

Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage:^a Issues in the Appraisal of Archival Sources

by HANS BOOMS¹

Editors' Introduction

*Hans Booms' article "Gesellschaftsordnung und Überlieferungsbildung: Zur Problematik archivarischer Quellenbewertung" originally appeared in *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 68 (1972), pp. 3-40 and is reprinted here with the kind permission of that publication and of the author. The work is an expansion of an address delivered by Booms at the opening of the German Archives Conference in 1971. The text published below is an English translation of the article in its entirety — the first such translation to appear anywhere in the English-language archival literature.*

At first glance, one may be struck by two features of the piece: its age and its familiarity. It was written fully fifteen years ago and, in view of major advances in the reproduction, manipulation, storage, and retrieval of information since that time, could be considered hopelessly outdated. Furthermore, Booms' ideas have been cited quite regularly in the North American literature on archival appraisal. What, then, is the justification for publishing the Booms article at this time?

First of all, while it is true that archivists have initiated many changes in the administration of archives, especially in the area of automated storage and access, very little has changed in the way they appraise records under their care. Only a few studies on appraisal appeared in the 1970s and early 1980s, and those few simply tinkered with methods and theories developed by American archivists just after the Second World War.

a The single German term *Überlieferungsbildung* takes in meanings and concepts which confound any attempts to translate it into acceptable English: the translation is inevitably either superficial and incomplete or painfully awkward to read. We have opted for painful awkwardness in an effort to salvage as many of the nuances of meaning Booms draws upon throughout the article. *Überlieferung* is usually translated as "tradition," but this does not convey enough of the image of a culture being passed on from the past to the present and into the future. *Überlieferung* is also something that must have a concrete but perishable form which present day society, as heir to the past, must actively acquire and preserve. Given the context of Booms' article, the term "documentary heritage" serves the original quite well. The German *bildung* refers to an act of shaping, molding, or forming something (as opposed to actually creating it out of nothing). Hence our offering, "the formation of a documentary heritage."

1 Revised and expanded version of the opening address given at the German Archives Conference 1971 and subtitled: "Problems of Archival Appraisal." A condensed version has been published in *Der Archivar* 25 (1972), cols. 23-28.

For that matter, one would be extremely hard put to find any mention at all of archival appraisal within the pages of *Archivaria* during the (admittedly brief) tenure of its existence up to now, let alone a full-fledged treatment of the problem. Archival appraisal has only very recently regained its status as the most important topic of discussion in North American archival journals, most notably in *The American Archivist*.

Secondly, although a number of English-speaking writers have referred to Booms in their studies, they have restricted their assessments to his ideas on practical methodology. Booms' scholarly and ground-breaking discussion on the societal role of the archivist as appraiser, on the nature and development of appraisal theory in Germany, and on the social, political, and philosophical issues behind archival appraisal have generally been completely overlooked. Therefore, we believe that the translation and publication of Booms' article in its entirety at this time would be of great benefit to the North American archival community.

Although the ideas and conclusions presented in Booms' article speak for themselves, it is helpful to place them within the context of the time and place in which they were developed. To this end, Dr. Booms has provided the editors with information about the political and intellectual conditions that influenced and generated the ideas formulated in his 1972 article, the response of European archivists to those ideas, and his hopes for the article's introduction into the English-speaking archival community.

Booms was born in 1924 and completed his archival education between 1946 and 1957. He began work as an archivist at the German Federal Archives in 1955, of which institution he is now President. While post-war Germany witnessed a major reorientation in its political, social, and cultural life, the archival profession remained heavily influenced by what Booms characterizes as the "authoritarian ideas of the 20s and 30s in Germany" maintained by a still-dominant "earlier Prussian" school of archival science. Therefore, Booms began in 1965 to write articles in which he sought to develop an alternative to the German archival science of his day, one that was more consistent with the democratic principles upon which the German Federal Republic was founded. His ideas were the objects of especially severe attacks from archivists in the German Democratic Republic, whose critiques appeared in various issues of their official journal, *Archivmitteilungen*. In response, Booms felt himself compelled to examine East German claims that an archival science based on Marxist-Leninist ideology was somehow superior. The article translated here, therefore, is the product of such an examination and as such serves as a devastating indictment of East German archival theory and practice.

Needless to say, the reaction of East German archivists, as it was expressed in subsequent issues of *Archivmitteilungen*, was not favourable. In the German-speaking west, the intensity of the reactions to the political aspects of the article varied — understandably, given that archivists generally tend to avoid heated political debates. Yet, while much of Booms' article is a critique of both the traditional Prussian and the later Marxist approaches to archives administration, which he regards as similar in many respects, the concluding sections also point the way towards a positive and practical alternative methodology. These positive ideas were well received by archivists in Western Europe and they have also been incorporated into the curriculum of archival studies programmes in Germany. Booms recognizes that his ideas are very theoretical in nature and have not been distilled directly from practice. As such, they provide a theoretical framework rather than practical instructions. Nevertheless, Booms argues that, without theoretically formulated objectives, the practicing archivist is lost at sea.

Dr. Booms hopes the translation of his article into English will first of all serve to reactivate discussion on the theoretical issues in archives and archival appraisal. Secondly, he hopes that it will create a greater awareness and understanding of the specific political and social context in which modern German archives have developed and continue to operate.

A few comments are necessary on the format of the article as presented here. Booms' footnotes have been translated, except of course for the titles of the references themselves, and carry number designations. Editors' footnotes provide comments on the translation or the general context of the main text and carry alphabetical designations. All other emphases and offset passages are the author's own.

**Hermína Joldersma and
Richard Klumpenhower,**
Editors and Translators

At the centre of the agenda for the forty-seventh German Archives Conference in 1971 were a number of investigations on "Archival Methods and Principles for the Acquisition, Appraisal, and Selection of Archival Material."² These investigations completed a cycle of sessions begun already in 1968, when the executive of the Association of German Archivists initiated what they hoped would generate a general, critical self-evaluation of the archival profession, especially as it relates to the theoretical and methodological tools used in three areas of archival activity. The discussion began at the 45th German Archives Conference in Kiel in 1969 with the archival interpretation of historical source material.³ It was continued at the 46th German Archives Conference in Ulm in 1970 with the dissemination and promotion of archives and archival material.⁴ And today, in Dortmund in 1971, it has turned to the central function of the archivist: the acquisition and appraisal of documentation. This function carries the greatest social significance, and unmistakably characterizes and defines the professional image of the archivist of today. At the same time, this is the archivist's most difficult area of activity since it presents a problem that is arguably the most crucial for the profession at the present time: it represents "le problème-clef de l'archivistique moderne," as Robert-Henri Bautier once called it,⁵ "the eternal archival problem for us as for everyone else abroad," as G.A. Belov, the Head of the Central Administration of the Archives of the USSR, described it.⁶

This key problem of archival science consists of two main aspects: the one relates largely to archival methodology, the other more to archival theory. The presentations of

2 Conference paper by Eckhart G. Franz in *Der Archivar* 25 (1972), especially cols. 17-19.

3 Conference paper by Hans Booms, *Der Archivar* 23 (1970), especially cols. 9, 13. See also "Öffentlichkeitsarbeit der Archive — Voraussetzungen und Möglichkeiten," *Der Archivar* 23 (1970), especially cols. 29-32.

4 Conference paper by Hans Booms, *Der Archivar* 24 (1971), especially cols. 8-13.

5 Cited by Pierre Boisard, "Pour une politique des éliminations. Réflexion sur la pratique des Archives de la Seine," *La Gazette des Archives* 59 (1967), p. 206; see also Gerhart Enders, *Archivverwaltungslehre* (Berlin, 1968), p. 85.

6 Ghennadyj A. Belov, "Zur Geschichte, Theorie und Praxis des Archivwesens in der UdSSR," *Veröffentlichungen der Archivschule Marburg. Institut für Archivwissenschaft* 6 (Marburg, 1971), p. 39.

Bernd Otnad, Toni Diederich, Otfried Dascher, and Friedrich Kahlenberg⁷ dealt with methodological problems concerning principles and methods for the acquisition and appraisal of documentation. Employing a more pragmatic approach, they undertook a critical review of traditional as well as newly developed archival acquisition techniques and, more or less, worked towards an increased systematization of the appraisal process. All four base their arguments on two assumptions: on the one hand, that techniques for the acquisition of archival material must be applied already at the pre-archival stage, with the creators of the registries; and, on the other hand, that appraisal techniques must be applied systematically, using a principle of positive selection, in the intermediate or records centre stage. The executive of the Association of German Archivists assigned me the task of addressing the theoretical aspect of this key problem of archival acquisition and appraisal. This task involves raising questions, through a theoretical and critical analysis, regarding theories of archival value and criteria for the appraisal of archival sources. The objective is to try to penetrate into the heart of the archival process that determines the formation of our documentary heritage.

Such an analysis must seek to reveal the professional archival standards by which modern archivists decide concretely which sources, by their contents, are valuable, and which are not. This type of analysis, especially as it relates to the theme of "society and the formation of a documentary heritage," inspired East German archivist Hans-Joachim Schreckenbach to assert that archivists in "capitalist countries" possess "no real solutions" to "the problem of the appraisal of information — and with that, the solution to the question of value."

"The causes of this," conceded Schreckenbach collegially, "do not lie in the subjective incompetence of the archivists involved;" rather, he believed they are rooted "in the objective reality of capitalist society...." The social conditions of capitalism, he contended, engender "the hopelessness of bourgeois archival science which, due to the given social context, is unable to solve the problem of information appraisal in any definitive manner." "A real solution" to the question of archival value in the form of "a comprehensive, scientifically based system of information appraisal, one that is valid for all areas of society," Schreckenbach concluded, "is, in the final analysis, only possible under the conditions of socialist society."⁸

It is typical of ideological statements that they dismiss any and all alternative statements as invalid and proclaim themselves in sole possession of the correct position, indeed, even

7 Otnad addressed the issue with "Registraturgut einer Landesregierung und ihrer Landesverwaltung" (Baden-Württemberg), published in *Der Archivar* 25 (1972), cols. 27-40; Diederich with "Registraturgut in Kommunalverwaltungen," *Der Archivar* 25 (1972), cols. 39-42; Dascher with "Registraturgut der Wirtschaft," *Der Archivar* 25 (1972), cols. 41-50; Kahlenberg concluded by addressing the necessity and possibility of coordinating archival acquisition and appraisal in an examination of "Aufgaben und Probleme der Zusammenarbeit von Archiven verschiedener Verwaltungsstufen und Dokumentationsbereiche in Bewertungsfragen," *Der Archivar* 25 (1972), cols. 57-70.

8 Hans-Joachim Schreckenbach, "Stand der Informationsbewertung in kapitalistischen Ländern," *Archivmitteilungen* 19 (1969), pp. 179-82. Here Schreckenbach specifies an ideological theme which, in the field of archives, has been raised regularly since ca. 1965 in *Archivmitteilungen*, *Zeitschrift für Theorie und Praxis i Kritik der bürgerlichen Geschichtsschreibung. Handbuch*, edited by Werner Berthold, Gerhard Lozek, Helmut Meier, and Walter Schmidt (Köln, 1970).

of Truth itself.⁹ However, it is not the ideological character of Schreckenbach's statements which should concern us here. All criticism is stimulating and helpful if one accepts it without prejudice so that it can be assessed for its possible legitimacy. Therefore, we should thankfully take up Schreckenbach's observations since they serve to bring into sharper focus the main issue of whether and how modern-day problems of archival appraisal can be solved. Moreover, Schreckenbach forces us to consider if — in the context of the ideological battles waged between different social systems in the modern world — even this seemingly esoteric problem of archival science is conditioned, even determined, by society. And we should be all the more thankful for Schreckenbach's observations as they finally compel us to search for an answer to a question already posed in 1957 by Hermann Meinert, now honorary member of the Association of German Archivists. Then, at the thirty-fifth German Archives Conference in Koblenz, Meinert characterized as "a highly interesting question, ... worthy of special treatment at one of our archival conferences, ... whether the methods of so-called dialectical materialism which are today preached as doctrine in eastern European countries can at all lead to genuine selection principles for archival material."¹⁰

Finally, this narrower question allows us the additional opportunity to assess, within the framework of the basic analysis as proposed, the overall meaning of archival work for society; to consider the obligations of archivists to the public in performing a professional function that carries the greatest social responsibility. Attempts have been made to define the social responsibilities of archivists for less central tasks, such as, on the one hand, collecting material produced during one's own time,¹¹ or, on the other hand, interpreting source material in the diverse forms of archival public service.¹²

Yet, neither ideologically inspired provocations, nor the professional opportunism which occasioned this analysis in the first place, can relieve us of the responsibility for determining at the outset whether the concept "society" and that of "the formation of a documentary heritage" can in any way be meaningfully and profitably related to one another. We want to attempt this by examining both elements as they are popularly conceived and later linking them more concretely with the help of our as yet undefined concept of the appraising archivist. This requires, firstly, that we analyze the relationship of the archivist as an individual to society; and, secondly, that we examine the function of the archivist in the formation of the documentary heritage. Such inquiries will help in determining whether a connection exists between societal values and archival standards and to what degree such a connection is influenced by the ideological context.

What is "society"? It is usually defined as an all-encompassing concept for human coexistence in general. Although it has, throughout the whole history of its usage, been understood to mean many different things and has posed many conceptual problems,¹³ the concept of "society" has continued to be used to designate a fundamental category of

9 See Jakob Barion, *Was ist Ideologie? Studie zu Begriff und Problematik* (Bonn, 1964), pp. 7, 15, 23, 35, 63f.

10 Hermann Meinert, "Zur Problematik des modernen Archivwesens aus der Sicht eines Stadtarchivars," *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 54 (1958), p. 99 (hereafter *AZ*).

11 Hans Booms, "Grenzen und Gliederungen zeitgeschichtlicher Dokumentationen in staatlichen Archiven," *Der Archivar* 19 (1966), cols. 35-40.

