

Articles

The Documentation Strategy and Archival Appraisal Principles: A Different Perspective

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Résumé

Les archivistes nord-américains ont récemment été témoins d'une recrudescence des écrits concernant la théorie de l'évaluation archivistique. Le présent article adopte une approche différente de ce sujet: il tente de décrire une série de principes fondamentaux tirés de la littérature archivistique concernant l'exercice de l'évaluation des dossiers. Ces principes font le lien entre la théorie et la pratique, mais ils représentent, selon l'auteur, quelque chose de plus qu'une simple méthodologie. L'article tente également d'évoquer la discussion vieille d'une décennie sur la stratégie de documentation archivistique, en démontrant que cette stratégie émane à la fois de tels principes et qu'elle est compatible avec ces principes.

Abstract

North American archivists have recently witnessed an upsurge in writings about appraisal theory. This essay takes a different approach to this topic. It attempts to describe a set of basic principles, derived from the archival literature, that relate to the practice of appraising records. These principles bridge the gap between theory and practice, but they represent—in the author's view—something more than just methodology. The essay also seeks to relate the decade-old discussion to the archival documentation strategy, showing how the strategy both emanates from such principles and is consistent with them.

Introduction

For the past few years, the readers of *Archivaria* and the *American Archivist* (and other archival journals) have had access to a steady stream of writings on archival

appraisal theory, much of it in reaction to or encompassing the documentation strategy.¹ The theoretical concepts range from immutable laws to a view that theory is no more than a codification of practice and principles; there is also the argument that there is no theory at all. Much of both ends of this spectrum of views have also swirled about basic archival concepts of evidence and information.² Some may have taken too seriously Schellenberg's idea that "ascertaining values in records cannot be reduced to exact standards" but can be "little more than general principles."³ More importantly, archivists have used the terms "art" and "science" too loosely.⁴ Some of the debate has also bogged down on different conceptions of the archival mission, ranging from the preservation of evidence, through the creation of a representative documentation, to the broad quest to document all of society.

My aim in this essay is to describe a consistent set of archival appraisal principles, considering what the documentation strategy has to say about each. I view these principles as the raw material for an appraisal theory, not as the fully-developed theory itself. Yet, I also believe these principles provide more specificity than the normal writings on the concepts of record, evidence, and information. Holding as I do to the notion of archival theory as patterns and codification of practice,⁵ I believe that doing such analysis of practice as reflected in our fairly substantial (if uneven) literature will move us to a solid foundation of archival theory. I also believe that they show the contribution of the documentation strategy to appraisal theory, and how it is generally consistent with the existing principles and practices.

A Brief Review of the Archival Documentation Strategy Concept

The archival documentation strategy was introduced in the mid-1980s. In the first of the published articles on this topic, Helen W. Samuels defined a documentation strategy,⁶ but since then the definition has been refined, most recently in the Society of American Archivists's 1992 glossary as

an on-going, analytic, cooperative approach designed, promoted, and implemented by creators, administrators (including archivists), and users to ensure the archival retention of appropriate documentation in some area of human endeavor through the application of archival techniques, the creation of institutional archives and refined acquisition policies, and the development of sufficient resources. The key elements in this approach are an analysis of the universe to be documented, an understanding of the inherent documentary problems, and the formulation of a plan to assure the adequate documentation of an issue, activity, or geographic area.⁷

The documentation strategy can be viewed as a conceptually simple mechanism to be added to the archivist's arsenal of appraisal approaches.⁸ In reality, however, it was developed in response to the nature of modern documentation and perceived weaknesses in archival appraisal approaches. As a result, the documentation strategy must be considered as a part of archival appraisal theory, even though some have simply preferred to describe it as a *new* discussion about *old* concerns.⁹

The archival documentation strategy has stimulated considerable discussion in the archival profession since the concept was introduced. Some of this discussion

has occurred due to misconceptions about the documentation strategy concept and because of varying notions of what constitutes archival appraisal theory (or whether there is such theory or not).¹⁰ Many archivists think that the concept is meant to replace or supersede other archival appraisal principles and techniques; rather, the strategy is intended only to provide another needed procedure and to add a missing perspective to the archival appraisal process and theoretical foundations of appraisal. Others confuse the concept with other appraisal tools such as surveys, which are quite different. Finally, a smaller group of archivists believes that the documentation strategy concept violates basic archival appraisal theory, although what constitutes this theory or the violation has never clearly been indicated.

