and gender studies, Indigenous studies, library studies, literary analysis, and archival scholarship; from Queer, anticapitalist, and poststructuralist ideas. Hopefully, these interwoven theories may provide some level of scaffolding for future scholarship on this topic. I begin my collage by summarizing current understandings about neurological differences and neurodivergence, with a particular eye on how this is relevant to archival studies. From there, I discuss how traditional recordkeeping practices do not always accommodate differing ways of experiencing the world and externalizing information. An example of this is the archives of Emily Dickinson, in which archivists and custodians ordered and described her records in a manner that obscured the poet's nontraditional ways of thinking and recordkeeping. Finally, I conclude by envisioning some ways in which archival theory can accommodate differing kinds of brains, and imagining how principles like provenance can be expanded to accommodate more perspectives. Here, I propose the concept of variegation (*poikilia*), inspired by the work of the first-century writer Pamphila, as one approach to conceptualizing an application of provenance that could encompass neurodiverse ways of recordkeeping.

In a piece with as personal origins as this, I must acknowledge that I am writing from my positionality as a white, settler, well-educated, female-presenting person with low support needs who was formally diagnosed in adolescence. This article is both informed by my lived experience as a neurodivergent person and (early career) archivist and limited by the gaps in my perception. I cannot speak for the experiences of any neurodivergent person besides myself, and I write this partly to encourage other neurodivergent archivists to add their voices to mine. I also want to be very clear here that neurodiversity does not exist in a vacuum. This work is directly and intrinsically related to challenging white supremacy, colonialism, capitalism, heterosexism and cissexism, and other systems of oppression. Challenging systems of oppression, in archives and beyond, are inherently interlinked.

Understanding Neurodivergence in an Archival Context

When I use the term "neurodivergent," I am referring to people whose brains function in ways that diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of "normal."[3] This wide umbrella includes people with neurodevelopmental and neurological conditions, learning differences, and chronic mental health conditions. There is no one universally accepted set of boundaries for neurodivergence, but a few conditions generally considered to fall under this umbrella include autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Tourette's syndrome, dyslexia, and dyspraxia. For many people who experience such conditions, their neurodivergence is an integral part of their identity, personality, and relationship with the world and could not be taken away without fundamentally changing who they are as people.[4] Since neurodivergent people think differently than neurotypical people, it follows that they might also create and maintain records in different ways. There has been scarcely any dedicated research (in the archival field or elsewhere) about the ways neurodivergent people operate as records creators, but anecdotal evidence suggests these interactions are different than with neurotypical people. Neurodivergent people tend to be highly visual and nonlinear thinkers, and the records they create reflect this.

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[3] Hung et al., "Neurodiversity in Archives," slide 16.
[4] Hung et al., "Neurodiversity in Archives," slide 16.

Dyslexic people, for instance, face challenges reading and writing text and may instead prefer to record information in a video, audio, or visual form. Sketchnoting, a visual notetaking style that synthesizes new information through focused drawing, has grown increasingly popular with autistic and other neurodivergent learners.[5] People with ADHD also often struggle with organization and may be more likely to keep their documents in chaotic heaps (or the digital equivalent) rather than in a filing system.[6] Of course, it goes without saying that neurodivergent people are not a monolith and do not share a unified set of recordkeeping practices. But on both micro and macro levels, we can see that neurodiverse ways of externalizing information often diverge from or clash with traditional recordkeeping paradigms that center written, verbal, and linear documents in specific organizational systems.

