Code and Poetry 09-22-14 : files and filing

* What is a file?
* The file in relation to the structures/epistemology of knowledge
* Most of our knowledge about the world is second-hand – often carried through a textual medium
  + How is that knowledge captured by you?
  + Last week we focused on the starting point of a text (the writer), now we’re focusing on end point (the reader)
  + Knowledge is not completely contained in your head
    - Ever since the moment of reading, there’s decay
    - We build cognitive structures/scaffolding to work against the decay
      * Notes
    - The texts argue for a range of materials we should study – index cards, notebooks, files
    - Political transparency – what information should the gov’t capture in the mesh? What should we have access to?
    - If knowledge isn’t just in your head, but involves efficiency in storing, retrieving, accessing a vast store of information around you, then maybe we should focus on developing these organizational skills
* Bush
  + Post-WWII article
    - Birth of informatics during the war
    - Bush was a scientist/administrator during the war
      * Trying to think what scientists can do now that the war is over
  + Benefits of science
    - Control of material environment
    - “Science has provided the swiftest communication between individuals; it has provided a record of ideas and has enabled man to manipulate and to make extracts from that record so that knowledge evolves and endures throughout the life of a race rather than that of an individual.”
      * System is captured and preserved in some way – the written record of science survives (see Bruno Latour – “Laboratory Life”)
        + The lab techs are less trained, the educated/important lab workers are in charge of recording the process/results
  + Once you capture something on paper, the way it’s distributed has largely remained the same
  + Personal versus communal knowledge – very few of us know how to make a car, computer, etc.
    - There are nations which do not have the technological ability to make a car (or something else)
    - Bush realizes that individual people know very little compared to what is captured in the record
      * Useful to know how to manipulate knowledge structures
      * We produce knowledge with little care about how it will fit into the grand scheme of total knowledge/knowledge structures
      * Bush realizes we’re overwhelmed by information
  + A file is something that can be extended – storage, transmission, access
    - Hanging file represented a huge advancement in science – allowed us to be much more efficient in navigating the knowledge structure
      * OS is the file of today
    - Is a file itself a medium?
  + Tons of information – have to filter out what’s important (a doctor putting together symptoms to find possible diagnoses) – infinite info > something smaller > something smaller
    - File as intermediary in identifying something important
  + When you start thinking of some critical term, put that down and then other related terms to create a semantic cloud (i.e. file, record)
  + Recording everything – makes more vulnerable to control? Extends human capabilities? Both?
  + Notion of natural human capacity being threatened by technology
    - Phaedra
  + Many systems (hospitals, universities) are filing systems to a large extent, so we need to work on understanding how it’s instituted
    - Problem in contemporary life: filing systems grow around us, but we don’t take them seriously, try to learn/teach them, instead abnegate the process to someone else without viewing it as having any political effect
      * Authority/power surging through network of storage – ability to retrieve what’s important
  + Knowledge structures as furniture – the memex desk
  + Foresees the search issue (which is still an issue) – still we don’t know how to go through millions of documents