Building a Set of Archival Appraisal Principles

As a result of such preconceptions of knowledge and practice, archivists have not made many efforts at systematizing the principles into a theoretical foundation. Perhaps the main reason for this lies in how archivists have viewed theory in general, as characterized by the debate set off by Frank Burke's 1981 essay, a debate ranging from "universal truths and laws"¹¹ through Cappon's overarching "principles" that "emerged empirically"¹² to rejections of theory altogether. These views come from the fact that many archivists perceive theory as akin to the kinds of theorems that constitute mathematical or abstract knowledge rather than as a more straight-forward "systematic statement of rules or principles to be followed," or a "scheme or system of ideas or statements held as an explanation or account of a group of facts or phenomena."¹³

Appraisal has been defined through a delineation of values such as evidential and informational, as well as through the development of techniques such as sampling and institutional collection analysis. Such views remain common, especially, or so it seems, at the United States National Archives,¹⁴ formerly the home of pioneer archival theorists such as Philip Brooks and T. R. Schellenberg, who built the foundation for an epistemological basis for appraisal. The diminution of the this institution's role in archival theory in the past generation or so may be one very important reason for the flaws in archival appraisal theory and methodologies in the United States. Most of the recent original work has occurred outside of the National Archives.

The scope of archival appraisal has been transformed from a process that is institutionally bound to one that is perceived to be a multi-institutional function, primarily as characterized in the documentation strategy model. This multi-institutional aspect is an effort to deal with the nature of modern documentation. As one archivist has stated, no matter how effective the appraisal approaches have been, "both the theory and methods are inadequate and inflexible for appraising contemporary records."¹⁵ This results from the problem of trying to decide whether appraisal should be defined on the basis of some set of common processes, functions, and principles or whether it should be identified through the roles that archivists take on in their institutions when they do appraisal.

The scope of archival appraisal as evidence of the need for archivists to expand their basic practices and cooperative endeavors is a topic that has only recently

been re-analyzed via the formulation of the documentation strategy. Archival appraisal was originally seen as the process of ascertaining whether a specific document, records series, or even record group or manuscript collection possessed sufficient informational and evidential content for the archivist to invest additional resources in preservation, arrangement and description, and other basic archival work. The traditional view has been to focus on archives as evidence; the American contribution has been to add the informational dimension.¹⁶ But it is evident that many archivists now view their role to be a selector of recorded information leading to a documentation of society based on some fundamental principles of archival appraisal. This view is a result of the archivist's recognition of the immense volume of records, the interrelatedness of records—even those produced by diverse institutions and organizations—and the increasing diversity of recorded information forms.¹⁷ It may also be the result of the influence of manuscript curators (who intend to collect and through their collecting to document something) over archivists (who normally have been institutionally based, serving the needs of their employers). The blending of the two is, however, most appropriate and essential given the nature of modern documentation, which, in effect, brings together the public archives and manuscripts traditions that the United States archivists have long described.

However, two basic problems persist here. First, the archivist relies on archival approaches to select, although these principles increasingly have been shaped or influenced by library collection development and other fields. Second, the archivist has restricted his or her activity to the traditional documentary forms, whether in paper or electronic media. The questions that must be asked are whether the archivist can document society with such a restricted set of sources, and, just as importantly, whether the archivist plays a role in selecting beyond the traditional documentary sources. The archival documentation strategy concept has much to contribute to both of these and other like concerns, provided that archivists and their institutions are willing to experiment with the process and embed it in their basic *modus operandi*. Whether they do or not depends on their view of appraisal and archival theory, as well as their definition of the archivist's mission (is it to document society, or to preserve institutional evidence, or something else?).