In order to explore the nuances of neurodivergence in archives, it is essential to understand the three primary ways in which neurological difference has commonly been approached. The first two of these approaches (medical and social) come from broader models of disability, while the third (neurodiversity) is specific to neurological differences.[7] While not all neurodivergent people self-identify as being disabled, most diagnoses under the neurodiversity umbrella qualify as disabilities for the purposes of accessing accommodations and protecting against discrimination—as such, disability scholarship extends to neurodivergence.[8] The medical model "centers the problem of disability in individuals and focuses predominantly on fixing the 'deficient' and the 'afflicted.'"[9] This framework, which neurotypical doctors and psychologists have historically defaulted to, presents the neurotypical experience as "normal" and stresses the importance of preventative measures, treatments, and cures for neurological differences in order to achieve this "normality."[10] Disability scholars and disabled people have long been critical of this approach, pointing out, among other things, that "disabled people may not desire to be fixed; do not need to disavow, rise above, or overcome difference; and moreover may find identity, community, pleasure, and activism in being disabled."[11]

In contrast to the medical model, the social model depicts disability as a socially constructed phenomenon arising not from some inherent deficiency but from a lack of accommodation by society.[12] This approach focuses primarily on the ways barriers in our social and built environments can be disabling, putting onus for change not on disabled people but on the environment.[13] The last approach, neurodiversity, was first used by Autistic sociologist Judy Singer in the late 1990s and builds on the social model of disability. Singer's objective in using a paradigm of diversity was to shift discourse about different ways of thinking and learning away from notions of disorder, deficit, and impairment.[14] Instead, a neurodiversity-based approach views neurological variations as a normal part of the human condition that should be accepted, not

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[5] Boroson, "Picture This," 35.
[6] Woodruff, "Filing Cabinets Don't Work for ADHD Minds."
[7] Lawrence, "Loud Hands in the Library," 99.
[8] "What Is: Neurodiversity, Neurodivergent, Neurotypical."
[9] Lawrence, "Loud Hands in the Library," 99.
[10] This approach is often seen in narratives about autism like those advanced by Autism Speaks.
[11] Brilmyer, "Toward a Crip Provenance," 10.
[12] Lawrence, "Loud Hands in the Library," 100.
[13] Brilmyer, "Toward a Crip Provenance," 17.
[14] "What Is: Neurodiversity, Neurodivergent, Neurotypical."

eliminated.[15] In this article, I use "neurodiversity" (and its related adjective "neurodivergent") as a general umbrella term to describe those who think, learn, and behave differently than people with more "typical" brains.[16] This term also highlights my position that brains operate in myriad ways, rather than simply "normal" and "abnormal." I recognize that not everyone with neurological differences embraces or self-identifies with the neurodiversity paradigm, but I still use it to frame my discussion here.[17] In addition to the reasons outlined above, I feel this approach is the most inclusive of the wide range of factors that affect how brains work, as well as of people whose brains work differently but who have not been formally diagnosed with a neurodivergent condition. Moreover, the paradigm's resistance against pathologizing or "curing" aligns directly with my argument. Instead of viewing recordkeeping environments that deviate from the standard as "incorrect," a neurodiversity-informed archival approach frames variation as natural and seeks to accommodate that variation within theory and practice.

Given that our understanding of neurodivergence is still developing, it perhaps is not surprising that it has scarcely been considered by the archival field. People with disabilities have historically been left out of the archival record, and of the few archives that do actively document disabled perspectives, neurodivergent perspectives are largely absent.[18] Despite neurodivergent individuals making up an estimated 15 percent of the general populace, neurodiverse representation in archival collections, archival literature, and the archival workforce is sparse.[19] As mentioned above, this in part reflects the scarce (but growing) understanding of neurodiversity in broader society. Diagnoses like autism and ADHD have only existed for less than a century, and although there certainly were neurodivergent people in the past whose records have been preserved in archives, this facet of these individuals is largely invisible. In a related vein, the effects of neurodivergence are often nonvisible or concealable. Many people who know they are neurodivergent choose not to self-disclose as such in professional or public settings to avoid facing stigma and discrimination.[20] Many more people who may meet neurodivergent diagnostic criteria, especially racialized people and people assigned female at birth, remain undiagnosed as an effect of systemic inequality in the medical system. Because of these factors, an individual's neurodivergence can often get left out of finding aids. The Venn diagram of archival creators and people who publicly identify as neurodiverse is currently incredibly slim. This will likely broaden over time as more neurodivergent people donate their records to archives, but archivists still can and should do better in representing neurodiversity now.

