specific models for the analysis, description, and reproduction of watermarks, and a gamut of tools with which researchers can access, compare, and exchange them on universal platforms. Many of the articles are accompanied by staggering tables of information with respect to paper stocks and types, along with pages of reproductions of the minute transformations of the wiremarks found in paper sources, all of which are hard to comprehend without a previous understanding of the history and research potential of watermarks. One also comes to realize that the reproduction of watermarks is a thorny problem, made evident by some of the rather low-definition illustrations in the volume. It is hoped that once the pertinent decisions are made with respect to the proposed standards, many more researchers will be encouraged to pursue watermark study as a critical activity in any bibliographical enquiry involving paper formats.

ANN MARIE HOLLAND

Montreal

Nicholson Baker. *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper*. New York: Random House, 2001. xii, 370 pp.; \$ 38.95 (hardcover). ISBN 0-375-50444-3.

A constant criticism of professional literature in all fields is that it is dull and boring, fails to refer to the external world, and is largely unreadable by specialists and non-specialists alike. These complaints are frequently true, and no doubt account for the havoc and dismay occurring whenever outsiders bother to read the literature, take it seriously, relate it to outside realities, and present it in a readable form to a general audience.

Which brings us to Nicholas Baker, who has made a career of studying books, bibliography, and libraries from an external perspective. His 1996 article, on the destruction of card catalogues, "The Author vs. the Library" (*New Yorker* 14 October 1996) attracted much public attention as did his collection of essays, *The Size of Thoughts* (Vintage, 1997). *Double Fold* is by far his most ambitious effort and constitutes a remarkable tour de force. With 63 pages of endnotes, a 400-item bibliography, and broadly-based external perspectives, Baker has undertaken a detailed analysis of post-World War II book preservation/conservation theory and practice as

undertaken in libraries. His particular concern is with microforms (microfilm, microfiche, and micro-cards), along with digitization, lamination, and mass de-acidification. Understandably, this book is creating a sensation within both the professional and lay press. *Searcher* 9, no. 6 (June 2001) (available on *Lexis-Nexis*) lists many reviews, in addition to a scathing critique.

Although the book has been dismissed in some circles as a rant and polemic, its scholarship and investigative detail raise it well above that level. That said, it is most assuredly a work of advocacy – but one that also recognizes alternative opinions. Baker does more, however, than merely describe opposing sides, from which the reader may choose one. Rather, he uses his gifts as a reporter and novelist to paint a compelling picture, leading inexorably to particular conclusions. Put simply, Baker argues that although microfilmed and digitized versions of books, newspapers, and other printed materials are fine and helpful, they are no substitute for the original. In a single-minded manner he has mined the professional literature to produce a damning indictment not only of book preservation activities of the past fifty years, but also particular individuals.

With iconoclastic zeal, he questions the motives and judgment of respected figures in American librarianship including every Librarian of Congress, from Archibald MacLeish to James Billington. Well-known figures such as William Barrow, Verner Clapp, Vartan Gregorian, Warren Haas, Robert Hayes, Keyes Metcalfe, John Ottemiller, Fremont Rider, Peter Sparks, Allen Veaner, and William Welsh – among others – are critically examined and evaluated. The activities of a wide range of institutions are held up for critical review, including: the Association of Research Libraries, Bell and Howell, the British Library, the CIA, Columbia University, Cornell University, the Council on Library Resources, the Defense Department (US), Harvard University, Kodak, the Library of Congress, MIT, the Mellon Foundation, NASA, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the New York Public Library, RCA, Stanford University, University Microfilms, and Yale University. In short, Baker has mounted a frontal attack upon some of the most powerful library/information institutions and individuals of the past half century.

Special attention and criticism are reserved, however, for Patricia Battin and the Commission on Preservation and Access, which she headed from 1987 to 1994. Battin, who was previously Head Librarian of Columbia University, has long been an advocate of digital libraries.

Baker argues that she and the Commission embraced the mass conversion of paper copies of books into digital formats as a way of providing content for the new technology. The funding for this conversion, he further argues, came from convincing charitable foundations and the American government that a brittle book crisis existed and that millions of books were turning to dust. With quotes from publications and interviews with Battin and others connected with the Commission, he details the contradictions and hyperbole of their rhetoric. Films of advocacy such as "Slow Fires" and the CBC's "Turning to Dust" are discussed. He also outlines the mass destruction of paper-based publications and the limitations of the new technology. In essence, he argues that the crisis is not with paper-based books and other similar publications, but with the long-term archival longevity of microform and digital copies.

Bibliographers and book historians may well feel conflicting loyalties on reading this book. On the one hand, it is impossible not to support Baker's plea for the conservation, in their original state, of books and other paper-based graphic materials, and to oppose their mass destruction for the sake of conversion to other formats, whose longevity is most unclear. On the other hand, we have all encountered newspapers and other publications whose poor physical condition demands conversion to other formats. In addition, we have all benefitted from microform and digital access to otherwise inaccessible material. The Bibliographical Society of Canada is currently digitizing its *Papers*, in order to extend their availability.

The intellectual inspiration for this book comes from Thomas Tanselle's *Literature and Artifacts* (Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 1998), which has alerted scholarly audiences to the need to preserve graphic materials in their original state. The emotional inspiration comes from Baker's love of old newspapers and his concern with the inadequacy of microform and digital copies. Furthermore, he is outraged that many mass conversion projects mutilate books and newspapers by sawing off their spines in order to facilitate microfilming and scanning. The policy motivating these projects, he argues, is the desire of libraries to reduce their book collections in order to cope with space/storage problems. Needless to say, he is unimpressed by the economic and other arguments behind such policies. Baker's response has been the creation of the American Newspaper Depository, a non-profit organization "to acquire preserve, and make available to the public, original newspapers of historic and scholarly interest that would otherwise

be destroyed or dispersed into private ownership.” Depending upon your point of view, this response may be completely Quixotic or entirely laudatory.

The major reason why this book has created such a sensation may, however, be due less to its content than to Baker’s skill in presenting his case. His mordant, satiric style will quickly bring the reader to tears and laughter. His description in Chapter 13 of an explosion occurring during a mass de-acidification operation on 5 December 1985 elicits horror and hilarity. His ability to cast an air of charlatanism around the doings of respected individuals and institutions makes them liable to public ridicule. This book is essential reading for anyone interested in books, bibliography, and libraries. We await with impatience, dread, and fascination Mr. Baker’s next missive – along with its righteous indignation.

PETER F. MCNALLY

McGill University