Archival Appraisal Principles

There are a number of ways in which we can construct an archival appraisal theory. The manner that I selected is to work through a series of broad statements, made by archivists through the past century; at the same time, I have drawn on other appropriate fields relating to the nature of records and information, as well as related archival principles that may not be at the same level of theory but are still broad enough to be applicable across archival institutions and types of records. The approach is in line with a general notion of theory: "*Theories* are logically interconnected statements about the world that describe, explain, and predict the occurrence of phenomena. They are based on *empirical generalizations* about the world, which are in turn based upon analysis of our direct observations."¹⁸ In what I consider a tour de force in library science, Michael Buckland has emphasized that theory is a body of generalizations and principles that are formed in their association

with practice leading to the intellectual content of a discipline. Theory requires that there be the possibility of a coherent set of hypothetical, conceptual, and pragmatic principles that form a general frame of reference for a field of inquiry. This allows for defining principles, formulating hypotheses, and considering actions.¹⁹

Theoretical Foundations: A Preliminary Proposal Based on Twelve Appraisal Principles

The basis of an archival appraisal theory can be limited in its scope. It starts with the notion that all recorded information has some continuing value, if not to the creator of that information, then to society. The quantity of information is so great, however, that it must be reduced in order to be useful. This reduction requires careful and tested criteria, built upon the notion of evidential and informational values. These criteria, moreover, are not determined solely by the institutional creators of this information; there are some generic characteristics of recorded information that suggest some common or universal appraisal criteria and processes. The selection of this information is not for some undetermined future research but for the present needs of the records creators and based upon the present knowledge of the record-generating institutions and society. Archivists must also be cognizant of other, non-textual, information sources that either complement or complete gaps in the traditional textual records. In order to ensure that the proper records are preserved, the archivist must be involved with the records creator as far up the life cycle of records as is possible. This also requires that archivists have as an appraisal mission the documentation of society, and that they participate in a team-oriented, multi-disciplinary appraisal process. Archivists must also acknowledge that, because of past failures in appraisal, certain records must be automatically kept because of their age or form. Archivists can also use, in a selective manner, some methods for reducing the volume of records already determined to have archival value. All of these elements of an appraisal theory are discussed below in relation to the documentation strategy concept.

Principle One: All recorded information has some continuing value to the records creators and to society. This is why archival appraisal is so difficult and so important. It is also difficult because archivists, having largely come from the humanities (history primarily), are prone to find value in virtually anything.²⁰ Allan Pratt has noted, for example, that while the scientist sees nothing wrong in discarding old scientific papers because these papers can be obsolete, the humanist is reluctant to destroy anything.²¹ Archivist Maynard Brichford supported this humanistic perspective, indicating that "all records have some research value,"²² as have other archivists such as Luciana Duranti.²³

This is probably the main reason why many archivists have determined that appraisal is a subjective process, and why many have determined to define its parameters from single institutional or individual perspectives. It is also probably the reason why many archivists have criticized the process and results of archival appraisal. F. Gerald Ham's assessment was that "archivists waste time and space preserving random bits and pieces, as well as large accessions, of the most dubious value"²⁴; if so, it is probably because archivists give in to their sense that all recorded information has some continuing value to the records creators and to society.

Ironically, however, the notion that all records have some value is peculiarly that of the archivist and some researchers, primarily scholarly historians. It is not shared by organizational records creators. Judging by the writings of records managers and information resources managers, institutions are less interested in preserving their recorded documentation, and more likely to define the length of time they maintain records through legal and fiscal obligations—which leads to maintaining very few records for any long-term uses. This point of view is counter to traditional views of archivists working in the Jenkinsonian tradition, in which the records creator determines the archival value and the archivist maintains the records.