12 Booms, "Öffentlichkeitsarbeit," cols. 19-26, 32.

13 Summarized in, for example, Ernst Fraenkel and Karl D. Bracher, eds., "Staat und Politik," *Das Fischer-Lexikon* (1957), pp. 86ff.; treated more comprehensively in, for example, *Sowjetsystem und demokratische Gesellschaft* (Freiburg, 1968), vol. 11, pp. 959ff.

human existence. Within this concept is rooted the deeper meaning of the description of the human being as *animal social*. It elucidates for us the existential conditionality of human beings in that they are inescapably individuals and members of a community at one and the same time. It shows us that single individuals can experience their humanness, and develop as human beings, only with reference to a community or group — in other words, to society.¹⁴ Within the framework of our considerations, this existential impulse of human self-actualization, as it could be called, points us to the indissoluble connection between society and the individual.

However, it should be understood that the concept of “society,” which, in its spatial or temporal dimensions, can be extended to include all of “humanity,” remains incomprehensible if it is not limited by reference to a specific social system. Only in space and time does “society” become concrete reality, for every society necessarily possesses a structure which orders the coexistence of individuals; otherwise, it would be useless as a form for human existence. Within this structure, the views of the world and of life that have become dominant in the society find their expression. Regardless of whether the society is viewed as a socialistic class structure, or a liberal competitive structure, or a technocratic industrial structure, or whatever, it always develops its own recognizable system of coordinating norms and values, of special control and behavioural models, which influence the life and thought patterns of its members.

If it is true that individuals exist only as human beings in so far as they belong to a group, a community, a society, and that consequently they are unable to separate themselves from the socio-historical conditions of their existence, it follows that they are also not able to avoid the specific posited values which are part of these conditions. This social context is all the more circumscriptive since individuals are unable to provide an absolute answer to the question of what they, in their daily lives, consider valuable or meaningful (unless, of course, they operate under ideological statements or philosophical creeds). They can only answer by referring to popular conceptions, ideas, or opinions which are deemed worthy by their social environment. Individuals share their esteem for such opinions with others in their respective life circles, which is why a person’s origins, education, and social situation play such a significant role in determining to what extent an individual is influenced by the dominant values of a society.

This plausible recognition (it seems to us) that scientific values are relative, includes, as a corollary, the fact that human value judgements must always be founded upon life experience. The individual’s horizon of experience provides the framework of references that is epistemologically necessary for human evaluation. For without experience, the individual remains unfamiliar with the societal values and norms with which he or she wishes to and must conform. This shows us even more clearly how strongly individual behaviour is subject to the basic orientation of society, and how strongly an individual’s

14 For this and the following discussion see also Theodor Schieder, *Geschichte als Wissenschaft*, 2nd ed. (München, 1968), pp. 91ff.; Arnold Brecht, *Politische Theorie. Die Grundlagen politischen Denkens im 20. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen, 1961), p. 140; Barion, p. 71; Helmut Bütow, “Marxistische Wissenschaftstheorie,” in *Deutschland Archiv. Zeitschrift für Fragen der DDR und der Deutschlandpolitik* 3 (1970), p. 1220; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Zum Verhältnis von Geschichtswissenschaft und Psychoanalyse,” *Historische Zeitschrift* (hereafter *HZ*) 208 (1969), p. 535.

judgement is governed by “value precedents” (Barion) and is formed by “biases” (Gadamer) and “subconscious assumptions” (Habermas).¹⁵

These observations may confirm our opinion that, contrary to the intellectual traditions of liberalism and idealistic humanism, it is no longer meaningful, at least in epistemological terms, to continue to view the individual as detached from his or her social environment.¹⁶ It might seem plausible — and this is how we would like to proceed in our analysis — that it is not only more meaningful, but actually essential, to view the activity of the archivist in relationship to the societal order, since it seems clear that there exists an indissoluble connection between values held by society and those held by the individual. Moreover, it also seems apparent that Schreckenbach, in posing an interdependency between archival appraisal and society as his methodological starting point, is in harmony with the scientific findings of modern sociology in “capitalist countries.”

But is this dependent relationship between society and the formation of the documentary heritage necessarily a causal relationship — as Schreckenbach implies by the ideological confidence with which he delivers his prognosis? “One cannot at the same time live in society and be free from it,” Lenin once declared. This assertion, which portrays the individual and society as interwoven entities, is clarified for us further by the statement of the Marxist historian Joachim Streisand: “Scientific communism views the individual as an ensemble of social relationships.”¹⁷ In our view, such statements expand the concept of human socialization to extreme proportions. They completely negate the free room that allows the individual to choose between alternatives; a free room which, in our opinion, cannot be interpreted away with appeals to the deterministic consequences of hypothetical inevitabilities. While, clearly, we would agree that individual judgement is preconditioned by the social environment, it is also true that this judgement “depends,” in turn, only “*partly* on a whole series of social and political relationships.”¹⁸ That the human being is bound to social structures is becoming obvious to us; but, at the same time, this means for us “neither absolute social determinism” nor “absolute independence.” Today, we recognize that there exists a “peculiar relationship” between the social conditioning of a human being and the possibilities arising out of his or her inner freedom;¹⁹ between an individual’s dependency on the powers of society and the dependency of society on the will and capacity of the individual. Only by recognizing this possibility for individual action is it worthwhile — given our basic view of the relationship between the individual and the whole — to investigate the role of the archivist in the formation of a documentary heritage as we have intended.

An investigation of this role of the archivist must begin with the preliminary question: what constitutes the documentary heritage of today and how does a documentary heritage

15 See also Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen, 1965), pp. 168, 254f., 286f., 293; Jürgen Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse* (Frankfurt/Main, 1968), pp. 242, 260; Habermas, *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften* (Tübingen, 1967), p. 34; Max Horkheimer, *Über das Vorurteil* (1963); Wolfgang Leesch, “Sozialwissenschaften und Archive,” *Der Archivar* 21 (1968), col. 113.

16 See Rupert Breitling, “Die zentralen Begriffe der Verbandforschung,” *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 1 (1960), pp. 62f.

17 “Geschichtsforschung und Geschichtsschreibung auf dem Wege zur sozialistischen Menschengemeinschaft,” *ZfG* 17 (1969), p. 1523.

18 Karl R. Popper, “Die Logik der Sozialwissenschaften,” in *Der Positivismusstreit in der deutschen Soziologie*, 3rd ed. (Neuwied, 1971), p. 112 (emphasis added).

19 Schieder, *Geschichte als Wissenschaft*, p. 20.

come into being? Without losing ourselves here in the unavoidable comprehensiveness of classical documentary criticism,²⁰ it suffices to define the documentary heritage, in this context, as the totality of the existing evidence of historical activity, or as all the surviving documentation on past events. Insofar as such a definition refers to texts which are stored in written, printed, photographic, mechanical or automated forms and generated by the total social and — in the broadest sense of the term — political process, the documentary heritage represents material that is preserved in archives, provided that the archivist has considered it worthy to occupy a permanent place in the archives. In appraising the archival value of such material, and thereby determining whether it should be preserved permanently in the archives, the archivist performs the constitutive act by which societal data are converted into “historical sources.” This act, which involves “transforming the heterogeneous continuum of real events into an interpretable, discrete form,” as Artur Zechel has described it,²¹ is the archetypal activity of the archivist; it is the act of forming the documentary heritage — a function that has been assigned to the archivist by the respective social groups which he or she serves.

This function has undergone a qualitative transformation in the last generation of archivists. Originally, it consisted of collecting and preserving more or less sparsely and randomly retained “leftovers.” Then, as the volume of material with the potential of forming part of the documentary heritage began to exceed the limits of what could be physically incorporated into that documentary heritage, this function changed to comprise mainly the acquisition and preservation of material chosen more or less thoughtfully from out of an overabundant store. What is more, the rate of this qualitative change in the professional functions of the archivist accelerated rapidly when archivists gained a monopoly in forming the documentary record, at least in the domain of public records, and thereby directed towards themselves the full force of this swelling flood of information.

Our social life today, at best still unified in its diversity (Scheurig), has long ago fragmented into innumerable functions. The further the public sector expands at the expense of the private sector,²² the greater the institutionalization of the managed life and the more numerous the bureaucracies and organizational systems that create tasks for themselves. And, as life in our modern industrial society becomes more diverse, with its technocratic structures and its technological development problems, the mountain of data competing for storage also begins to grow at a more rapid pace. According to some calculations, the profusion of available information doubles in increasingly shorter time spans (8, 5, 3 years!). It has been discovered that, already today, 95 per cent of all information lies beyond the capacity of any one individual to comprehend. Humankind is facing an explosion of information which threatens to render the problem of the control

20 Relevant are: Ahasver von Brandt, *Werkzeug des Historikers. Eine Einführung in die Historischen Hilfswissenschaften* (Stuttgart, 1958), pp. 58ff.; Paul Kirn, *Einführung in die Geschichtswissenschaft* (Berlin, 1963); Bodo Scheurig, *Einführung in die Zeitgeschichte* (Berlin, 1962).

21 Artur Zechel, “Probleme einer Wissenschaftstheorie der Archivistik mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Archivwesens der Wirtschaft,” *Tradition. Zeitschrift für Firmengeschichte und Unternehmerbiographie* (1965), p. 298.

22 See also Helmut Schelsky, *Schule und Erziehung in der industriellen Gesellschaft* (1957), pp. 33ff.

of information completely insolvable.²³ For many years now, archivists have made unsuccessful attempts to staunch this flood of information, at least that which reaches the archives, by building ever higher and longer records storage areas.²⁴ Leaving aside the fact that this strategy would very quickly exceed the limits of what the economy is able to bear, it also does not solve the problem of volume. Neither does the solution lie only in refining those archival acquisition techniques that help archivists gain intellectual and administrative control over the material at the pre-archival stage, indispensable though these techniques may be for the process of archival appraisal.

These observations are equally valid for modern techniques of data processing. It would be an illusion to believe that "EDP technology" or "information science," graced as they may be with the flair of modernity and progress, can deliver us from this information explosion. Although these methodologies have become indispensable in helping us to capture and make available the transmitted documentation,²⁵ they, too, will not help to decrease the flood of information. Reducing quantity while condensing archival material qualitatively remains the task of the archivist as appraiser. It is the archivist alone who has the responsibility to create, out of this overabundance of information, a socially relevant documentary record that is, in spatial terms, storable and, in human terms, usable.²⁶

This archival burden of responsibility for a problem that seems virtually insolvable represents, in the area of public records, the flip-side of a position to which archivists themselves have unswervingly aspired. In Germany, as Wilhelm Rohr and Gerhard Enders describe it, archivists have had to fight bitterly for their monopoly over the selection of departmental records.²⁷ Even in Prussia, where, as early as 1833, the first orders for records destruction were issued, it nevertheless took more than 100 years before an administrative order set down the following rule: "The final decision concerning whether registry material is to be destroyed can and must be made only by the professional archivist; that is to say, no destruction of files may occur without his participation."²⁸ In other

23 See the studies by Botho Brachmann, "Zum System der Informationsbewertung in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik," *Archivmitteilungen* 19 (1969), p. 95; Brachmann, "Die Auswirkungen der modernen Informationsüberlieferung auf die Wechselbeziehungen zwischen Geschichtsbild und Informationsbasis," *ZfG* 17 (1969), pp. 62ff.; more specifically for archival science, Ake Kromnow in *Nordisk Arkivmyt* 12 (1967); and now also Carl Haase, "Kostenfaktoren bei der Entstehung behördlichen Schriftgutes sowie bei seiner archivistischen Bearbeitung und Aufbewahrung," *Der Archivar* 25 (1972), cols. 49ff.

24 Johannes Papritz arrived at the ideologically rigid conclusion that archival appraisal and disposal may "never be made dependent upon the availability of existing space in the repository" in "Zum Massenproblem der Archive," *Der Archivar* 17 (1964), col. 220. Wilhelm Rohr, at the 1957 Archives Conference in Koblenz, had insisted on the necessity to consider the preservation of documents in relation to the "high costs of building new structures and/or expanding existing ones" in "Zur Problematik des modernen Aktenwesens," *AZ* 54 (1958), p. 77; see also Enders, p. 85.

25 See Christoph Sproemberg, "Dokumentation in den historischen Wissenschaften. Aufgaben und Probleme," *Nachrichten für Dokumentation* 22 (1971), pp. 151-56.

26 See Rudolf Morsey, "Wert und Masse des schriftlichen Quellenguts als Problem der historischen Forschung. Erwartungen des Forschers von der Erschließung der Archive," *Der Archivar* 24 (1971), col. 17ff. Woldemar Lippert recognized the full extent of this problem concerning the documentary heritage in 1901 when he contended: "to preserve everything is not in the realm of possibility as long as money remains a consideration in the state budget." He was, however, convinced that this was "a blessing to future historians who would otherwise drown in an unfathomable sea of material;" see "Das Verfahren bei Aktenkassationen in Sachsen," *Deutsche Geschichtsblätter* 2 (1901), p. 258.

27 "Das Aktenwesen der preußischen Regierungen," *AZ* 45 (1939), pp. 52ff. Enders, p. 88.

28 Heinrich Otto Meisner, "Schutz und Pflege des staatlichen Archivguts mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Kassationsproblems," *AZ* 45 (1939), p. 42.

words, no public records that are potentially archival will survive for posterity if they have not passed the scrutiny of the archivist.

Archivists, therefore, in fulfilling their role in the formation of the documentary heritage, hold the monopoly on an activity which dictates what kind of cultural representation of society, insofar as this is reflected by the public record, will be handed down to future generations. That such a function is being performed should raise the question of whether that function requires certain societal controls. It is obvious, however, that this question has yet to be addressed. The person who decides which events in social life are transmitted to us through the record, and, as a result, decides which are preserved to form part of a society's memory and which are not, is thereby making decisions which are important for society. Yet, up to now, it seems, such a situation has failed to attract societal concern. "Whoever controls the past, controls the future," to quote a hyperbolic statement from George Orwell's apocalyptic vision of the future, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In his vision, "registry clerks" are constantly revising and recreating the written documents of the past to fit the changing needs for historical documentation in the present in an effort to influence the development of the future.²⁹ Admittedly, this phantasmagoria is a radical extrapolation beyond reality of how historical knowledge is abused for ideological purposes, of how history is used as an arsenal "for the justification of the *status quo*" (Schieder) and as an *apologia* for the current political situation. Yet, it is precisely Orwell's hyperbole which may serve to make us sensitive to the question of the social significance of archival appraisal.