Neurodivergent representation in archives can take a variety of forms. As stated above, it can mean including records created by neurodivergent people describing their experiences of being neurodivergent. An example of this is an interview with Camron Parsley in the Kentucky Oral History Collection at the Kentucky Historical Society, in which Parsley talks specifically about

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[15] Lawrence, "Loud Hands in the Library," 99.

[16] "Neurodivergent" refers to an individual while "neurodiversity" refers to the paradigm of talking about neuro-divergent people as a group.

[17] "What Is: Neurodiversity, Neurodivergent, Neurotypical." A common critique of neurodiversity is that it can shift focus away from these conditions as disabilities and minimize the challenges people with neurological differences face, especially those with more significant impairments.

[18] White, "Crippling the Archives," 110.

[19] "Neurodiversity and Other Conditions."

[20] "Who Do You Tell about Your ADHD?"

living as a teenager with ADHD.[21] More generally, archives can seek to include the fonds of neurodiverse creators, even if all or most of their records do not deal specifically with their neurodivergent identity. It is important, though, that the finding aid (likely in the biographical sketch) includes the fact that the creator was neurodivergent *if* that was an identity they held and publicly disclosed. For example, the Papers of Temple Grandin at Colorado State University Archives and Special Collections mostly contains materials related to Grandin's work in the animal sciences industry and her professorship at the university, but Grandin's autistic identity is also highlighted in the finding aid.[22]

In instances in which neurodiverse records are described, this language should engage with neurodiversity holistically, inclusively, and sensitively. Librarian and Autistic self-advocate Emily Lawrence pointed out in a 2013 essay that when neurological difference is discussed in library and information studies (LIS) scholarship, it is almost exclusively by neurotypical authors writing for a presumed neurotypical audience. This results in an overuse of medical and pathologizing language, stereotypical or insensitive portrayals of neurodivergent people, and a focus on children and parents/caregivers rather than on neurodivergent adults with their own agency. Notably absent from LIS scholarship on neurodiversity, Lawrence concludes, are the wants and needs of actual neurodivergent patrons and staff.[23] To counteract this in an archival context, archivists need to center neurodiverse voices in descriptions of neurodivergent creators—whether that is the creator's own input, the work of neurodivergent archivists, or language developed in consultation with neurodivergent self-advocates. The conscious collection of records by and about self-identified neurodivergent creators is undoubtedly important in increasing representation of neurodiversity in archives, but I want to focus here on another, less tangible kind of representation—making space for neurodiverse records creation, use, and storage within the archival principle of provenance. Traditional archival ideas, as I demonstrate below, do not always accommodate the records common among neurodivergent people, or indeed messy records at all.

Interrogating Standardized Applications of Provenance

When we look at foundational archival theory and early methodology, we can often see clear parallels to the medical model of disability with a focus on a dominant "normal" and on "making whole." Archival literature has traditionally approached the principle of provenance (and subprinciples of *respect des fonds* and original order) with the perspective that cohesiveness and completeness are the ideal that archivists should strive to maintain. After all, *respect des fonds* is concerned with maintaining the whole of a creator's records as a cohesive unit, and original order is concerned with preserving the order imposed by the creator.[24] Influential early theorists (including Samuel Muller, Robert Fruin, and Johan Adriaan Feith) viewed the fonds as a living body that needed to be kept whole and intact, and used language of dismemberment to describe fonds that had been separated or reordered.[25] Furthermore, traditional theorists typically saw the principle of provenance as universally applicable to archives—T. R. Schellenberg, for instance,

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[21] Camron Parsley (oral history interview), October 8, 2010, in Kentucky Oral History Commission, *Living with Difference*.

[22] Temple Grandin Papers.

[23] Lawrence, "Loud Hands in the Library," 104, 102–3.

[24] "'The Only Way We Knew How,'" 7.