Principle Two: The immense quantity of recorded information is an impediment to the information's continuing value, leading to the need for the reduction of this quantity. Six decades ago, Sir Hilary Jenkinson stated that the bulk of modern archives is a “new and serious matter” requiring the archivist’s attention. This bulk is caused, according to Jenkinson, by easier duplication and other methods of modern technology.²⁵ He also noted that “there is ... a real danger that in the future research work upon Archives may become a task hopelessly complicated by reason of their mere bulk.”²⁶ Margaret Cross Norton, writing at about the same time and from her vantage point in the United States, also stated that the growing quantity of government records has meant that the “emphasis of archives work has shifted from preservation of records to selection of records for preservation.” In her situation she advocated a process whereby the archivist worked also as a records manager, so that the quantity of records could be reduced by selection *and* through the application of photographic processes and the prevention of creation of unnecessary accumulation at the point of records origination.²⁷ Norton affirmed the fact that all government records have some value for historians and other researchers; she also noted, however, that “even the historian realizes the impracticality of working from such an avalanche of records as would result from keeping everything.”²⁸ Schellenberg continued this theme: the first sentence of his seminal writing on the appraisal of public records was “Modern public records are very voluminous.”²⁹

More recently, other archivists have continued to make this record characteristic an issue that they must contend with in their appraisal work. German archivist Hans Booms, for example, stated similar sentiments and presaged some of the concerns expressed by the architects of the American documentation strategy approach.³⁰ It is obvious that the quantity of modern documentation is a particular concern of archivists with mandates to document geographical regions or topics. The concern for volume drives the asking of the right questions, leading to a proper surviving documentary heritage; dealing with one of the most salient aspects of modern documentation, it is an approach that is very important in the modern information technology era.³¹ The volume of information is bound to continue to increase through the growing sophistication and pervasiveness of information technology.

Principle Three: This reduction of documentary sources may occur through accident and natural events, resulting in a random or, at the least, partial aggregation of documentation that may harm the records creators and society. Archivists have

not confronted this matter as they should have. Is this accidental accumulation better or worse than planned archival selection? In a perceptive essay on this matter, Daniel Boorstin has laid out a philosophy of the durable and the least used. He notes "how partial is the remaining evidence of the whole human past, how casual and how accidental is the survival of its relics."³² One reason for this, he writes, is the fact that "there is a natural and perhaps inevitable tendency toward the destruction and disappearance of the documents most widely used...."³³

Individuals in many other disciplines and perspectives have echoed this concern. According to Kenneth Dowlin, an advocate of the modern high-tech library, "information has reached the stage where a significant proportion of what is produced is throw-away."³⁴ Historian and material culture specialist Thomas Schlereth has supported this: "Evidence comes to us ... often seriously flawed by the fecklessness of historical survival and the penchant of most collectors to save only those objects ... that once had the highest monetary value and now do likewise as antiques. Frequently only the best or the most expensive of past craftwork has survived to be enshrined in museums and ensconced in private antique collections."³⁵ Historian J. R. Pole has contributed a different perspective to this concern, noting that the "records that survive are themselves the direct *consequences* of past social and political decisions.... They present the present mind with a choice that is vast and variable but never merely random."³⁶ This opens up the possibility for archivists to think and act more creatively in the documentation of regions, at least in examining the causes of the present survivals of documentation.

This characteristic of accidental or natural survival of records poses, of course, some very fundamental questions for the archivist engaged in appraisal. Following Boorstin's lead, if the most important records tend to be those that were the most often referred to while still in the hands of their creator, there is the greater likelihood of their loss, weakening, or misplacement in the files, thus minimizing the contextual knowledge that is so important to the archivist understanding and evaluating the record. This conclusion argues against the more traditional view of the archivist waiting for relatively long periods of time *before* receiving the records from the creator; it also poses some interesting questions about allowing the creator to determine what should be preserved, as the Jenkinsonians contend.³⁷ We are led, instead, to a more activist stance of archivist interacting with records creator. Hugh Taylor, in his study of diplomatics, has said as much: "If the record is to be of maximum value to the administrator and where appropriate, to the general public as user, then archivists must be far closer to the point of creation and original use."³⁸

One can make a strong case for the development of solid criteria and some planned selection. The chance of natural selection will not necessarily result in documentation that provides clues to the most important aspects of an institution, an individual, or society—or that provides, if desired, a representative record (as others in other disciplines have suggested).³⁹ What should be the desired end of archival appraisal? Should it be what the records creator determines is important, as the Jenkinsonians want? Is it what Ham calls for when he states that our "most important and intellectually demanding task as archivists is to make an informed selection of information that will provide the future with a representative record of

human experience in our time?"⁴⁰ Or, is it some other paradigm, such as the notion of adequacy of documentation?⁴¹