To be sure, we can only find a qualified answer, and for that, two paths are available. The first involves an attempt at measuring the significance of historical facts for the solution of modern problems of politics (in the broadest sense of the term) and its administration, and it is for this purpose that such facts have been entered into the data banks of information systems. But because this first path is more exclusive to administration, is more esoteric, and renders the social significance of archival appraisal for the public consciousness less evident, we will choose another path for our considerations. This second path will lead us to consider the significance of the discipline of history for society. We will then have to link this with an analysis of the function of the archival record within the discipline of history. The social status and role of the archival formation of the documentary heritage in society is closely related to the utilitarian status and role of history and historical consciousness in the public realm.

"Historical consciousness and historiography," Theodor Schieder has maintained, "were and are as a rule closely bound up in the general political, social, and intellectual system of the time...."³⁰ In societies which have developed their political system according to a Marxist world-view, this means that the societal importance of the archivist's formation of its documentary heritage is already guaranteed by the politically dominant ideology: this is based on the fact that " 'the historical' occupies a central position in socialist ideology."³¹ In socialist countries, "historiography has become a theoretical basis for the class struggle of the working class."³² There, historiography has to supply "scientific proof" for the validity of Marxist teaching and must give the convictions attached to

29 George Orwell, *Neunzehnhundertvierundachtzig* (Rastatt, 1950), pp. 44-51.

30 Theodor Schieder, "Grundfragen der Geschichte," in *Die Weltgeschichte* (Freiburg, 1971), p. 20.

31 Walter Schmidt, "Geschichtsbewußtsein und sozialistische Persönlichkeit bei der Gestaltung der entwickelten sozialistischen Gesellschaft," in *Geschichtsbewußtsein und sozialistische Gesellschaft* (Berlin, 1970), p. 9.

32 Joachim Streisand, "Über das Geschichtsbild der Arbeiterklasse," *Archivmitteilungen* 21 (1971), p. 202.

that “the necessary scientific foundation ... insofar as it provides the concrete historical proof of their correctness.”³³ However, as the East German archival journal *Archivmitteilungen* asserts in virtually every issue,³⁴ “archival science was and is closely tied ... to historiography and, by extension, also to historical consciousness.”³⁵

This kind of ideologically sanctioned linkage between the archival formation of a documentary heritage and that which is of greatest societal importance is not possible for those of us who live in a pluralistic society. Such a linkage is simply incompatible with the way in which the sciences, including historical scholarship, view their place in our society. If they are to remain true to their epistemology, the sciences cannot hold the same central position that they do under the conditions of a society operating with a closed world-view.³⁶ This renunciation does not flow out of “agnosticism” or lack of perspective; neither does it spring up out of “the deep pessimism” of bourgeois “late capitalism.”³⁷ At issue here is nothing less than the simple consequences of our assumptions about the limitations of human knowledge. Contrary to the views of Lenin and many after him, we are not able to view world history as a process which unfolds according to laws — most notably, that law which renders history the function of the single, urgent purpose of class struggle. Instead, we content ourselves with the insight that the historical process is a multifarious interrelationship of factors which — holding out the hope that the expected may occur, though it is never guaranteed — continually develops towards open ends.

Accordingly, we are not able to answer the questions, “Why History?”³⁸ or, “What is the use of history today?,” by merely touting the “inevitable triumph of socialist ideology.”³⁹ In the context of our society and of our view of the limits of human knowledge, it seems that the appropriate response for us must be much more vague. In our case, history serves as “a medium for illuminating human existence” (Schieder), as a means of obtaining a “clearer understanding of human action” (Kosselleck), “as an element of our reconciliation with the present and as a necessary criterion for our blueprint for the future,”⁴⁰ or as “an aid for living and making decisions” in present-day society.⁴¹ From such a perspective, it is already much more difficult to establish concretely the societal importance of archival appraisal. Nevertheless, such convictions are entirely adequate in serving our intention to weigh the societal importance and, with that, the social responsibility of the archivist in the formation of the documentary heritage. “The decisive question by which the meaning and scientific validity of history must be established,” is, “whether and how science can extract from history principles or insights that are normative for today, influence present-day behaviour, and have an effect upon the future.”⁴² The historical disciplines are necessarily dependent upon archives for solving such existential questions in a

33 Berthold *et al.*, eds., *Kritik der bürgerlichen Geschichtsschreibung*, pp. 4, 5f.

34 See, for example, Günter Benser, “Partei und Klasse,” *Archivmitteilungen* 21 (1971), p. 83.

35 Streisand, p. 201.

36 See also Hans-Joachim Lieber, *Philosophie — Soziologie — Gesellschaft* (Berlin, 1965), pp. 3f.

37 See Berthold *et al.*, for example, p. 1.

38 Reinhart Koselleck, “Wozu noch Historie?” *HZ* 212 (1971), pp. 1ff.

39 Berthold *et al.*, p. 1.

40 *Geschichtswissenschaft und Geschichtsunterricht. Lageanalyse — Folgerungen — Empfehlungen. Stellungnahme des Verbandes der Historiker Deutschlands im Zusammenwirken mit dem Verband der Geschichtslehrer Deutschlands* (1971), p. 2.

41 Karl-Georg Faber, *Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft* (München, 1971), p. 218.

42 Josef Engel, in an observation made during a discussion with Karl Dietrich Erdmann, “Die Zukunft als Kategorie der Geschichte,” *HZ* 198 (1964), p. 66.

scientific manner — not, as we just saw, for reasons of ideological opportunism, but rather, as must still be shown, for compelling methodological reasons. It is in this dependency of history on archives in our society that the societal importance of the archival formation of the documentary heritage is most evident.

Historical research is, by definition, a retrospective activity that concerns itself with an already completed reality.⁴³ Therefore, the subject of historical inquiry must always be the past. However, as Droysen pointed out in his “first great fundamental principle” of historical scholarship,⁴⁴ the past can only be observed indirectly. Consequently, human beings are able to realize only a very qualified picture of the past. As humanity seeks “to break through the limits of human memory” (Schieder), to expand this memory beyond the limited capacity of one individual to remember, and to avoid being delivered up to sheer fantasy, it relies upon the concrete evidence from the past which has come down to the present — the historical sources. “Hence, the question of sources ... is the most fundamental question of every historical inquiry” (Schieder). The importance of archives in helping to resolve the question of sources makes it clear that the writing of history is possible only because of the existence of a documentary heritage in material form, and that the documentary heritage is the material source of a society’s historical consciousness.

On the other hand, the documentary heritage does not simply supply the material needed for forming a picture of history; it also provides the material preconditions of a methodology for realizing that picture. Through this, the historical rendering gains its scientific quality. For history is an empirical science and, therefore, one of its fundamental prerequisites is that it “can never be severed from its solid foundation in a concrete documentary tradition.”⁴⁵ After all, historical research does not derive its scientific validity from the subjective questions posed by historians conditioned by their social environment;⁴⁶ but rather, and above all, it depends upon the exactness with which historians use the documentation handed down from the past to provide answers to historical questions and to assess their accuracy.

As the archival documentary record provides historians with the essential material necessary for a systematic treatment of history, it also affords the historical researcher a rudimentary guarantee of scientific validity. Yet, this is not the only component of such a guarantee. The scientific validity of history is also based on the assumption that the documentary record available to the historian does in fact represent the essential, substantive documentation of past human activity. For, because historians are so fundamentally dependent on the sources, they must constantly deal with the basic problem of historical research “centering on the degree of objectivity inherent in the sources” (Pabst). Traditionally, historians have answered this question by appealing to their use of “the critical method, through which the authenticity and quality of the sources as historical evidence are evaluated” (Schieder). This method, however, has been applied, by and large, only to single documents, or, at best, to smaller groups of texts of the same origin. Questions concerning the objectivity of the documentary record in a larger context, especially within its total societal framework, have up to now never been raised by historians. For them, this

43 For this and the following see: Schieder, *Geschichte als Wissenschaft*, pp. 13ff., and “Grundfragen der Geschichte,” pp. 24f., 31; Karl-Georg Faber, pp. 41f., 196f.

44 Johann Gustav Droysen, *Historik. Vorlesungen über Enzyklopädie und Methodologie der Geschichte*, ed. Rudolf Hübner, 5th ed. (München, 1967), p. 20.

45 Klaus Pabst, “Geschichtsforschung,” in *Die Weltgeschichte* (Freiburg, 1971), pp. 38f.

46 Koselleck, p. 10; Popper, pp. 112f.

“dependence upon something that has been preserved by chance”⁴⁷ poses few problems. They have put their faith in what they consider to be the inherent objectivity of the documentary record — an objectivity bestowed, so it seems, by the manifest workings of Fortune. Here and there, doubtful voices could be heard to observe that “the accidental nature of the documentary record ... might distort the historical picture” (Pabst). Yet, historians have never considered it significant that, besides the workings of chance, the ways in which archivists design, mould, and shape the documentary record might also have an effect on the “historical picture.” In the future, however, the historian, in addressing “questions concerning the degree of objectivity inherent in the sources” (Pabst), will have to consider that the value criteria by which the archivist forms the documentary record reflect the character of his or her society, are “conditioned by a multitude of factors,” and are “determined by one’s view of the world.”⁴⁸

It is up to historians, not archivists, to revise the critical methods of historical scholarship so that the “ideological relativity of the documentation” can be identified and controlled.⁴⁹ But it is the task, if not the societal duty, of the archivist to provide the required preconditions for such a reassessment of historical methodology. Due to the scientific nature of historical enterprise, the historian has a right, in turn based on the historian’s responsibility to society, to an archival documentary record that has been systematically created following principles grounded in archival theory. Therefore, archivists must objectify their notions of archival value and formulate their value coordinates so that their contribution as a constitutive element of the documentary heritage can be measured and controlled.

In formulating and justifying society’s claims on the work of archivists, we have concluded our preliminary deliberations. Now, better equipped to recognize the complexities of the problem, we return to the original question: how do archivists determine the value of the documentary record? How do they recognize which sources are more valuable than others, which categories and groups of documents absolutely belong to the documentary heritage, and which can be easily dispensed with? In short: how does the archivist solve the problem of archival appraisal, the key problem of archival activity? In order even to begin to answer the question, we must leave aside all the “methodological preliminaries” (G. Enders) related to appraisal and acquisition and seek to describe the formal, systematic execution of the appraisal function. Only in this way, it would seem, will we gain the critical categories we will need to assess all significant techniques for archival appraisal developed up to now according to how well they resolve the question of value.

47 Schieder, “Angewiesen auf zufällig Bewahrtes. Die Geschichte und die Sozialwissenschaften,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Nr. 271, 21 November 1967, pp. 13f.

48 “Standards of value and appraisal viewpoints are conditioned by a multitude of factors. They are determined by one’s view of the world, but especially by one’s interpretation of history. How the archivist assesses the value of archival material depends on which forces in the historical process the archivist observes are operative or the most decisive,” Enders, p. 86. The fact that I received word of the death of Gerhard Enders on 18 March 1972, during the rewriting of this section of my paper, makes me realize all the more the loss which the death of this brilliant colleague means not only for German archivists, but for archivists all over the world.

49 Scheurig, p. 35; see also Popper, *Das Elend des Historismus* (Tübingen, 1965), pp. 117f.; Günter Rohrmoser, *Das Elend der kritischen Theorie* (Freiburg, 1970), pp. 104f.

In our consideration of the relationship of the individual to society we established initially that is not possible for human beings to designate a certain thing — considered in itself and thereby isolated — as valuable or not valuable in any absolute sense.⁵⁰ The value of a particular item only becomes apparent when it is set in relation to something else and compared with that other item. If human beings do not answer questions of what they do or do not consider valuable with ideological statements or philosophical confessions, their answers cannot be absolute, but only relative to something in reference to which a certain thing seems valuable. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander: if this holds for human beings epistemologically, it also applies to the archivist professionally. Moreover, archivists cannot determine the value of documentation by seeking it in the documentation itself. They will not find its “objective” value there. Documentary sources do not possess an inherent value discernable within the documents themselves. Documentary sources become valuable only when the archivist accords them value during the appraisal process.⁵¹

In order to be able to assign value in a practical way during the process of appraisal, archivists need one or more aspects by which they can gradually “find” or perceive the relative value of their archival records in relation to value coordinates. Only with reference to phenomena whose value has been established beyond question can the archivist place documentary sources in relationship to one another so that they may be compared with one another and situated within a hierarchy of value. Crucial to this kind of systematic execution of appraisal is, first and foremost, a universally binding recognition of value coordinates. Without such coordinates, the appraisal process is not really possible or else remains, at best, unsatisfactory.

If such value coordinates are to be of any real use to appraising archivists in making their decisions as to what is of “enduring” and “permanent archival value,” they must be not only comprehensive and pertinent, but also sufficiently clear and concrete: comprehensive and pertinent, so that they can effectively serve as an intermediary in assigning value for the entire spectrum of subject matter contained in archival information; clear and concrete, so that, as principles for appraising the immense quantity of material, they can provide a genuine orientation for the archivist. The problems involved in establishing these value principles, recognizing them as universally valid, and defining them as concretely as possible, are central to both archival appraisal and the scholarly analysis of sources. Whether or not archivists will be able to develop value concepts to guide them in the formation of the documentary heritage depends largely on how firmly they keep their feet on the ground of reality.

To proceed further with our analysis, we should review the value concepts which archivists have developed up to this point. Have they succeeded in defining value principles concretely enough to be useful in the formation of the documentary heritage? Assertions have been made to the contrary: Fritz Zimmermann stated in 1957-58 that ‘the problem of archival value ... has not been the subject of an independent theoretical inquiry within German archival science’;⁵² Artur Zechel contended in 1965 that “the need for a scientific foundation for appraisal has been disregarded far too long”;⁵³ and

50 See above, p. 73, as well as, generally, the considerations of Brecht, pp. 140ff.

51 See also Enders, p. 86.

52 Fritz Zimmermann, “Wesen und Ermittlung des Archivwertes. Zur Theorie einer archivalischen Wertlehre,” *AZ* 54 (1958), p. 103.