[25] Muller, Fruin, and Feith, *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*, 36.

asserted that it is "basic and inflexible."[26] This perspective allows for a universal and objective application of archival theory in order to preserve the records' context, but it tends to break down when confronted with archives (often personal archives) that do not fit into a particular mold. In such cases, a standard structure is frequently enforced across an institution, making the organization of fonds seem uniform even when that was not originally the case. As Athanasios Velios states, this arguably "makes the individuality of archives disappear . . . because, in a sense, they are being lost within larger collections of big institutions."[27] Uniformity and standardization are important in many archival contexts, but they do not properly serve the archives of individuals. Much as the neurodiversity paradigm promotes acceptance of a wide variety of brains, there is need for a set of archival principles that account for more complex realities of records creation.

More recent scholarship has begun to expand the conception of provenance beyond a single narrow interpretation. This perspective "facilitates what is considered when thinking about the history of a record—parallel, secondary, imagined, and multiple histories."[28] This is evident in Jessica M. Lapp's concept of "provenancial fabulation," which accounts for a "multiplicity of record creating contexts and plays with the spatial and temporal boundaries of records and archives."[29] Lapp reenvisions a principle of provenance that "aligns with feminist understanding of knowledge generation, circulation, stewardship, and use."[30] In doing so, she argues that provenance is not fixed or singular but can be adapted to the realities of records and their creators. Perhaps most saliently, Gracen Brilmyer's work has applied a disability studies perspective to the principle of provenance.[31] Brilmyer's framework of "Crip Provenance" argues that just as disabled bodyminds are cast as a difference from the norm but do not need to be "cured" or restored to a perceived former whole, so too are fonds.[32]

The Archival Body and Divergent Mind of Emily Dickinson

The practical effects of an archival emphasis on curing and making whole are particularly visible in the manuscripts and records of the canonical nineteenth-century American poet Emily Dickinson (1830–1886). While no such diagnosis existed in her lifetime, Dickinson has sometimes been described as being on the autism spectrum by modern theorists.[33] This is only speculation and is impossible to confirm (and I do not attempt to do so here), but it is true that Dickinson's ways of thinking and being were viewed as different by her contemporaries.[34] There is evidence in Dickinson's poems and letters that she experienced sensory sensitivities, and she demonstrated

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[26] Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives*, 104.

[27] Velios, "Creative Archiving," 261.

[28] Brilmyer, "Toward a Crip Provenance," 8.

[29] Lapp, "'The Only Way We Knew How,'" 1; Brilmyer, "Toward a Crip Provenance," 8.

[30] Lapp, "'The Only Way We Knew How,'" 15.

[31] Brilmyer, "Archival Assemblages"; Brilmyer, "Toward a Crip Provenance."

[32] Brilmyer, "Toward a Crip Provenance," 9. The term "bodyminds," which comes from disability studies, is an approach to understand and represent the interconnected relationship between the body and mind. I believe it is an apt term to illustrate that the ableist assumptions of wholeness in archival theory apply to the mind as well as to the body.

[33] In her 2010 book *Writers on the Spectrum*, Julie Brown asserts with confidence that Emily Dickinson was autistic based on factors like her purported sensory sensitivities, narrow but intense interests, and extreme social behaviors. I disagree with Brown's presumption that it is possible to conclusively diagnose someone who has been dead for over a century, but the idea that Dickinson *might* have been neurodivergent provides an interesting lens through which to view her records.

[34] Higginson, "Emily Dickinson's Letters."

social behaviors that could be described as extreme. People that knew her during her lifetime perceived her as being enigmatic and unique. Eccentric and often reclusive, Dickinson lived life in her own way.