Even those involved with the documentation strategy approach have not completely resolved this intellectual debate. They see the strategy as a concept allowing an approach that either can build a representative record or can answer the best formulated questions of what is needed to be preserved based upon the best present knowledge of what is important. This seems better than allowing institutional records creators to determine what should be saved—since their perspectives are often quite faulty in their own right⁴²—or allowing individual decisions to occur about records without any real input by archivists and others as to why these documents might be worth saving.

Some might contend that a truly random process of survival is an alternative method of identifying what records should be saved. How could such a true random process be achieved in archival appraisal?⁴³ While such concerns are real, relying on a true random process instead of a deliberative appraisal process seems to be a dangerous move. Obviously, this is yet another area that requires more serious reflection and research.

Principle Four: Even a faulty archival appraisal decision or decision process is better than records surviving haphazardly or not surviving at all. Because all recorded information has some continuing value to the records creators and to society, each decision must be, by necessity, equivocal. As Margaret Cross Norton indicated, "it is comparatively easy to select records of permanent value, relatively easy to decide on those of no value. The great bulk of records are borderline."⁴⁴

This nature has led, perhaps, to somewhat circular statements by pioneer archival theorists. Schellenberg's statement that "in the long run the effectiveness of a record reduction programme must be judged according to the correctness of its determination" suggests far more questions than it answers.⁴⁵ On the other hand, there is considerable evidence that the researchers, at least the scholarly historians among the users of archival records, will make use of what they can find. Boorstin posed the matter very well when he noted that "the historian-creator refuses to be defeated by the biases of survival. For he chooses, defines, and shapes his subject to provide a reasonably truthful account from miscellaneous remains."⁴⁶

This suggests some need for reflection by all archivists, but especially those engaged in appraisal, and even more so for those doing appraisal for institutions with mandates to document geographic regions or topics. Archivists should feel freer to experiment, evaluate, develop, and refine their appraisal theory, principles, and practices—something that archivists have done too little of—since mistakes made may tell us something about the needed criteria and not seriously harm the final documentary record left from a particular period. It should also indicate the need for archivists to work with their researchers in developing better criteria and understanding of their use. Despite the fact that use has long been defined as a fundamental reason for their existence, archivists have done a woeful job in systematically evaluating the nature and implications of such use. The user's perspective is extremely important since a satisfactory set of output measures for any archives ought to be its ability to meet its users' needs, a crucial aspect of an archival

programme's effectiveness.⁴⁷ If the wrong records are held by the archives, in the opinion of its potential researchers, then there is little hope for meeting their needs. As Brichford commented, "the surest proof of sound records appraisal lies in the quality of use of the archives and the growth of its reputation among the administrators and scholars it serves."⁴⁸

Archivists have also been loath to admit mistakes in appraisal, falling back on the fact that a mistake in accessioning original materials, even if those materials are hardly ever used, is somehow acceptable because they are unique and irreplaceable. Libraries can make two kinds of errors in their selection: they can fail to acquire books that would have been used or they can purchase printed materials that are little or never used.⁴⁹ While there have been exceptions, archivists in general seem reluctant to consider such issues. Jenkinson did state that archivists should not criticize past archival selection decisions if they were made according to the standards of their time.⁵⁰ Luciana Duranti, from a different vantage point, has stated that she does not know of one situation in which "appraisal decisions have destroyed documents that we needed to have for our protection, development, and intellectual growth. When serious losses have occurred, they may have been caused by accidental circumstances in more recent times, by the voluntary destruction of records creators of compromising documents, abducted while they were still active, and sometimes in the initial phase of creation...."⁵¹

This returns to the issue of the archivist needing to confer with the user, to maintain adequate records, and to conduct sufficient research to answer such concerns. There are some rare instances when the researcher speaks directly to the archivist about this, as did historian JoAnn Yates when she questioned whether archival appraisal approaches were not so inadequate for documenting businesses that it might be better to preserve comprehensively the records of a few representative corporations.⁵² The issue of representativeness rears its problematic head here again. This is certainly one reason why the documentation strategy concept and approach is built through the archival records user and creator working *with* the archivist in determining appropriate questions to be asked and selection strategies to be formulated and carried out.