53 Zechel, “Werttheorie und Kassation,” *Der Archivar* 18 (1965), col. 2.

finally, as has already been mentioned, Hans-Joachim Schreckenbach declared in 1969 that we are unable to solve this problem for reasons inextricably related to our societal system.⁵⁴

The task of appraising documentary sources did not become the monopoly of the archivists only because of the fact that material with the potential of forming part of the documentary record exceeded the limits of what could be physically incorporated into it. As Georg Wilhelm Sante observed years ago, the history of attempts by archivists “to reconcile the mass production of records with the limited capacity of archives to absorb them” forms part of the history of archives in general.⁵⁵ As long as archivists, trained in law, still preserved material for the purpose of safeguarding the legal system, they were able to meet the demand for reducing the volume of documentary material in a simple way: they merely disposed of those records which had been lying about for the longest time since it appeared the least likely that this material would ever be needed again. However, because historical research requires an historical methodology, and archives came to be seen primarily as the arsenal of history, a criterion based on the age of the documentary material could no longer be the maxim used to reduce the volume of archival sources. On the contrary, in fact, historical scholarship began to assign a positive value precisely to these older sources and, as a result, the principle of source reduction was reversed and superseded by a principle of source preservation. At the same time, the discipline of history, dependent as it was upon archives and written records, was informed by a philosophy of individuality.⁵⁶ It operated under the assumption that, as Droysen formulated it, “if something has moved the human spirit and has found material expression ... it can be re-experienced,”⁵⁷ and therefore must be worthy of attention.

Since all sources are materially perceivable signs of the past, and since there is “hardly any record” which cannot “be used again for some sort of purpose,”⁵⁸ history tended towards the opinion that actually “nothing should be destroyed” and that it would be best if “every record were kept for all times.” To be sure, archivists of this time knew that “keeping everything ... would be an impossibility.”⁵⁹ Yet, at the second German Archival Conference in Dresden in 1900, the historian von Zwiedineck stated that “historical scholarship demanded a far more extensive preservation of records” than that which the archivists at the conference had “recommended.”⁶⁰ This clash between, on the one hand, the claims of history that archives must contain the totality of the documentary record if they are to represent the “true” record of society for a particular period, and, on the other hand, the economic pressures on archivists to reduce the quantity of the documentary record, introduced the problem of documentary source appraisal into the history of archives. Since then, archivists have attempted, and are still attempting, to perform the

⁵⁴ See above, n. 8.

⁵⁵ Georg Wilhelm Sante, “Behörden — Akten — Archive. Alte Taktik und neue Strategie,” *AZ* 54 (1958), p. 90; for the development of disposal and appraisal methods, see Adolf Brenneke, *Archivkunde. Ein Beitrag zur Theorie und Geschichte des europäischen Archivwesens*, ed. Wolfgang Leesch (Leipzig, 1953), pp. 38-43; Enders, pp. 87-90.

⁵⁶ See Thomas Nipperdey, “Kulturgeschichte, Sozialgeschichte, historische Anthropologie,” *Vierteljahrsschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 55 (1968), p. 147.

⁵⁷ Droysen, p. 26.

⁵⁸ Georg Hille, “Die Grundsätze der Aktenkassation,” *Korrespondenzblatt des Gesamtvereins der deutschen Geschichts- und Altertumsvereine* 49 (1901), p. 26.

⁵⁹ Lippert, p. 257, n. 1, and p. 258.

⁶⁰ *Korrespondenzblatt* 49 (1901), p. 31.

feat of documenting everything within their jurisdiction while, at the same time, reducing the bulk of the documentation by excluding the valueless. As far as we can tell, however, the professional discussions of that time produced no concrete methods for determining what is in fact valueless and by what standards archivists measure value.

Wilhelm Rohr later described this phase in archival appraisal as a period when “the methodological tools with which archivists believed they could fulfill their most distinctive task — the selection of permanently valuable documents — were confined to a few very general rules of thumb. It was assumed that the trained archivist, on the basis of his historical education and professional experience, could find the proper solution on a case-by-case basis.”⁶¹ Rohr’s analysis seems particularly apt when one considers Woldemar Lippert’s 1901 defense of archivists against the reproaches of those historians who claimed that archivists were not adequately qualified to eliminate records. Lippert contended that archivists have acquired “historical expertise,” are “professionally educated historians,” and “possess practical experience in records disposal.”⁶² Based on these arguments, archivists believed they had sufficient tools at their disposal to be able “on their own” to “process records for destruction,” i.e., to appraise archival sources.

After all, the historians of that time could offer no alternative criteria for appraising historical phenomena. If Lippert rendered archivists qualified for historical appraisal by designating them “historical experts,” so Friedrich Meinecke, himself a former archivist, placed historians “in possession” of an “overall feeling for historical life,” which could be compared to “an unwritten, living synthesis.”⁶³ Unchallenged as they were at this time by any disposition towards ideological criticism, this “overall feeling” of Lippert and Meinecke grew out of a usually unexamined approval of recent developments within their society. On this rested their “rather unsceptical belief in steady human progress, in the blessings of the liberal national-state, in a richly unfolding culture.”⁶⁴ This optimistic anthropology, derived from historicism, also provided historians with “self-evident standards of value” (Wehler) with which to appraise historical phenomena. Archivists, however, understood themselves to be “professionally educated historians” as well, and strove “to harmonize their administrative practices with the demands of their discipline.”⁶⁵ Why then was it precisely the archivists who began to doubt whether they possessed such “self-evident standards of value” — standards which were in complete harmony with the mindset of the time — for appraising historical evidence?

Both archivists and historians in the age of historicism applied such self-evident standards of value to practical problems without any particular difficulty. For them, two requirements were sufficient to perform the task: *verstehen* [intuitive understanding] and experience. Without question, they accepted the principle that “the basis of history is hermeneutics.”⁶⁶ For a long time, this doctrine of *verstehen* remained the key concept in the German humanities. It was a central concept for the historiographical school extending from Ranke through Droysen to Dilthey.⁶⁷ Derived from the Aristotelian concept of intuition, hermeneutics or *verstehen* was thought to “grow out of a gift for sensitivity and

61 Rohr, p. 75.

62 Lippert, p. 257.

63 Friedrich Meinecke, *Zur Theorie und Philosophie der Geschichte. Werke IV* (Stuttgart, 1959), p. 184.

64 Wehler, p. 536.

65 Lippert, p. 249.

66 Gadamer, p. 187.

67 See also Schieder, *Geschichte als Wissenschaft*, pp. 37-41.

human maturity.”⁶⁸ *Verstehen* or “historical expertise” (as Lippert called it) entailed the ability to empathize with historical events. This provided justification for the famous and longstanding principle of *Fingerspitzengefühl* [subtle intuition] by which archivists — even up to the present day — have resolved and continue to resolve problems of archival source appraisal, even if they were generally unwilling to admit it. The title of Hermann Meinert’s 1956 contribution on records appraisal to a *Festschrift* for Georg Wilhelm Sante, “Von archivarischer Kunst und Verantwortung” [The Art of Archival Work and Archival Responsibility], still reflects this approach.⁶⁹

Yet *verstehen* does not depend only on a “gift for sensitivity;” it also requires “human maturity” (Wehler). “The ability to put oneself into a situation” intuitively “in this way” (Gadamer), requires that “the individual’s horizon of experience” serve as a “system of reference” to make understanding possible.⁷⁰ This seems to have been the thrust of Theodor Mommsen’s opinion, “that historians become good historians only as they get older; that is to say, when they attain the greatest possible variety of human experiences which may serve as the basis for their judgements.”⁷¹ The epistemology of hermeneutics and *verstehen* required recourse to the phenomenon of experience. Out of this grew, in general terms, an admiration at that time for “practical experience,” and, in particular, the view that the “archivist who possesses *practical* experience in disposal” (Lippert, emphasis added) is best qualified to undertake appraisal. As a result, archivists and historians alike shared a timidity towards analytical activities, and, indeed, a disdain for all that was scientifically theoretical.⁷² Such attitudes were already clearly expressed by Lippert: “Detailed regulations and systems for determining what should be destroyed and what should be preserved are of no value; as is generally the case, theory is worthless or inferior — only actual practice is decisive.”⁷³

This kind of “tension between theory and practice,” evident in Lippert’s statements from 1901, “was for a long time a particularly pronounced feature of German historical scholarship.”⁷⁴ This was the case for every discipline concerned with experience, and, as such, also characterizes the history of German archival science. That Hilles’ 1901 appraisal maxims were repeated by Brenneke in the 1930s and published by Leesch in 1953 illustrates this point.⁷⁵ It is further confirmed by the observation that Zipfel’s formulation against theory, that one should work “out of practical experience for practical experience,”⁷⁶ could be reintroduced into the discussion at the German Archival Conference in 1970 with full conviction. “The tendency ... to abstain from theory ... is in

68 Wehler, p. 533.

69 “It is necessary to recognize that a good archivist must be something of an artist. Experience and practice count for a great deal, but they are not enough; passion and an intuitive confidence are required....” in *Der Archivar* 9 (1956), cols. 281ff.; Rohr, p. 100.

70 Habermas, *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften*, p. 164.

71 Wehler, p. 535.

72 Faber, p. 10.

73 Lippert, pp. 257f.

74 Faber, p. 10.

75 “Those rules which have been concocted from theory, as opposed to those which have been developed through practical experience, I consider worthless,” in Hille, p. 30; see also Brenneke, p. 39.

76 *Mitteilungsblatt des Generaldirektors der (preußischen) Staatsarchive* (1939), p. 64.

itself an integral part of the history of science" (Faber). This may explain why "the necessity for a scientific basis for appraisal has been ignored for all too long."⁷⁷ It also clarifies why it is not particularly characteristic of even present-day archivists to display "a willingness [to address] questions of appraisal seriously" (Zechel), that is, in a theoretical and critical way.

Only in the period between the two world wars did archivists begin to develop a sharper awareness of the problems surrounding archival source appraisal. This awareness was triggered by the political upheavals of the years 1918 and 1933, which resulted in officials clearing out the masses of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century records which had been piling up in their offices. With this development, "the so-called 'problem of bulk' first became evident to German archivists."⁷⁸ Faced with an onslaught of records, they began to doubt whether "general rules of thumb" (Rohr), experience, historical expertise, or intuition were still sufficient for archivists to maintain an evaluative control over the flood of records. These doubts grew out of the political and social conditions in Germany at the time: the consequences of World War I, the relative political instability of the Weimar Republic, and the uncertainty of individual and social life under National Socialism shook the optimistic anthropology of historicism to its foundations. Doubt, scepticism, and insecurity replaced an unproblematic harmony of individual opinion with the mindset of the time;⁷⁹ as a result, the naive faith of archivists in "self-evident standards of value" (Wehler), in a personal "intuitive certainty" (Meinert), and in *Fingerspitzengefühl*, was lost.

Archivists did not, however, take advantage of this growing uncertainty as an opportunity to test and secure the value concepts used in the appraisal process, nor to define more dependable principles for determining value. Bound as they were to the societally sanctioned mindset of the time, they did not consider that problems of archival appraisal arose because the value concepts they were using were underdeveloped; they concentrated instead on developing and compiling formal, systematic guidelines. Assaulted by massive numbers of records, archivists of the newly established *Reichsarchiv* were the first to formulate special instructions for the disposal of records and to establish "categories of basic principles" for individual departments, branches, and agencies.⁸⁰ Then, in the 1930s, the Prussian archives administration appointed a commission on records disposal to establish general disposal principles. The regulations they developed, formulated by Meisner,⁸¹ were intended to sweep away once and for all "the old idea that disposal could be undertaken on a purely intuitive basis according to *Fingerspitzengefühl*" (Brenneke).

Meisner's regulations for the disposal of records were an attempt to provide a firmer foundation for the noncommittal approach of intuitive archival appraisal and as such represent a noteworthy step on the road to mastering the theoretical problems of the archival profession. Meisner's "guiding principles" went a long way towards refining and

77 Zechel, "Werttheorie und Kassation," col. 2; see also Leesch, "Sozialwissenschaften und Archive," col. 105. Leesch attempts to demonstrate how inadequately archivists solve the problems of the profession by following "purified experience" and how much more successfully "on the basis of theoretical considerations."

78 Rohr, p. 75.

79 See also Wehler, p. 536.

80 See in particular Brenneke, pp. 38-42; Enders, pp. 87-90; also, the works cited in Zechel, "Werttheorie und Kassation," cols. 1-4.

81 Meisner, pp. 34ff.

systematizing the business of disposal. But as regulatory standards, with no claim to constituting binding norms, they could not provide the concrete value perspectives that were necessary for “disposal according to content criteria”⁸² — in other words, for an archival judgement as to which records should be “retained on a permanent basis,” and which not. So too, they “still allowed archivists great leeway in making consciously responsible decisions.” It was left to the theoretically nebulous “archivist as artist” (Meinert) to fill in the gaps. However, this also meant that the clearly felt need for concrete, binding value concepts remained unsatisfied.

The resulting uncertainty, added to other more significant factors, also helps to explain the “curious” vehemence with which “the near-ancient quarrel” (Meinert) between *Provenienz* [provenance] and *Pertinenz*, [subject classification] began to be carried out. To be sure, *Provenienz* and *Pertinenz* are arrangement principles, not selection principles; yet, the problem of archival appraisal had an effect on this theoretical discussion as well. The *Pertinenzprinzip* [principle of subject classification] was rejected all the more vehemently as an archival arrangement principle because it made the unresolved question of archival value so clearly noticeable and revealed archival uncertainty so plainly. When following the *Pertinenzprinzip*, archivists were abruptly and threateningly confronted with a staggering variety of individual subjects, all of which lacked any prescribed value priority. In this situation, archivists had to resolve questions of value on a subject-by-subject basis, without really knowing by what criteria they should recognize value. The *Provenienzprinzip* [principle of provenance] on the other hand, obscured the need for the concrete, binding value principles archivists seemed unable to define, and offered surrogate appraisal methods. In this way, the *Provenienzprinzip*, indispensable as it was for archival arrangement, also provided a formal, ideological basis for undertaking records disposal.

In order to understand the motives behind this, one should realize that the documentary material which archivists of that time were entrusted to administer as part of the documentary heritage was considered *a priori* to be of good provenance simply by virtue of the fact that it originated from the domain of the state. Regardless of what it contained, records which came from the state were thought to possess inherent value, for the society and consequently the archivists of that time considered the state to be something independent and absolute — a supra-societal governing power above all partisanship. As the embodiment of a transcendent idea, the dignity and worthiness of the state was always justified “in and of itself.” Such philosophical and ideological conceptions of the state had dominated bourgeois society since the rise of Idealism, Romanticism, and an over-extended Hegelianism, and were in harmony with an individualistic view of history.⁸³ Consequently, the truth-value of the documentary material was, in principle, never questioned — this was always considered a given. Just as historicism focused research attention more and more on the state as something of central value, so too did the appraising archivist regard the origin of the material from the absolutized state as a value criterion.