The records she left behind similarly resisted classification and order, existing as a disparate and jumbled assemblage rather than an organized and unified whole. In a letter to her friend and editor Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Dickinson admitted that "I had no monarch in my life, and cannot rule myself; and when I try to organize, my little force explodes and leaves me bare and charred."[35] Her archives contain her polished manuscripts in handmade, handwritten booklets called "fascicles" but also on unbound sheets and scraps of paper. They contain "letters sent, letters never sent, poems sent in letters, poems written within letters, crickets pinned to sheets of paper including poems, drawings, mixed media collages, recipes and pieces of paper practicing signatures, single letter shapes and other miscellaneous documents."[36] What Dickinson did not leave, however, were any records (like diaries or published works) in which she presented a dominant and controlled narrative about herself. Dickinson's biographer Alfred Habegger writes that "the consequences of the poet's failure to disseminate her work in a faithful and orderly manner are still very much with us."[37] I would argue that Dickinson's not "faithfully and orderly" disseminating her work was hardly a failure but rather a conscious choice based on her personality and ways of thinking; still, the fact that she did not control her own legacy means that everything we have of her is mediated through the lens of others.

As Jessica Jean Beard states in her literature doctoral dissertation on Dickinson's archives, "all that is known about her and her work has come from the trunk of manuscripts she left behind. How these items were organized, if at all, is unknown. They have been split up, sorted, and published by handfuls of editors and archivists." In other words, the original order of these records has long been lost. Beard continues that "each of these actions has come without much knowledge of the poet and her work, and each one also works to construct some idea of those things." Not only was Dickinson's identity reconstructed, Beard argues, but the canonical Dickinson we know today was actively constructed through archival structures.[38] The custodians who shaped and reshaped Dickinson's records after her death sought to portray a more presentable and conventional version of her, and frequently altered the records and their organizational structure to achieve this. Many of Dickinson's few surviving letters have had words or phrases cut out of the text ("scissored deletions") by someone in a deliberate act of censorship that likely sought to conceal a later-in-life romance with an elderly judge.[39] Poems that existed in various disparate and incomplete forms were amalgamated by editors to produce the body of work we know today.[40]

Dickinson's papers were divided into two groups after her death—one in the care of her brother's wife and the other in the care of his mistress—and eventually donated to two different archives. Of course, Emily Dickinson is by no means the first or only literary figure to have their archives split up. What makes this reordering noteworthy, however, is that it impacts our understanding of

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[35] Higginson, "Emily Dickinson's Letters."
[36] Beard, "'Bound—a Trouble—,'" 14.
[37] Habegger, *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books*, 628.
[38] Beard, "'Bound—a Trouble—,'" 6, vi.
[39] Habegger, *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books*, 587.
[40] Beard, "'Bound—a Trouble—,'" 49–50.

Dickinson and her work, creating a blank(er) canvas on which to cast her in a normalized light. As Beard states, "Her archive has been shaped by the editing and organizing habits of those hoping to shape her poems into a narrative of American literary history. Dickinson's difficult archive has been edited out in her printed texts, resulting in clean poems and a poet whose life and work makes narrative sense." When the original order of Dickinson's records was destroyed, much of who she was as a person and creator was also lost. Beard writes that "a stable archive with clean, understandable printed poems reveals nothing about the messy archive Dickinson actually left us," adding that "the enclosure imposed upon a set of materials changes the meaning of those materials."[41] Just as we will never know what the original order of Dickinson's fonds was, it is also impossible to say conclusively what the lasting ramifications of the shaping and reshaping of her records are. However, it is fair to assume that one byproduct of this was a flattening of the multidimensionality Emily Dickinson held in life.