Principle Five: Because of the immensity of this documentation and the importance of recorded information to its creators and society, a well-developed set of universal or common archival appraisal criteria is one of the most important elements for appraisal. This is a long-held view of the archivist—although the actual development of criteria has been less than successful. Maynard Brichford, on the first page of his appraisal manual, declared that the "most significant archival function is the appraisal or evaluation of the mass of source material and the selection of that portion that will be kept."⁵³ What should be the basis for these criteria? They should first of all rest on a theoretical foundation representing how organizations, people, and society function and be cognizant of archival appraisal practice that has proved successful in achieving this representation. Part of this representative record should be the preservation of all records that serve as vital evidence for the organization; it is the remainder, the informational, that is so elusive. Some archivists have demonstrated that the practice and theory of other disciplines that affect the nature of record-keeping to a certain degree must be used for developing

effective archival appraisal criteria. This can be seen in David Klassen's view that records going into a social welfare archives should be derived from the documentation that is largely produced by that discipline's self-conscious professional activity.⁵⁴

The criteria should also facilitate effective decision-making about the documentation that possesses archival value. In the field of management, Maier developed a formula characterizing an effective decision as equalling quality times acceptance. Quality is the feasibility of a decision arrived at by the use of data, facts, and analysis; it is the result of the cognitive or intellectual process. Acceptance is more subjective, suggesting the personal aspects of a problem that has been determined by those affected by the decision; it is the emotional and non-intellectual aspect of the human decision-making process.⁵⁵ This notion clearly suggests that the archivist, in conducting appraisal, must know the objective of the appraisal process and determine the reactions of the records creators and users to the selection. Some archivists have suggested that this is at the heart of the archival appraisal dilemma: "I also contend," wrote David Bearman, "that we will only be able effectively to appraise larger volumes of records if we focus our appraisal methods on selecting what should be documented rather than what documentation should be kept, and develop tactics for requiring offices to keep adequate documentation, rather than trying to review what they have kept to locate an adequate record."⁵⁶ This is also affirmed by less theoretical notions of decision-making. According to Charles McClure, a leading student of library and information professional effectiveness, "if one defines decision-making as that process whereby information is converted into action, then decision-making has largely to do with the process of acquiring, controlling, and utilizing information to accomplish some objective."⁵⁷ In this sense, the archivist conducting appraisal must do everything necessary in order to determine the desired ends of appraisal, consider the universe of documentation, and reflect on the users' and creators' interest in the appraisal decision. This also takes us back to the user, of course: standard systems approaches set forth classic input-output measures, with output being the effectiveness of use.

The reason for the significance of selection criteria is that the appraisal process is fundamental to the mission of any archival institution. Peter Drucker has noted that "profit is not a cause but a result—the result of the performance of the business in marketing, innovation, and productivity."⁵⁸ Archivists must ask what the equivalent of "profit" is for their organizations. Most would state that it is the successful use of their archival holdings by researchers. This successful use is dependent on appropriate and wise appraisal decisions. Akin to what Drucker stated about business organizations, use—if equal to profit—is dependent on appraisal; appraisal is likewise dependent on knowledge of researchers' needs, specified aims for appraisal, and the appropriate ability to perform these.