As an arrangement principle, the *Provenienzprinzip* — in contrast to the *Pertinenzprinzip* — hid from archivists the fact that this was an extremely ephemeral and

82 This and the following cited in Brenneke, p. 42.

83 See also Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Das deutsche Dilemma. Leidenswege der politischen Emanzipation* (München, 1971), pp. 15ff.; and also Ernst Engelberg, “Über Theorie und Methode in der Geschichtswissenschaft,” *ZfG* 19 (1971), p. 1353.

unproductive value principle. For material with an *a priori* value did not need to be appraised individually on the basis of subject matter so long as it was perceived to be inextricably bound to the context of origin, as prescribed by the *Provenienzprinzip*. Under these presuppositions, the archivist always dealt with groups of documents which in general took one of two forms: either they arrived as “grand, organically evolved registries,” the preservation of which was already guaranteed by the strict *Registraturprinzip* [principle of original order]; or they arrived as “organic bodies of archival documents” the context of which within the registries was transformed by a more open application of the *Provenienzprinzip*. But because of the high societal value placed on the *origin* of the documentary material — material which, according to the *Provenienzprinzip*, occurred in such neat and ordered forms — the process of archival disposal for both groups of documents consisted basically of eliminating the “ephemeral.” In other words, it was the task of the archivist to relieve the registry of “ballast,” represented by “records of transmittal or receipt,” or “duplicate records,” etc., in order to make the essential elements of the record “organism” all the more clearly visible.⁸⁴

Archivists never considered the place of archival value within the arrangement structure of the *Provenienzprinzip* in any pointed way. For, in contrast to the *Pertinenzprinzip*, the *Provenienzprinzip* allowed archivists to avoid this issue. Faced with the task of appraising documents under these conditions, archivists saw themselves pinned between the *Scylla* of a naive and troubled faith in intuition on the one hand, and the *Charybdis* of an archival world devoid of principles of value on the other. In response, they sought refuge in structural and functional criteria. A disposal process based on the *Provenienzprinzip* obscured the need for concrete value concepts in the appraisal process. This situation persisted as long as society continued to sanction the overestimation of government institutions at the expense of more informal institutions of society. In practice, this presumed that archivists were willing, despite all protestations to the contrary, either to ignore the mass onslaught of records, or to postpone mastering the problem of appraisal by erecting storage areas, “limbos,” intermediary records centres, and similar institutions.

However, with the expansion of responsibilities during World War II and the continued differentiation of all aspects of societal life, the rate of increase of written materials began to grow rapidly again in the 1950s. As a result, the problem of archival appraisal impressed itself upon the archival consciousness with renewed intensity. But it was precisely the highly acclaimed 35th German Archival Conference of 1957, in spite of its role in advancing archival methodology, which revealed in full measure how unsuitable archival methods were and how little had been developed up to that point in the way of an archival theory for resolving “the central problem of all archival activity ... [through] the identification of archival value.”⁸⁵

The most renowned effort to find a solution, one which had the most profound effect on future developments, was undertaken at this conference by Georg Wilhelm Sante and Wilhelm Rohr.⁸⁶ The Sante/Rohr model, as we shall call it here for the sake of convenience, is based on a more or less consciously shared awareness that archival resources are

84 See also Brenneke, pp. 20ff., 38, 41. Herman Meinert anticipated this: in records disposition, “an unconscious idea seems to have persisted that if one weeded out the worthless, what remained would all be of archival value,” in “Zur Problematik des modernen Archivwesens,” p. 99.

85 Meinert, “Zur Problematik,” p. 97.

86 Sante, pp. 90ff.; Rohr, “Zur Problematik,” pp. 74ff.

becoming increasingly insufficient to control all the documentary material produced within the jurisdiction of archivists and can no longer absorb “the hypertrophy ... of the records” (Sante). This recognition did not, however, provide enough of an incentive for archivists to adapt archival theory and methods to handle the growing volume of records. Instead, they looked for a solution in the opposite direction: they attempted, using systematic techniques, to reduce the volume of records to proportions which traditional archival methods of appraisal still seemed able to manage. Hence Sante pleaded — to use his metaphor — “that the flood ... be intercepted right at its source and channeled into canals which partially bypass the archives.” This meant, of course, that archivists had to accept the fact that they no longer performed their “definitive task ... of selecting and preserving essential documents” by extracting them from the totality of the accruing documentary material. “Instead,” as Sante suggested, “the pressure on archives will be relieved at the start if a selection is made already within the agencies.”⁸⁷ In order to control the record mass, in other words, archivists were to undertake archival appraisal only for a systematically selected, highly reduced core of documentary material. Toward this end, Sante in effect combined the practices of the “selective archives” [*Auslesearchiv*] of earlier centuries, which collected selected individual documents, with the dominant *Provenienzprinzip*, thereby forming a connection with the “elite registries” of the later “central archives” [*Hauptarchiv*].^{88,b}

Whether this practice can still be useful for modern day archival appraisal depends largely on how archivists arrive at the standards of value used to identify the “archivally valuable” agencies whose documentary records will form part of the documentary heritage. For this selection process, Sante suggested that the archivist adopt a policy of choosing “only those agencies of greater significance which form the supporting framework of the administration, so to speak, and which set themselves apart by their creative activity.... Only such agencies are valuable for archival purposes and shall be called upon to submit their records.” If, however, archivists no longer have ideologically established, “self-evident standards” at their disposal, by what and in relation to what can they determine the archival significance of an agency? Sante sought the answer to this problem in the function of the agency. Archivists “must make their selection with a view to the function of the agency and the significance attached to that function.” They must first “analyse the functions of individual agencies; ... only thereafter can the records produced by these agencies be appraised.”⁸⁹

Sante’s ideas did indeed rejuvenate “old tactics” with “new strategies,”⁹⁰ but he did not offer any concrete value criteria and as a result still left “considerable leeway for the archivist to make a responsible decision.”⁹¹ Consequently, Wilhelm Rohr attempted to

87 Sante, pp. 93, 95.

88 Brenneke, p. 101.

b Booms is referring here to archival institutions of Germany before unification in 1871. The *Auslesearchiv* or selective archives was maintained by the higher government offices of eighteenth-century Prussia and Bavaria to aid in developing domestic and foreign policy. Individual documents were selected from the *Behördenarchive* or agency archives of the lower government offices and combined with the records of the higher offices to form one large collection. In the nineteenth century, the government established a *Hauptarchiv* or central state archives which remained closed to the public and housed only the registries (*Eliteregistaturen*) of the higher government offices.

89 Sante, pp. 93, 95.

90 The subtitle of his article, p. 90.

91 Brenneke, p. 42.

make Sante's method more useful and practicable. Rohr sought a more exact measure by which to identify the "*crème de la crème*" (Sante) of records-creating agencies, and he found it in the totality of an administrative organization. "For the central state archives," Rohr explained, "the most valuable records would be, for example, those of the constitutional bodies at the highest levels of government ..., then the office of foreign affairs, for which of course all documents that do not relate to higher politics would have to be severely extracted from the whole. Next follow, through a number of *stages* of declining importance, the registries of the other ministries, and within these, the central or ministerial offices are the most important.... Subordinate agencies ... will usually not survive the filter of selection."⁹² In other words, in his effort to establish a standard for selecting those agencies whose records alone would form the documentary heritage, Rohr resorted to a principle of hierarchical gradation and equated the hierarchical position of the producers of documents with the value of the documents which they produce. In doing so, he assumes that the more important a records-creating agency is within the whole organic structure of an administrative organization, the more valuable are the documents it generates. At the same time, this standard conforms to those societal values which posit "the primacy of external over internal politics," or "the primacy of politics over economics," and so forth.⁹³

If one analyses the model developed by Sante and Rohr, one can see that they have both, despite all arguments to the contrary, really failed to produce a truly positive value selection. In its basic form, their model retains the negative approach of conventional disposal practices which are geared to eliminating valueless material. In essence, they have merely shifted the application of Brennekeian disposal practices from the records themselves to the producer of the records: whereas traditional disposal processes were initiated within the original context of the registries or "organic archival bodies," in order to distill the final essence of the documentary organism (Brenneke) through the continuous elimination of ephemeral documents, Rohr and Sante initiated their disposal process within the original context of administrative organizations, in order to distill the final essence of an administrative organism through the continuous elimination of ephemeral registries. Therefore, not unlike the *Reichs*- and Prussian archivists of the 1930s, Sante and Rohr made judgements about whether records should form part of the documentary heritage according to how well such records documented the activity of their producers. The idea that organizational activity is inherently of archival value was anchored in prevailing societal opinion; even up to the 1950s, it continued to reflect the excessive ideological significance which was attached to the institutional or formal public realm at the expense of the informal, and the degree to which the state, as only a part of society, has traditionally been absolutized.

Furthermore, the Rohr/Sante model uses purely economic reasons, and not those derived from the process of archival appraisal itself, to conclude that archivists must drastically reduce the number of agencies or individuals which they consider to be potential documentation producers. The standards needed for this reduction are not of universally binding validity; on the contrary, they are based on the bureaucratic principle of hierarchical gradation, and are consequently derived from the activity of the records creators themselves. Thus, even with the highly acclaimed Sante/Rohr model, archivists,

92 Rohr, "Zur Problematik," p. 79 (emphasis added).

93 Compare the last half of this quotation with Engelberg, p. 1353.

in forming the documentary heritage, were still dependent upon rigid, formal standards inherent in the administrative structure of the records creators. These standards remained inadequate for documentary appraisal and were always vulnerable to changes in the organization and administrative structure of the records producer. It must be concluded, therefore, that like their colleagues, Sante and Rohr were unsuccessful in their efforts to develop comprehensive and, at the same time, concrete criteria for archival appraisal.

Fritz Zimmermann, however, at that time did recognize that all attempts to do justice to the problem of appraisal — in the absence of concrete value standards — suffer from the same weaknesses: they approach the problem “too schematically and put too much emphasis on the formal structures.” He made these critical statements at the same 1957 Archives Conference where Sante and Rohr had offered their “virtually revolutionary ideas” (G. Enders). Consequently, Zimmermann felt compelled to contribute “to the development of a genuinely secure, if not incontestable, standard for archival selection.” To this end he tried to determine the “objective archival value of the individual document being considered for deposit in the archives.” In other words, he sought to define a value for the archival document which was not, as in the Sante/Rohr model, derived from general societal analyses of the activity of the records producers and which was not inherent in administrative functions. Instead, Zimmermann believed that he could deduce archival value from human interest and need. In a concept borrowed from political economy he maintained that it is “human demand” which “gives a document its value.”⁹⁴ Yet, although he was seeking a solution to the problem of archival appraisal, Zimmermann merely tried to expand that value category to which the Prussian and *Reichs*-archivists had always adhered in addition to their efforts to find a formal and practical solution to the problem following provenance-based disposal practices: namely, the value category formed by the demands of historians.

Ever since archivists chose to define themselves professionally as historians, they have tried to ply “their trade in harmony with their science” (Lippert). They have unrelentingly sought meaning for their profession not only in the responsibility they owed their sponsors to maintain documentation, but especially in their function as “hewers of wood and drawers of water” for historical researchers. Inevitably, there grew out of this a professional ambition to undertake archival appraisal in harmony with the demands and ideas of historical research. The statement that “only the person who is familiar with historical problems is qualified for records disposal” (Dahm), has long formed the basis for an archival professional ethos.

For an equally long time, however, as Lippert observed in 1901, archivists have had to endure constantly “shifting directions and new endeavours in the field of the historical sciences” — features which are inherent in the very nature of historical research.⁹⁵ Since that time, archivists have also been confronted with the fact that fluctuating historical demand, defined by historical theories, is actually not a very dependable category for determining value, especially if one is interested in “maintaining enduring values” (Rohr). If, as we have seen, a standard of value related to administrative structure and function turned out to be an inadequate and untrustworthy category for determining what was of enduring value, the determination of value according to the demands of historians proved to be similarly inadequate. For “enduring values” are dependent not on

94 Zimmermann, pp. 103ff., 104, 107.

95 Lippert, p. 257.

the degree to which they satisfy the needs of present day research, but, at best, only the needs of future research.

And so archivists, infused with the epistemological categories of classical German Idealism and in complete harmony with the historiography of the German Idealist school, undertook the selection of documents "*sub specie aeternitatis*" (Sante), although the categories they used to define value could of course never attain this ideal. Since then, archivists have carried on relentless "debates concerning the possible future value of the records" (Meinert),⁹⁶ and have tried to identify "the significant areas of life within the pertinent records which should probably be documented since they will continue to provide answers to future inquiries" (Zimmermann).⁹⁷ And although already at the beginning archivists had to admit that it is "very difficult to predict what will be pertinent 50 or 100 years from now" (Lippert/Müsebeck),⁹⁸ they did not waver in their efforts "to preserve everything of importance in anticipation of the needs and problems of an unforeseeable future" (Rohr),⁹⁹ and "to anticipate and consider possible future value perspectives ... of scholarship" (Brenneke).¹⁰⁰ They did of course realize that this required "a prediction about an essentially unpredictable future." Yet, archivists remained optimistic about their abilities to speculate, an optimism rooted in the philosophy of German Idealism. They believed that, upon closer examination, such a prediction would not be entirely impossible: "the future is not at all a completely unwritten page, for the present has already left its mark on it. The future has already begun in the present" (Zimmermann).¹⁰¹ Who would want to argue with the superficial truth of this aphorism? If, however, archivists are to retain any kind of confidence in the perspective of the future as a standard for archival appraisal, they must, while maintaining an optimistic understanding of society as a complete whole, "possess that foreseeing and predicting breadth of vision which lifts their value judgements beyond the narrow circle of present conditions to heights of historical understanding" (Meinert).¹⁰²

The society in which we live and work today is, as we have become all too well aware, no longer infused with such optimism. Therefore, we perceive quite readily that, through such a faith in visionary power, our archival forebears had entered the realm of "historical theology;" they had attempted to play the role of the prophet who reads evidence and interprets signs of future events from the past. In the Idealist tradition of Hegel's historical epistemology, they tried to gain the value standards for appraisal by constructing a futurology of potential issues in historical scholarship. But their efforts to form the archival documentary heritage of the present from evidence of the past using value standards of the future necessarily ended in speculation, especially since the basic conditions of human existence fog our perception of the future. Such a technique has proven even less effective for dealing with archival appraisal than that which had relied upon the central value standard of the state.