While Dickinson's case is a particularly notable example, acts of ordering and reordering are commonplace in archives (and especially personal archives). Catherine Hobbs writes that "at the point of acquisition, archivists encounter archives in various states of rawness in terms of order. The newest document may yet be on the desk. Others may be grouped in piles, heaped in folders on the desk, or spread in a swath across surfaces, and still others may be neatly filed away in drawers or boxed in the attic." Archivists, then, must arrange these messy piles and disparate accumulations into a cohesive whole that is neatly ordered in document boxes and a finding aid. Even with the best of intentions and stringent regard for original order, some aspect of the creator's personhood is inevitably lost in this transition. Hobbs is critical of archivists' tendency to smooth out messiness in their descriptions of fonds. By not including information about records' original states in finding aids, she argues, "archivists give the impression that the fonds, or at least the fonds conveyed through the description, is consistent in form. These descriptions imply orderliness. This 'dressing up' of personal lives diminishes the human aspect of the material and borders on the unethical."[42] This sentiment is echoed by the archivist protagonist of Isaac Fellman's novel *Dead Collections*, who muses of a donation with no discernable order: "I know it doesn't do anything for the researchers, but there's this sentimental side of me that just says—here—this came to me a mess and I'll give it to you a mess. I don't want to organize it at all. This is a rich, hoardy, information-bearing mess. This is a primordial mess. This is the shape of a person's mind, the carved pink eraser of the brain. This will tell you everything you need to know."[43] Hobbs and Fellman are not specifically talking here about neurodiversity, but their arguments seem especially relevant to the consideration of neurodivergent archives. How many potentially neurodivergent creators, like Emily Dickinson, were made to seem neurotypical (or at least more conventional) in the records they left behind?

It may be tempting, when considering this erasure, to fall back into notions of Dickinson's original order as an ideal that ought to be reconstructed. However, Gracen Brilmyer's Crip Provenance framework specifically cautions against these ideas.[44] Brilmyer writes that "when emphasis is

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[41] Beard, "'Bound—a Trouble—,'" 14, 34, 26.

[42] Hobbs, "Personal Ethics," 185.

[43] Fellman, *Dead Collections*, 35.

[44] While Brilmyer's framework comes from a contemporary standpoint, this position is certainly not new or unique. Foundational archival theory (see Muller, Feith, and Fruin's *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*, 83) states that once the original order of a fonds is lost it is usually impossible to reconstruct it.

placed on restoring a former whole, archivists may overlook the impossible—a 'complete' fonds may have never existed." It is regrettable that Dickinson's records were altered and reordered in the ways they were, but there was never a halcyon moment in which all of the records she created and received were compiled together in one place. Dickinson's records—like all personal records—were always in flux, and there was no single point in time at which these records were at their most complete. Instead of longing for a former whole that might not have actually existed, Brilmyer's framework "encourages us to embrace records' realities—in other words, to meet records where they are at *literally* (dispersed and duplicated in different archives) and *figuratively* (as temporally, spatially, and historically situated yet always already incomplete)."[45]

As Beard succinctly puts it, "The Dickinson archive is already edited, plural, scattered, and incomplete at the moment we look to it for answers."[46] Just as disability studies scholarship rejects the idea that "what existed before is superior to what exists currently" and that "what is damaged" should be returned to a perceived former state of wholeness, this framework rejects the idea that an imagined former whole is superior to records' current states.[47] Unlike the earlier custodians, editors, and archivists who reshaped the mess of Dickinson's records to fit a conventional narrative, we must accept and embrace this messy state. Beard captures this well when she writes, "Dickinson's work as an unsettled archive will evade all attempts to normalize, organize, and collect. The best we can hope to do is imagine conceptions of the author, the poem, the book and the edition to be flexible enough to allow these complications and contradictions to be exposed and to exist."[48] When archives resist the impulse to make whole, we should not force wholeness on them.

Toward a Neurodiversity-Informed Archival Praxis

This paper has examined fonds that do not fit perfectly within traditional conceptions of wholeness and completeness, but the question remains of how to accommodate these records in mainstream archival theory and practice. I take inspiration here from Marisa Elena Duarte and Miranda Belarde-Lewis's work on imagining, which they conceptualize as a decolonizing methodology to "create new spaces for Indigenous ontologies to emerge," rather than trying to fit Indigenous ways of knowing into settler-colonial knowledge organization systems.[49] Drawing from this, could we begin to imagine new ways of organizing and representing the records of neurodivergent people, instead of forcing them to fit into dominant, Western archival structures? Writing from a feminist knowledge information perspective, Melissa Adler states that "dismantling systems . . . requires not simply updating, revising, or adding to them, but inhabiting and re-inscribing spaces using techniques and language from outside of those systems."[50] Adler draws from the work of Pamphila, a female first-century miscellanist whose massive thirty-three-volume history was organized not by categories or chronology of events but by the order in which she originally came