Is there a framework or other basis for such criteria? Even without a framework, are there suitable criteria for guiding appraisal? Most archivists would immediately point to the classic statements on evidential and informational values as the criteria to be followed. There have been detractors, such as Norton, who argued that "records are created for one purpose and for one purpose only, namely, to fulfill an administrative need; and if the records fulfill that need, the archivist considers

them adequate.... If, as often happens in the case of government records, the documents tend to take on value for purposes of historical or other research, that is so much 'velvet.'"⁵⁹ Moreover, the concepts of evidential and informational value, as other specific criteria, have not been all that well-defined. Schellenberg himself noted that "the distinction between evidential and informational values is made solely for purposes of discussion. The two types of values are not mutually exclusive."⁶⁰

Other archivists have tried to refine these criteria by providing more specificity. Brichford describes uniqueness, credibility, understandability, time span, accessibility, frequency of use, type and quality of use as more specific criteria for selection for preservation.⁶¹ Many archivists fall back upon these criteria as if they are precisely defined and use them as the explanation for most of their decisions. It is not difficult to see them devising checklists or weighted evaluation scales based on such records characteristics. In many cases, the use of the terms seems ill-advised and certainly lacking in methodological rigour.⁶²

The classic case of this is the notion of intrinsic value. This value is a very specific criterion possessing a lengthy set of terms used to define its parameters. A close reading of these terms, however, reveals a lack of precision itself. Terms as value-laden as "aesthetic or artistic" are used. Ironically, the only publication defining the concept of intrinsic value states clearly that its use is relative: "opinions concerning whether records have intrinsic value may vary from archivist to archivist and from one generation of archivists to another." Yet the same publication states, in one of the most obvious contradictions in the profession, that the "archivist is responsible for determining which records have intrinsic value," refuting the notion that archivists probably seek outside assistance in this.⁶³ Nevertheless, intrinsic value is seen by some as one of the major recent contributions to archival theory.⁶⁴ Some of this may be due to the fact, as lexicographers have found, that the precise or ultimate meaning of any word is impossible to determine. Archivists need interaction with individuals at either end of the spectrum, from institutional records creator to records user. It is this function that the documentation strategy makes an effort to provide.

Principle Six: The criteria that provide the basis for archival appraisal decisions are independent of records creators and their institutions and are generic to recorded information. Malcom Getz, in his economic study of public libraries, suggested that "each library is molded at its birth by the needs that existed at that time."⁶⁵ What he meant was that these needs establish an institution's mission—which remains the continuing formative influences on libraries. If this is also true for archives (and I think it is true for all organizations), it means that appraisal practices, collection policies, and missions will be dictated by the institution's long-standing aims and traditions—rather than by the changing nature of society and its information systems and needs. It suggests that archival programmes founded before the computer may continue to exercise older notions of how to carry-out their mission rather than adapt to dealing with newer systems—partially explaining, in fact, why it has been so difficult for the archival profession to cope with electronic records.⁶⁶ Kevin Lynch, looking at this matter from the perspective of city planning and architecture, has suggested that urban preservation has been the

“work of established middle- and upper-class citizens. The history enshrined in museums is chosen and interpreted by those who gave the dollars.”⁶⁷ Some of this is clearly dependent upon the filiopietistic origins of most historical societies and museums. Archivists have to make an effort to break away from such mindsets in order to provide a more even documentation of modern society.

There is little question that the need to understand how records originated in their environmental setting is important. Schellenberg noted that the “archivist must know how records came into being if he is to judge their value for any purpose.”⁶⁸ This is clearly seen in Yates’s study of internal communication systems in business organizations.⁶⁹ It can also be seen in an analysis of individual documents. Maps, for example, are “unique systems of signs.... Through both their content and their modes of representation, the making and using of maps has been pervaded by ideology. Yet these mechanisms can only be understood in specific historical situations.”⁷⁰ The nature of modern documentation poses a number of interesting problems. Samuels has concluded that the “analysis of single institutions ... is insufficient to support the [appraisal] decisions archivists face.” “Institutions do not stand alone,” Samuels contends, “nor do their archives.”⁷¹ Michael Lutzker has noted that “all working archivists recognize ... that the records we receive, no matter how voluminous, contain something less than the full administrative history of our institutions.”⁷² Ham has also made this point: “in spite of the bulk and redundancy of modern records, there is also a problem of missing data.”⁷³