96 Meinert, "Die Aktenwertung. Versuch einer methodologischen Zusammenfassung," *Mitteilungsblatt des Generaldirektors der (preußischen) Staatsarchive* (1939), p. 108.

97 Zimmermann, p. 110.

98 Lippert, as cited by Ernst Müsebeck in "Grundsätzliches zur Kassation moderner Aktenbestände," *Archivstudien zum 70. Geburtstag von W. Lippert* (Dresden, 1931), p. 160.

99 Rohr, "Das Aktenwesen der preußischen Regierungen," p. 62.

100 Brenneke, pp. 42f.

101 Zimmermann, p. 110.

102 Meinert, "Die Aktenbewertung," p. 109.

It seems that Artur Zechel also realized this problem: in his contribution to the testimonials marking the seventieth birthday of Hermann Meinert in 1964 and in the framework of a critical evaluation of Zimmermann's theoretical efforts, he argued that archivists should be moving away from "calculating the probable future demands of historians" as the value standard for appraisal. In its place he recommended that a concept taken from Gestalt theory be introduced: the so-called "Ehrenfels criteria" of the "status" and "purity" of the (record)-Gestalt.¹⁰³ With this, however, Zechel seemed to find himself returning to the "aesthetic" of the *Provenienzprinzip*, the ineffectiveness of which as a standard of value we attempted to expose earlier.

In the meantime, Hermann Meinert, probably one of the most perceptive of our insightful archival forebears, had also surrendered in the face of problems surrounding archival appraisal. It had been Meinert who had engineered a virtual Copernican revolution in archival appraisal, that "problème-clef de l'archivistique moderne" (Bautier).¹⁰⁴ He had "shifted the emphasis away from the negative results of appraisal, from the destruction of the valueless, to the positive goal, to the selection of the permanently valuable."¹⁰⁵ Together with the necessity of such a revolution Meinert had also recognized that a "positive value selection" can only be accomplished if the documentary material is measured according to "fixed standards" in a "valuation process" based on an analysis of content.¹⁰⁶ This, however, assumes that such value standards are derived from higher value principles. Meinert offered three: *Volk* [the people], *Staat* [the state], and *Kultur* [culture].

Such "individual entities of a higher order" as complete individual totalities could certainly serve the research interests of historiography, which tends to individualize its historical subjects.¹⁰⁷ However, for the archivist appraising documentary material these categories proved to be much too vague for the purpose of ascribing value to groups of records in the appraisal process. Recognizing this, Meinert wrote in 1956 that in 1939 he had attempted "to identify those points according to which the 'appraisal process' could be organized and understood as selection process." However, it was "hardly possible then to develop a definitive and satisfying theory, let alone to develop procedures for a case-by-case analysis."¹⁰⁸ One must realize, Meinert proclaimed at the oft-cited Archives Conference in Koblenz, "that here one is fast approaching the limits of possibility." Meinert clearly realized that the unalterable preconditions necessary for the application of his own positive selection appraisal were undefinable, for in resigning himself to this fact all he could do was fall back more emphatically than ever upon the hermeneutic tools of the historian: he required that "the archivist must be an historian" and that "a good archivist must be something of an artist," equipped with "experience, ... practice," and especially "passion and an intuitive confidence."¹⁰⁹ In the course of our investigation, however, we have already seen how unsatisfactory and unprofitable these tools are for appraising the vast bulk of material.

103 Zechel, "Werttheorie und Kassation," col. 16.

104 Meinert, "Die Aktenwertung," pp. 103ff.; *ibid.*, "Von archivarischer Kunst und Verantwortung," cols. 281ff.; Rohr, "Zur Problematik," pp. 97ff.

105 Rohr, "Zur Problematik," p. 77.

106 Meinert, "Die Aktenwertung," pp. 103ff.; see also Brenneke, p. 42.

107 See Nipperdey, p. 147.

108 Meinert, "Von archivarischer Kunst und Verantwortung," col. 284.

109 Meinert, "Zur Problematik," p. 100.

Do not these considerations leave the impression, then, that the highly acclaimed Archives Conference of 1957, however fruitful it may have been for the development of administrative control methods for archives, not only left the problem of appraisal unsolved, but also signalled the failure of archivists to meet this challenge? Johannes Papritz may have been under this impression in 1964 and 1965 when he maintained "that appraisal and culling ... should only be undertaken following scientific principles," but in the final analysis he could only observe that "knowledge of the structural form of the record body" must serve as a precondition for such scientific appraisal.¹¹⁰ Even though such insights are helpful, even indispensable, in the appraisal process, they too fail to provide an answer to the question as to which records belong to the documentary heritage and which do not. There is, it seems, no direct path leading from Papritz's theories about the structural form of the record body to a "theory of archival value" (Papritz).

Finally, efforts have been made to contain the floods of documentary material by gathering them into the reservoirs and catch basins of "limbos," intermediary records centres, *dépôts intermédiaires*, even *cité interministérielle*, so that such material does not flow, partially unexamined, past the archival repository. This has led to the development of rather imposing techniques for rendering the collected and backlogged material systematically surveyable. Which methods, however, are to be used to reduce this backlog to the standard proportions of "a mere extract" or "a mere condensation" (Rohr)? Which value standards are to be related to which value principles in directing the formation of the documentary heritage? Are there more satisfactory alternatives to structuralist methods or those which are inherent in the records creating administration? Are there methods which will be more profitable than those which remain uselessly speculative? Answers to such questions, as far as we can see, are also not to be found within American, English, French, or other foreign professional literature.¹¹¹

What, then, shall we, as participants in this forty-seventh Archives Conference, answer to our East German colleague Hans-Joachim Schreckenbach, when he states that archivists in what he calls "capitalist countries ... possess no real solutions" to "the problem of appraising information" and the formation of the documentary heritage? As it stands, it is difficult to deny the truth of this statement, at least in a general sense. But are we therefore also forced to accept the premise closely tied to it, and presented in a variety of ways by others, that "the reasons" for the "hopelessness of bourgeois archival science" are inherent "in the objective reality of capitalist society"? Must we — living, as we are told, within the "socio-economic context" of "late capitalism," and therefore inevitably afflicted with backwardness — merely accept the eschatological pronouncement that "a real solution" to the question of archival value "is possible in the final analysis only under the conditions of a socialist society?"¹¹² Is the relationship between society and the

110 Johannes Papritz, "Zum Massenproblem der Archive," *Der Archivar* 17 (1964), col. 220; "Methodik der archivischen Auslese und Kassation bei zwei Strukturtypen der Massenakten," *Der Archivar* 18 (1965), cols. 118f.

111 Since there is hardly space here to cite all the pertinent foreign literature, only a few studies which give a broader overview of the problem can be mentioned: Rudolf Schatz, "Niemandland zwischen Behörden und Archiv (England — Frankreich — Deutschland)," *AZ* 62 (1966), pp. 66ff.; Eckhart G. Franz, "Aktenverwaltung und Kassation in England," *Der Archivar* 10 (1967), cols. 237ff.; also his "Aktenverwaltung und Zwischenarchive in Frankreich," *Der Archivar* 24 (1971), cols. 275ff.; Schreckenbach, "Stand der Informationsbewertung in kapitalistischen Ländern," *Archivmitteilungen* 19 (1969); see also the relevant journal reports published in recent issues of *AZ*.

112 Schreckenbach, pp. 180, 182.

formation of a documentary heritage so politically determined? Do we really perceive, on this side of the border, “a fundamental lack of perspective on the part of West German archivists” and the “rigidity of their outdated ideas,” while on the other side we witness “the victorious vision of socialism”?¹¹³ Perhaps, in answer to such charges, we should examine what the socio-economic redevelopment of an “advanced socialist society” has produced in the way of solutions to this key problem of archival science.

In contrast to archivists in our society, who have only recently begun to move away from the exclusive application of a negative disposal principle in favour of Meinert’s principle of positive selection, archivists in socialist societies adopted Meinert’s principle much earlier. Only a few years after Meinert made his final plea (1957) to cease the practice of simply disposing of valueless records and to adopt instead the principle of selecting valuable records, the *Basic Principles for the Work of the Russian State Archives*, published in 1964, encouraged Russian archivists to “determine the scientific and practical value of documentary material.”¹¹⁴ A year later, East Germany followed suit with *Principles for Determining Value*.¹¹⁵

There are many reasons for the fact that this methodological reorientation was completed more rapidly in these two countries. Certainly one factor is that East German archivists began to control the large volume of records by applying in a systematic way the archival methods made available to them through the previous work of Prussian archivists. Another factor is that archivists in these countries were forced to accept much earlier that “the financial contribution of society” towards archives, and especially towards the building of storage areas, had “to be kept within economically responsible limits.”¹¹⁶ But this reorientation was accomplished so rapidly especially because a socialist society built upon a planned system recognized more quickly the economic utility of Meinert’s thesis. Liselott Enders expressed the problem very succinctly: “If we use the general rule of thumb that only about one per cent of all the records produced by state administrative offices will be permanently preserved in the state archives, and that consequently about 99 per cent can be disposed of after its active retention period has expired, then it is neither scientifically desirable nor economically defensible to spend most of our time and energy on minutely culling the larger mass of records.”¹¹⁷

However, if this economic principle of positive selection is to become effective in practical terms, it requires, as we have tried to show, the development of standards of value and above all value principles to which standards used in the process of appraisal are to refer. Meinert himself failed to realize his own theory because he did not formulate such value principles concretely enough. Let us now see whether and how the Marxist adaptations of his theory have solved this problem.

113 Walter Hochmuth, “Unsere Perspektive,” *Archivmitteilungen* 16 (1966), p. 3; *Kritik der bürgerlichen Geschichtsschreibung*, p. 1.

114 *Grundregeln für die Organisation der Registratur und für die Arbeit der Archive der Institutionen, Organisationen und Betriebe der UdSSR*, published by the State Archives Administration, Ministry of the Interior, German Democratic Republic (Potsdam, 1965), p. 33.

115 *Grundsätze der Wertermittlung für die Aufbewahrung und Kassation von Schriftgut der sozialistischen Epoche in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, published by the State Archives Administration, Ministry of the Interior, German Democratic Republic (Potsdam, 1965).

116 Gerhart Enders, p. 85.

117 Liselott Enders, “Die weitere Rationalisierung des Bewertungsverfahrens,” *Archivmitteilungen* 21 (1971), p. 85.

“In socialist societies, historical materialism provides the standard perspective on history. As a science which formulates comprehensive laws for the development of society, it also determines archival value criteria,” wrote Gerhard Enders in his *Archivverwaltungslehre* [*Principles of Archives Administration*].¹¹⁸ Accordingly, the first sentence in section 11 of the East German *Principles for Determining Value* reads:

Dialectical and historical materialism is the scientific foundation for formulating and applying unified principles for determining value. Because it has provided a method by which to identify the inherent laws determining societal development, it also offers scientific standards for judging the value of records produced within the provenance of the state, the economy, and society.¹¹⁹

If our central question in this business is which value principles have allowed archivists in socialist societies to resolve the problem of archival appraisal, the answer deduced from the basic Marxist statement given here must be that these principles are “the objective inherent laws of societal development.” In order to give this “basic scientific category of all of societal development, which was discovered by Marx,”¹²⁰ the kind of substance that will allow critical appraisal, we must remember that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels understood this formula to be the “progressive extension of basic socio-economic forms,” and that they were convinced that it contained “the inherent law of class struggle,” which “as the driving force of historical progress ... reveals itself in historical phenomena, and only in them.” The Marxist theory of history teaches us that with this Marx and Engels finally discovered “the criterion by which significant and insignificant phenomena in the historical process could be distinguished;”¹²¹ so too Marxist archival science contends that they also provided the archivist with definitive criteria of value needed in the archival formation of the documentary heritage.

Of course, as section 12 of the *Principles* explains, it is prerequisite that these value criteria be applied “dialectically.”¹²² Ernst Engelberg among others once described the categories for this “dialectic materialism” as: “the unity and the struggle of opposites, or the inner and outer contradiction of a phenomenon, ... essence and appearance, necessity and chance, content and form, potentiality and reality.” To be sure, a great deal of imagination would be required if such abstract categories are to be rendered useful for archival appraisal. It stands to reason that, as Engelberg suggests, archivists who must use the *Principles* to appraise sources, much as “Marxist-Leninist historians” in their efforts to interpret the sources, cannot “do without the categories of historical materialism. ... They are points of orientation in the analysis of historical facts.” Engelberg also gives some examples of such points of orientation: “forces of production, class, state, etc.”¹²³

Now we must recall at this point that, during the course of our investigation, we already once found such concepts to be ineffective as value principles for the archival process of selection, mainly because they were not concrete enough. In fact it was Meinert, originator of the principle of positive selection, who in 1957 gave up trying to define the problem further, because his value principles of “*Volk* [the people], *Staat* [the state], and

118 Liselott Enders, pp. 86f.

119 *Grundsätze*, p. 11.

120 *Kritik der bürgerlichen Geschichtsschreibung*, p. 37.

121 Streisand, p. 202.

122 *Grundsätze*, p. 11.

123 Engelberg, p. 1361.

Kultur [culture]” proved to be too undefined.¹²⁴ Could Marxist archivists, with the help of the “dialectical interaction” occurring between Engelberg’s abstract categories and these “individual entities of a higher order” have succeeded where Meinert had failed? To determine whether this ideological “superstructure” of “dialectical and historical materialism” really reaches the “grassroots” of appraisal, we must analyse Marxist “appraisal criteria” and their function within the appraisal process.

The “function of the creator of the registry” occupies the very top of the list of the “appraisal criteria” given in the *Principles for Determining Value*.¹²⁵ The status of this criterion is justified in this way: “The function of the creator of the registry determines decisively the value of the records which originate from this function.” G.A. Belov explains the archival “principles” of the USSR along similar lines: “the value of the documents” is an “unconditional consequence of the significance of the creator of the records and of his or her function in society.”¹²⁶ In other words, as Reinhard Kluge has summarized it,¹²⁷ the following was most important for the “development of Marxist value criteria”: “The *Principles* directed the process of determining value *primarily* towards analysing the function of the records creator within socialist society” (emphasis added).