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[45] Brilmyer, "Toward a Crip Provenance," 9, 13.
[46] Beard, "'Bound—a Trouble—,'" 15.
[47] Eli Clare, quoted in Brilmyer, "Toward a Crip Provenance," 11.
[48] Beard, "'Bound—a Trouble—,'" 193–94.
[49] Duarte and Belarde-Lewis. "Imagining," 686.
[50] Adler, "Eros in the Library," 67.

across the information.[51] This system was derived from weaving and embroidery and privileged aesthetic beauty along with historical accuracy and usefulness. Pamphila's seemingly disordered and random organizing method stemmed from a conscious choice to move beyond conventional systems, just as neurodivergent ways of organization make sense to the brains they originate from (if not always to the wider world). In the words of the Byzantine writer Photius, Pamphila "thought that mixture and variety (*poikilia*) were . . . more delightful and enjoyable . . . than division by single topic."[52] The nuanced Ancient Greek word *poikilia*, often loosely translated as "mixture and variety" or "embroidery," comes from textile arts and describes the visual effect of multiple different colors or materials on an object.[53] More than that, it is also "an adjective applicable to anything variegated, complex, or shifting."[54] Adler writes that "the aesthetics of *poikilia* privileges a '*harmonia* that does not unify' by conveying the singularities and variations that comprise a diverse whole. All elements retain their own qualities while interacting with one another and the larger universe. In other words, *poikilia* privileges diversity, complexity, and togetherness."[55]

Can a similar framework be used to make space for neurodiverse and nontraditional brains in an archival setting? It is true that we cannot simply abandon traditional Western archival theory completely, but *poikilia* reminds us that a whole comprises myriad diverse perspectives and that there is beauty in considering all of them. Pulling from this idea, we might imagine an application of provenance that is not uniform but instead variegated. Like a pothos leaf or a tortoiseshell cat, this approach presents a cohesive whole that still allows for multidimensionality. Rather than forcing neurodivergent creators to conform to a set of "normal" recordkeeping practices, we should instead be asking how our archival principles can accommodate neurodiverse perspectives as a different color of a variegated whole. This means rethinking an application of provenance as universal and unchanging across all records in a repository, and unlearning the idea that there is one correct way for records to be ordered.[56] It could also mean experimenting with finding aid formats that are visual, dynamic, and nonlinear for fonds that might resist static and hierarchical classification. By creatively and empathetically "meeting records where they are at," rather than attempting to impose a single organizational system, archivists can better represent neurodivergent creators in their arrangement and description practices.

One of the clearest applications of variegated order lies in the concept of creative archiving, as introduced by Athanasios Velios. Velios draws here from his work creating the digital archive of the British conceptual artist John Latham, whose body of scientific and philosophical theories underpinned his artwork, and who developed his own filing and ontological classification systems. A dominant theme in Latham's art is that of the event, or the relationship between time and creation. Latham utilized a typology (*minits*) to classify events and further extended this thinking to create a scale (the Time-Base Spectrum) for mapping the duration of an event. Latham also proposed three frameworks—based on the Time-Base Spectrum and modeled after the characters of the eponymous three brothers in the Russian novel *The Brothers Karamazov*—for describing

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[51] Adler, "Eros in the Library," 67. Pamphila (or Pamphile) of Epidaurus, who was of Egyptian descent, lived in Greece during the reign of the Roman emperor Nero in the first century AD. Virtually none of her writing survives today, and the little that is known of her comes from descriptions in other sources.

[52] Photius of Constantinople, quoted in Adler, "Eros in the Library," 68.

[53] Adler, "Eros in the Library," 69.

[54] Ann Carson, quoted in Adler, "Eros in the Library," 69.

[55] Adler, "Eros in the Library," 69.

[56] Of course, this approach is less applicable to governmental or institutional recordkeeping systems.

different ways people can approach a situation and understand truth. This trichotomy is most evident in the structure of Latham's *Observer* series (1959–1960), which contains discrete elements conceptualized respectively as Mitya (impulse), Ivan (reason), and Alyosha (intuition).[57]

In arranging and describing this fonds, Velios sought to incorporate Latham's conceptual structures into the records' arrangement. While this individualized approach is not an overt attempt to represent a neurodivergent brain, Velios does articulate that Latham's unique conceptual and theoretical structure would be diminished with a conventional archival arrangement. Velios portrays this as a radical interpretation by the archivist; without Latham himself alive to provide feedback, Velios had to rely on his own interpretation of the artist's ideas and work to arrange his fonds. Velios's approach is rooted in a desire to create a system of organization informed by the creator's order, as well as an acknowledgment that such an endeavor can only ever be an outsider's interpretation. Rather than impose one single intellectual order on the records, Velios instead opted to create a system of description with several different lenses through which the records could be mediated by a user. These were based on Latham's Karamazov Brothers frameworks. Users of the digital Latham archives can choose whether to access records as impulsive Mitya (a casual observer interested in simply browsing the collection's highlights), reason-driven Ivan (a researcher performing direct, detailed queries to retrieve item-level records), or intuitive Alyosha (a visitor seeking to gain a holistic understanding of Latham's life and work). Both the Ivan and Alyosha approaches allow a user to search the archives, but where an Ivan user queries a database via keyword search, an Alyosha user relies on a Latham-specific classification system using numbered time-bases.[58] As such, the archive represents a variegated application of provenance, where within the same body of records there exists several opposite but complementary structural systems. Digital tools are used to represent an interpretation of structure, but a single organizational system is not imposed on the records by the archivist. Such a customized, individual application does sit somewhat at odds with the large backlogs and MPLP (more product, less process) ideologies that are the reality of many archivists, but a variegated approach can still inform the interpretation and representation of neurodivergent or otherwise unruly archives. Whatever their practical realities, archivists must recognize that provenance is not universally applicable and that some level of care and individualism is necessary in approaching the records of neurodivergent creators.

That said, there is still the need to move beyond "high-level, theoretical discussion about the need to expand the principle of provenance" to better understand how neurodiverse archives are created over time and how best to work with them.[59] For this, we need more empirical research to broaden the horizons of our understanding. That could look like a series of interviews with neurodivergent creators about their records creation and recordkeeping processes. Or it could take the shape of an author examining and assessing the ways the archives of prominent neurodivergent figures have been arranged and described. I also want to emphasize the importance of voices from neurodiverse archivists more generally in furthering this conversation. While this article has focused mainly on neurodivergent creators, it is important to work toward creating environments where neurodivergent employees are hired in archives *and* feel comfortable and safe revealing this aspect

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[57] Velios, "Creative Archiving," 263, 262, 264, 265.
[58] Velios, "Creative Archiving," 266, 267.
[59] Jennifer Douglas, quoted in Lapp, "'The Only Way We Knew How,'" 2.

of their identity, and are given the support they need to thrive in their work environment.[60] A key aspect of representation is visibility, but that will not occur if archival spaces are hostile to neurodivergent (and generally non cis, straight, white, male, abled, and Western) ways of thinking and being. As the archival profession grows and evolves, it is crucial to continually be asking ourselves how we can best represent and be inclusive of the "broad spectrum of human experience."[61] This neither begins nor ends with neurodiversity, but making space for neurodivergent perspectives in archives is a valuable part of this process.

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[60] Eng, "Neurodiversity in the Library."
[61] F. Gerald Ham, quoted in White, "Crippling the Archives," 110.

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