We should also recall at this point, how in 1956-57 Georg Wilhelm Sante explained the value of this (at that time not yet considered “Marxist”) value criterion. Archivists “must make their selection with a view to the function of the departments and the significance attached to that function.” They must always begin by “analysing the functions of the individual agencies ..., and only thereafter can the records produced by these agencies be appraised.”¹²⁸ The arguments, Marxist or not, correspond to each other exactly. But in our assessment of the usefulness of Sante’s proposal as a solution to the problem of appraisal, we had reached the conclusion that these proposals are based on an ideologically conditioned, absolute and positive evaluation of the activity of the records creator. As such they are largely ineffective as value principles for the appraisal of documentary material.¹²⁹ Could the grand design of the Marxist world view have altered this conclusion?

In section 35 of the *Principles for Determining Value* one reads: “the higher the place of the records creator within the hierarchy of a certain jurisdiction, the greater are, as a rule, his or her tasks and responsibilities with respect to space and material.”¹³⁰ Under the heading “Conclusions for Determining Value,” which are taken from section 35, one reads that these criteria “at the same time provide a perspective for judging the relative value of records originating from the activity of the records creator.”¹³¹

At the 1957 Archival Conference in Koblenz Wilhelm Rohr had said that “the decisive criterion ... will be the degree to which an individual agency possesses the autonomy and the power to make independent decisions, and furthermore the importance of the tasks

124 See above pp. 93ff.

125 *Grundsätze*, pp. 14ff.

126 Belov, p. 45.

127 Reinhard Kluge, “Zukünftige Aufgaben in Forschung und Praxis der Wertermittlung,” *Archivmitteilungen* 17 (1967), p. 48.

128 Sante, p. 95.

129 See above pp. 89ff.

130 *Grundsätze*, p. 16.

131 *Grundsätze*, p. 23; see also Belov, p. 49.

delegated to it."¹³² As we have seen, this criterion formed the basis for Rohr's attempts to refine Sante's all too global value designations, which were based on the social status of the records creator: the ranking of records within Rohr's values corresponded to the ranking of the records creator within the bureaucratic hierarchy of the administrative organization. The appraisal approach found in sections 30, 33, and 36-39 of the *Principles for Determining Value* is essentially the same.¹³³

We should recall at this point our observation that, in formulating these appraisal criteria, neither Rohr nor Sante referred to the actual contents of the records.¹³⁴ We should remember as well that Rohr based his theory on the axiom that records produced by state agencies should be considered valuable "in and of themselves." The value of these records increase, however, as one moves up the administrative hierarchy within which the records creator fulfills his or her function. We saw that correlating bureaucratic hierarchy with archival value in this way produces a very provisional and schematic assignment of value. Whenever archivists use the Rohr model to determine whether and to what degree individual record groups should be kept "permanently," they are once again left to rely on the old familiar disposal techniques, which, as we have concluded, are also ineffective for the appraisal process. Rohr's theory, as formulated in the so-called Sante/Rohr documentation model, failed to solve the problem of appraisal. But could the mantle of Marxist philosophy have rendered this theory more useful for the task?

In essence, the professional interests of East German archivists in the 1960s as expressed in the *Principles for Determining Value* were an extension of the Sante/Rohr model. This is why, under the heading "Criteria for Value," the "function of the record group creator" is listed first. The "nature and character of the document" is only second on the list.¹³⁵ Discussed under this heading are mainly criteria derived from records theory. Certainly these are indispensable aids in evaluating the preliminary documentary quality of records. But these "value criteria" offer little help to the archivist trying to decide whether groups of records, on the basis of their content, are to be included as part of the documentary heritage or whether they are to be discarded as insignificant. Equally unhelpful are the other "value criteria" listed under this second heading: "position within the documentary heritage" [*Übertieferungslage*], "special characteristics relating to social upheavals" [*Besonderheiten bei gesellschaftlichen Umwälzungen*], and "special characteristics conditioned by territorial factors" [*Territorial bedingte Besonderheiten*].^{136,c} What is more, these criteria are only of a subsidiary nature.

132 Rohr, "Zur Problematik," p. 79.

133 *Grundsätze*, pp. 15ff; in the meantime, Botho Brachmann has reworked and made changes to "The Hierarchy of Sources" in his "Zum System der Informationsbewertung in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik," *Archivmitteilungen* 19 (1969), p. 96. While value standards in the East German *Grundsätze* were still dominated by "the pyramid of state administration and the records originating there," Brachmann followed the Soviet *Quellenkunde der Geschichte der UdSSR* by constructing his hierarchy of values according to "the leading role of the party of the working class" and putting at the top of the pyramid "the works of V.I. Lenin."

134 See above, pp. 48f.

135 *Grundsätze*, pp. 14, 25f.

136 *Grundsätze*, pp. 14, 26ff.

c These value criteria use terminology which holds special meaning for Marxist academics in Eastern Europe. The last two reflect the prominence of revolutionary movements and imperialist activity within the Marxist-Leninist view of history. As a result, translation of these criteria into English is difficult and tends to obscure the original ideological context and meaning. We have therefore included the original German expressions within the text for reference.

Can we then state, at the conclusion of this critical analysis, that archivists in socialist countries have succeeded in finding those “real solutions” (Schreckenbach) to the problem of archival value where archivists in “capitalist countries” have failed? Already in 1967, Gerhard Enders, setting aside all ideological judgements, had concluded that the *Principles for Determining Value* “did not constitute a comprehensive system of appraisal. They are practically of no help in the disposal process. They are rather methodological aids that point out a way to proceed: compile lists of records samples and records creators, and continue work on records cataloguing.”¹³⁷

By following Ender’s instructions on “the methodological preliminaries ... for determining value,” East German archivists have in the meantime established and developed an excellent system of techniques in their “unified system for appraising information.” It is therefore all the more surprising that, after the end of the first five-year plan for controlling information, Liselott Enders had to admit “that, when put into practice, the appraisal system fragmented into individual, partial systems which could not be reunited as the need arose. Rather, when applied in an ‘introverted’ manner, they threatened to explode the system, thereby making it unusable.” Liselott Enders was solely concerned with “techniques of systematic appraisal,” not “theoretical positions” or “the system of appraisal itself.”¹³⁸

Defects in practical application become evident again and again and time after time. In archival work they arise especially in cases where the weaknesses of a “unified system of information appraisal” begin to appear when confronted with organizational and functional changes in the system of the information producers, as Liselott Enders already observed earlier.¹³⁹ In the societal process, the primary and secondary forces affecting development are always changing, the social determinants constantly in flux. Is it possible, we may ask at this point, that such methodological difficulties keep recurring also because this “unified system of information appraisal” does not offer a method for actually evaluating the content or the substance of the information itself? Can we, therefore, conclude that the archival appraisal theory developed so far by the East Germans has proven to be incapable of meeting the demands of modern archives? To measure the significance of the substance of the information for great volumes of records, more is required than evaluations of the “function of the records creator,” structural analyses of documents, and so forth. This fact is not altered by pointing out the degree to which techniques for controlling records have been perfected, although these are a necessary precondition for the appraisal procedure. East German archivists do possess a superbly developed system of information appraisal. But in their efforts to solve the key question of archival appraisal, the tools they have at hand are no different than those available to their colleagues in “capitalist countries.” And these tools, as we have argued, are not sufficient to resolve the problem of archival appraisal.

A stereotypical, oft-repeated assertion is that the Marxist historical dialectic is the scientific basis for the applying the *Principles for Determining Value*; yet this does not change the fact that the archival tools used on both sides of the border are basically the same.¹⁴⁰ As an ideological “superstructure,” this all-purpose Marxist formula obviously

137 Gerhard Enders, “Zur Problematik der Archivwürdigkeit,” *Archivmitteilungen* 17 (1967), p. 89.

138 Liselott Enders, p. 85.

139 Liselott Enders, “Zum System der Bewertung,” *Archivmitteilungen* 18 (1968), p. 185.

140 *Grundsätze*, p. 11.

does not affect the “grassroots” of archival appraisal. It “precedes” the analysis in a very formal way and is “somehow glued on or tacked on at the end.”¹⁴¹ As we have seen, archival appraisal of information proceeds without any real reference to the stereotypes of ideology, and can be easily explained and understood in practice without them.¹⁴²

Those who think this statement somewhat absurd should re-examine at this point just how concrete the categories of dialectical and historical materialism, as described by Ernst Engelberg, really are.¹⁴³ From this it will become clear how little is gained from any attempt to identify value or lack thereof with their help. Such categories measure the value of archival documentary material by the degree to which it documents the “deterministic character of the historical process and its forces.”¹⁴⁴ Therefore, in applying them, archivists find themselves obliged merely to substitute the traditional historical hermeneutic which interprets phenomena according to “individual entities of a higher order” (Nipperdey) with a historical hermeneutic which interprets phenomena according to a process of dialectic tensions.¹⁴⁵ In keeping with the theory of history that is dominant in their society, these Marxist archivists will also find that they, like their Idealist archival forebears, rely as well upon “self-evident standards of value” in the appraisal process, albeit with the difference that these standards are not imparted by their “intuition,” but rather by the state-controlled ideological monopoly on interpretive activity exercised by the central committee that oversees the work of archivists.

Faced with the unsolved problem of archival appraisal, archivists, informed by the philosophy of classical Idealism, have tried to define the principles necessary for appraisal through a futurology of research interests. However, as this scale of value is speculative, it could not serve as a concrete, guiding principle for the process of archival appraisal since it ignores the existential conditions of human existence. In an effort to correct this default, archivists, informed by the philosophy of historical materialism, have tried to define principles necessary for appraisal through “objective laws for social development.” However, as this scale of value is not derived from scientific observation, but is rather based on an historical-philosophical creed, the claim that history can be understood as a determined process is no less speculative. The inherent laws of historical materialism, therefore, also can not serve as concrete, guiding principles for the process of archival appraisal since Marxist epistemology ignores as well the existential conditions of human existence.

Perhaps we must accept Schreckenbach’s assertion that, as archivists in “capitalist countries,” we have not yet found a “real solution” to the problem of appraising the flood of information. If we are to remain consistent with the conclusions of our analysis, we also cannot contradict his assertion that “a true solution to the problem of value” is possible — if not “only,” as he claims, then certainly as well — “under the conditions of a socialist society.”¹⁴⁶ But, in the common interest of all archivists who seek the further development

141 Although Ernst Diehl admonishes East German historians that it is their duty to avoid such superficialities in “Zu Problemen und Aufgaben der Geschichtswissenschaften der DDR,” *ZfG* 17 (1969), p. 1396.

142 For his helpful criticisms, especially in this section of the study, I heartily thank Heinz Hoffmann, *Archivoberinspektor* at the German Federal Archives.

143 Engelberg, p. 1361.

144 Lozek, “Antikommunismus contra Wissenschaft,” *ZfG* 19 (1971), p. 1534; he characterizes comparative criticism of Idealism and Materialism as a “typically neo-positivistic stance.”

145 See Wehler, p. 537; for the concept of hermeneutics see above pp. 84ff.

146 Schreckenbach, pp. 180, 182.

of archival science, we can and must deny that such a solution has already been found in socialist countries.

How then do we archivists propose to find a “real solution” to the problem of appraisal? How can we resolve the key problem of our profession? If we do not want to relinquish our duties in the future to information scientists, if our archives are not to degenerate into storehouses of antiquarian curiosities, then we must be serious in our efforts to overcome decisively the most widespread challenge of our profession: to reduce the growing quantity of documentation to the form of a documentary heritage that is of a useable and storable quality. We have already established that gaining administrative and intellectual control over this vast quantity of material through the mechanical or automated techniques of modern dataprocessing is in itself no solution. We have tried to make clear that success can only be attained when, in the appraisal process, archivists are able to appraise the material according to principles which allow them to make concrete value judgements. This challenge cannot be met, as we have seen, by employing a method which entails “evaluating the function” of the records producer. This functionalist method involves, while keeping in mind each volume of the documentary material, discarding registry after registry until only the documents of those activities remain which, within the total structure of the producer of archival documents, are considered essential and worthy of permanent preservation. We have tried to show that such functional principles are not sufficient to form the documentary heritage of a given archival jurisdiction. In the meantime, the archival profession has come to accept without question that state archives have the responsibility to acquire not only the records which document all the official activities performed by government offices within their jurisdiction, but non-official material as well.¹⁴⁷ Archivists came to this professional conclusion on acquisition policy because they recognized that the sum of the activities of government offices does not equal the sum of historical-political life. Yet, as far as the appraisal of source material is concerned, we have apparently not become sufficiently aware that here, too, archivists cannot derive the principles necessary for appraisal solely from what are considered to be the essential functions of the state within the given jurisdiction of the archives. We should no longer regard the records-generating and records-structuring activities of the records creating agency as the basis for appraisal. Under such premises one cannot effectively avoid the use of traditional disposal practices, nor can one complete a positive value selection. Positive value selection — with a view to reducing information in the whole documentary heritage into smaller groups — requires that appraisal be carried out following the *Pertinenzprinzip* [principle of subject classification]. It requires archivists to appraise the content of individual, subject-defined groups of information regardless of their provenance.¹⁴⁸ We should no longer seek to derive necessary and useful principles for appraisal from analyses of function; we should strive, rather, to take them directly from the social process to which we are responsible.

There have been others who, recognizing the epistemological relativity of value in reality, have turned to the societal process itself in an attempt to find a more effective,

147 Booms, “Grenzen und Gliederungen,” cols. 35, 41.

148 Wilhelm Rohr had already anticipated such unavoidable conclusions, although in a more specialized context: “Under certain circumstances our usual thinking in *Provenienzen* [provenance groupings] and therefore also the appraisal and selection of potential archival material according to the agency from whose records it originates, will need to give way to points of view determined purely by *Pertinenz* [subject content],” in “Zur Problematik,” p. 79.

stable orientation point for the process of archival appraisal. Already in 1939, Hermann Meinert suggested that, in order for “values to be applied in a standard way,” they must be derived “from the essence of the human community.”¹⁴⁹ In 1967 Karlheinz Blaschke recommended preserving especially those documents “which reveal the societal relationships of an era in its essential features.”¹⁵⁰ At that same time, Enders also insisted that archival value must be measured according to its significance for the process of societal development.¹⁵¹ However, it was especially the rise of the modern social sciences that drew our attention to society as the constitutive element of reality. As a concept, it has become more powerful than the state: the state is now viewed as only a part of society.¹⁵² Societal development, characterized as it is more by change and upheaval than by stability and continuity, makes us more critical of the self-evident and the familiar. Consequently, by referring to society, we are able to see the possibilities for formulating more timely and relevant solutions to archival problems. This motivates us here to seek overall societal values for the process of archival appraisal.

Although some archivists have already pointed out the possibility of using the societal process in archival appraisal practice, the question of how the information in archival material can be related to the societal process in a systematic manner in archival appraisal has remained open. The provisional, superficial answer to this can only be that we must try to combine the two elements. We must analyse the significance which a specific group of records being appraised by the archivist for its documentary value may hold for the societal process and for historical development. Yet this provisional answer leads us to the next question: how should archivists recognize this significance, and how should it be measured? In answering this question we must keep in mind that “significance” is a very relative, ambiguous concept. Its usefulness as an aid in the appraisal process will depend absolutely on that to which it is related.¹⁵³

If, for example, we were to measure the archival significance of informational material according to the speculative philosophical systems of Hegelian Idealism or its derivative, Marxist Materialism, we could come up with an immediate answer only for those documented events which these ideologies regard as markedly distinctive. The great mass of events, on the other hand, would remain in isolation as atypical or undistinctive and would either be excluded from the value analysis from the very beginning or would end up as part of the “structural and developmental system of constructed interrelationships”¹⁵⁴ required by the predetermining ideological scheme. Reflections on social theory, especially those limited by a closed ideology which uses a monocausal principle to interpret reality, do not help the archivist to solve the problem of information appraisal in a satisfactory way. In order to progress further, the archivist will need to start examining the actual empirical realm of the societal process. This in no way implies totally abstaining from theory nor does this proposal advocate an empiricism devoid of theory; rather, we

149 Meinert, “Die Aktenauswertung,” p. 106.

150 Karlheinz Blaschke, “Wertermittlung als Problem und Aufgabe,” *Archivmitteilungen* 17 (1967), p. 57.

151 Gerhart Enders, *Archivverwaltungslehre*, p. 86.

152 Ralph Dahrendorf, *Gesellschaft und Demokratie in Deutschland*, p. 470; see also Ulrich Preuß, “Bemerkungen zum Begriff der Öffentlichkeit und des Öffentlichen,” in *Offene Welt* 97/98 (1968), p. 291.

153 For this see Haskell Fain, *Between Philosophy and History. The Resurrection of Speculative Philosophy of History within the Analytic Tradition* (Princeton, N.J., 1970), p. 247.

154 Engelberg, pp. 1352 and 1357ff., whose views about this and the following are diametrically opposed to my own.

believe, it is realistically adjusted to accommodate the human capacity for knowledge. For when archivists attempt to measure the significance of documentary material in relation to the societal process, they immediately encounter an epistemological problem: the societal events themselves must first be put into some kind of relationship to one another. What is more, the societal process itself will not provide the archivist with such a relationship of events; for history, we believe, contains no predetermined, inner interpretive relationship.¹⁵⁵

At the beginning of an appraisal procedure, the societal process, in spite of the relationships established by the provenance of the records, appears to the archivist's eye to be fragmented into numerous groups of documentary records defined and limited, in varying degrees of specificity, by subject. These groups of documents evidence a diversity and complexity of historical phenomena that threatens to transcend human comprehension. Therefore, in order to appraise this "mesh of individual, collective, personal, and structural factors crossing and joggling at an infinite number of points,"¹⁵⁶ one must first establish what the nature of such societal relationships are. And herein lies the ultimate source of the difficulties encountered in the archival appraisal process. For the archivist must decide which specific events and development patterns should be preserved in documents, yet the value of such events and patterns can only be determined when the archivist has attained a comprehensive view of the total societal development process and an interpretation of the way all of society has actually developed.

Such an interpretation must be as close and as true to reality as possible, and the emerging synthesis of historical methods with those of the social sciences offers a means by which this may be achieved. The epistemological theory of socio-historical methodology requires the researcher to analyse only smaller, manageable, and comprehensible social structures.¹⁵⁷ With the help of this method archivists can make an attempt, and only an attempt, to thread individual historical phenomena to form chains of events, to organize them into series, to assign short-term causal links between tendential regularities, to condense numerous similar events into a single category,¹⁵⁸ and to clarify structural relationships. This will help to reveal constitutive conditions and dynamic, generating forces within the profusion of individual events.

Supported by the methods of the social sciences, and using the hermeneutical method of the historian, the archivist can form a conception of a certain period in the development of the entire section of society for which he or she is responsible. This method of recovering segments of the past for present day consciousness should take something of the form of a coarse grid representing an historical prototype or model. Archivists can then construct in its likeness the documentary heritage from which historians, in turn, can create their own interpreted historical picture. The goal of such an archival activity should be to arrange groups of records within a hierarchy of value that parallels a gradient of historical events scaled according to societal significance.

Yet, after considering the nature and objectives of these points, one is left with the question of just how and by what methods archivists are to form the conception of the past

155 See also Faber, p. 216.

156 Schieder, "Grundfragen," pp. 13, 31.

157 See Schieder, "Angewiesen auf zufällig Bewahrtes."

158 See especially Ernst Pitz, "Geschichtliche Strukturen. Betrachtungen zur angeblichen Grundlagenkrise der Geschichtswissenschaft," *HZ* 198 (1964), p. 290.

necessary for the formation of a documentary heritage. As a useful point of departure, we should draw briefly on our previous deliberations. As we argued in greater detail in our discussion of the dependency of historical scholarship on the documentary heritage,¹⁵⁹ human beings can only create a very conditional picture of the past. Even people who have personally experienced events in the past can only call them to the present through a process of remembering. But personal experience has already shown us just how unreliable images and concepts reconstructed from our memories in fact are and how they become more and more unreliable with the passing of time. If, therefore, historians do not want to create products of illusion and if they are to avoid dependence upon their own ability to fantasize, they must rely upon the concrete evidence of the past for even very recent events. To undertake an interpretive review of certain historical phenomena, sources are required by which historians can appraise conceptions of the past.

So too, archivists must form a conception of the past from a review of individual phenomena and use this conception to help shape the documentary heritage. For them too, their memories of period events serve as the basis for such a conception. But by what standards can they verify the accuracy of their subjectively formed conceptions? As we have seen, the sources themselves do not provide adequate guidelines. If the sources themselves cannot be used to analyse systematically the archivist's preliminary, sketchy conception of the documentary heritage, what else is there?

We believe that only the society from which the material originated and for whose sake it is to be preserved can provide archivists with the necessary tools to assess the conceptions by which they bring the past into the present. In constructing the conceptual grid of history which will serve as a model for the documentary heritage, archivists must not follow the value concepts of their own time period, but rather, those of the time from which the material originated. Just as the question of sources is the most fundamental for every historical research inquiry (Schieder), so the question of the value ascribed by those contemporary to the material should become the most fundamental of every archival endeavour to form the documentary heritage. Measuring the societal significance of past facts by analysing the value which their contemporaries attached to them should serve as the foundation for all archival efforts towards forming the documentary heritage.

In our view, a legitimate value standard or principle for the archival appraisal process can only be derived from this kind of contemporary valuation. Such a standard is inherent in history itself, for it is a standard of the past. It is not the product of speculation or ideological beliefs; it does not do violence to source material by applying value standards of the present which in the near future may already prove to be inadequate. If there is indeed anything or anyone qualified to lend legitimacy to archival appraisal, it is society itself, and the public opinions it expresses — assuming, of course, that these are allowed to develop freely. The public and public opinion, as a constitutive element of modern society, sanctions public actions, essentially generates the socio-political process, and legitimizes political authority.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, should not public opinion also legitimize archival appraisal? Could it also not provide the fundamental orientation for the process of archival appraisal? Archivists need a constant to make their source selections, for once

¹⁵⁹ See above, p. 80.

¹⁶⁰ See also Booms, "Öffentlichkeitsarbeit," cols. 23-25; Kurt Sontheimer, "Tabus in der deutschen Nachkriegspolitik," in *Die Gesellschaft in der Bundesrepublik. Analysen*, ed. Hans Steffen (Göttingen, 1970), vol. 1, pp. 206f.

made, such selections are irreversible. Such a constant can only be derived from socio-political values that were dominant at the time the documentary material was created and actively used. The opinions, judgements and, with that, the specific interests of the contemporary society as it developed are therefore essential criteria for an economical selection of the sources — a selection which identifies only the most important series of documents.

Using such an approach for solving the problem of archival value as a point of departure, archivists must first analyse public opinion of the time as expressed in published form. Archivists would then need to make an attempt to understand what was considered important in the particular historical period under consideration. They would constantly have to compare public statements and actions, as well as corresponding deficiencies resulting from omissions, with contemporary demands and expectations; they would constantly have to relate achievements, failures, and opposing currents to the contemporary context of effects until finally, after weeding out exaggerations in current activity, overestimations of the time resulting from the immediacy of day-to-day events, and irrelevancies of little consequence, they distill in concrete form the significant points from the total political and social events which occurred within the specific archival jurisdiction. An archival judgement made some time after the documents' creation ought to consider contemporary opinion important and significant. The documentary heritage should be formed according to an archival conception, historically assessed, which reflects the consciousness of the particular period for which the archives is responsible and from which the source material to be appraised is taken.

Such an analysis of historical and political events should, in effect, serve as a kind of documentation model according to which the archivist forms the documentary heritage. Similar types of plans should be prepared for that particular segment of the total societal process defined, first of all, by a particular archives' sphere of responsibility (e.g., industry, church, municipality), and secondly, by a sufficiently short time period. With such documentation plans, one can establish exactly the events, actions, omissions, and developments that are essential and determine what is characteristic for the time and subject category under consideration. Those informational sources, then, which document the essential currents and cross-currents of a particular society in a particular period will be worthy of preservation. The more precisely archivists distinguish degrees of historical relevance for these historical phenomena according to how characteristic, typical or momentous they were at the time, the more accurately will their documentation model reflect a scale of significance for societal phenomena parallel to which a scale of value for groups of records can be constructed. Archivists who possess such a concrete documentation plan have at their disposal a principle that provides precise direction for appraising the great volume of record material. To be sure, a great deal of material has already been collected as a whole, processed for better administrative and intellectual control, and for administrative purposes stored for various lengths of time in intermediary records centres. Yet, such archivists also know the content of the information they must select from the backlog of material which is to be included as part of the documentary heritage. Essentially, it remains for the archivist to determine which documents, regardless of their provenance, possess the optimum concentration of desired information so that a maximum of documentation is achieved with a minimum of documents.

The extent of archival subjectivity and societal conditioning evident in this documentation model and its influence on our conception of history seems rather frightening. In their personal behaviour, archivists, as *animaux sociaux*, are, as we saw earlier, unavoidably subject to the fundamental orientation of society. In the tension between social determinism and free thought and action, archivists' capacity to know, as our epistemological excursion revealed,¹⁶¹ is inevitably dependent on a life experience shaped by the environment. Can one defend, on ethical grounds, the fact that archivists form the documentary heritage according to a conception derived from such a socially conditioned subjectivity? Can we expect historians to build their "objective" histories on this foundation?

Let us forego examining, in this connection, how much historians, who must extract answers to their subjective questions from the source material in a systematic and accurate manner, are dependent upon their place in society. Let us rather ask, in order to arrive at a comparative assessment, on which documents historians up to now have been dependent in so far as such documents have not been "capriciously preserved." Those sources which in fact were selected by the archivist for inclusion in the documentary heritage were selected following the aforementioned intuition and so using the approach of the artist, or else following a kind of divine foresight and presentiment and so looking down from the heights of historical consciousness. Behind these, too, were hidden socially conditioned values; only one was not, or did not want to be, as conscious of them. It goes without saying that the formation of a documentary heritage is a subjective and therefore socially conditioned process. This fact is, as we saw, rooted in the very essence of human existence; it is a condition that cannot be changed or removed, only confined. Methods for limiting the effects of subjectivity must be employed, but these will never achieve a state of absolute objectivity — an impossible goal. They can, however, help archivists to distance themselves from their subjectivity to the greatest possible extent.

In order to achieve this desired distance, the documentation plan (covering periods of five, ten, or at the very most twenty years to make the most of what remains of human memory of the time) should not remain the responsibility of a single or even several archivists. The plan should be the product of a procedure characterized by both a division of labour and cooperation among workers. Wherever possible, it should be subject to the criticism of a team. If at all possible, it should be discussed in an advisory council composed of individuals from different areas of life such as administration, science, the media, or economics. It should be written down, if possible published, but in any case it should be included as part of the documentary heritage itself. If such a programme is instituted, the final product will be a model for forming the documentary heritage which has been developed by archivists, is sanctioned and controlled by society at large, and can be analysed using the historical method of documentary criticism. The model will be a concrete orienting principle for ascribing value through an appraisal process of positive value selection. Perhaps this proposal will point the way towards a feasible, practicable solution to the "eternal archival problem" (Belov) of appraisal.

Yet, within the pluralistic structure of our modern industrial society, the purpose and goal of the archival formation of the documentary heritage can only be to document the totality of public life as manifested in communities formed by common interests or other ties. This assumes, as Friedrich P. Kahlenberg also insisted,¹⁶² that all of society should

161 See above, pp. 74-75.

162 Kahlenberg, "Aufgaben und Probleme," cols. 57-70.

contribute to the development and implementation of methods for appraising the documentary heritage. In a federally structured society, this would require as well that all archivists in public archives at the various administrative levels cooperate with each other in their appraisal efforts, as well as with all other archivists in non-governmental institutions. In the Federal Republic of Germany we have only just embarked on a journey down the road that leads to a resolution for the most important social responsibility of the modern archivist. The road is passable, as we have tried to show, and is not blocked by the "objective reality" of our society, in spite of the claims of some. The journey requires only that the traveller possess the insight and the will to draw the necessary conclusions and to act on them.