Yet the consensus among archival practitioners seems to run counter to this assessment. Frank Boles and Julia Young have stated that the “analysis of this element takes place within a universe defined by the archivist’s experience and knowledge.” That experience and knowledge is defined by their institutional setting. “Repository policies ... and acquisition policies in particular, should guide the archivist in establishing the relative weights that should be assigned to the components and their elements.”⁷⁴ In an article penned solely by himself, Boles carried this thinking to its natural conclusion, suggesting that “appraisal can be understood to be a three-part activity, involving first the application of institutional interest evaluation, second the implementation of record evaluation criteria, and third..., the interaction of institutional interest evaluation and record evaluation.”⁷⁵ While this kind of thinking perhaps represents a very practical approach to appraisal, it potentially ignores the need to understand record-keeping, information systems, and the nature of modern documentation. It is a denial of the empirical foundation of archival theory. Here, of course, the archivist must make a choice: the dependence on a single institutional perspective or expansion to multi-institutional approaches and various other interests as provided for in the documentation strategy.

Principle Seven: The most fundamental aspect of appraisal is the consideration of records as part of an organic whole related to institutional purpose and function. Muller, Feith, and Fruin in their famous late-nineteenth-century manual stated that “an archival collection is an organic whole, a living organism, which grows, takes shape, and undergoes changes in accordance with fixed rules.”⁷⁶ They also noted the fundamental archival truth that documents are often difficult to understand if removed from their context, since “the various documents of an archival collection throw light upon one another.”⁷⁷

This contextual aspect is reflected in many other documentary (and, even non-documentary) fields. Lynch, in historic preservation, noted that “under the banner of historical preservation, we have saved many isolated buildings of doubtful significance or present quality, which are out of context with their surroundings and without a means of supporting their use or maintenance or of communicating their meaning to the public.”⁷⁸ In archaeology, “a find’s context consists of its immediate *matrix* (the material surrounding it, usually some sort of sediment such as gravel, sand, or clay), its *provenience* (horizontal and vertical position within the matrix), and its *association* with other finds (occurrence together with matrix).”⁷⁹ Field archaeology is “based on the theory that the historical value of an object depends not so much on the nature of the object itself as on its associations.”⁸⁰ Schlereth, looking at material culture and museum collections, has considered the same problem: “Without a documented context, many artifacts remain little more than historical souvenirs.”⁸¹ Another museological rumination stated that the “universal language spoken by curators about these artefacts is contextual.”⁸² Stephen Jay Gould, writing from the perspective of a paleontologist, expressed the same concept in his treatise on the Burgess Shale: “What do scientists ‘do’ with something like the Burgess Shale, once they have been fortunate enough to make such an outstanding discovery? They must first perform some basic chores to establish context—geological setting (age, environment, geography), mode of preservation, inventory of control.”⁸³

This principle, perhaps a universal law, requires the archivist to look at records in their institutional context and to not consider them piecemeal—a fault pertaining more to the manuscript curator operating under a collecting policy than to the institutional archivist serving the needs of an organization. Jenkinson also suggested this same principle, noting that destruction had to be done on the large scale; otherwise it is too expensive to perform.⁸⁴ Schellenberg likewise argued that “appraisals of evidential values should be made on the basis of a knowledge of the entire documentation of an agency; they should not be made on a piecemeal basis.”⁸⁵ More recently, Booms has shown the international hold on this idea: “The value of a particular item only becomes apparent when it is set in relation to something else and compared with that other item.”⁸⁶ In general, archivists have interpreted this solely within an institutional environment, when in fact the changing nature of modern documentation demands a multi-institutional approach, as seen in the documentation strategy model.

Principle Eight: The quantity of recorded information should be reduced in a planned manner, based upon carefully determined and tested selection criteria. Planning has become a fundamental aspect of archival practice. Faye Phillips, in the best statement of archival acquisition policies, noted that “policies must precede active collecting rather than be developed as an afterthought.” Why? Because “sporadic, unplanned, competitive, and overlapping manuscript collecting has led to the growth of poor collections of marginal value.”⁸⁷ Judith Endelman also has shown how planning in reverse, using the notion of institutional collection analysis, is so essential to the refinement of acquisitions policies.⁸⁸ It is the matter of comparison between what we think we have been doing with what we have actually done. Careful planning is also important because appraisal dictates so much of what we do in all our activities: the use of our resources, the service to society, and

whether we have been successful at all. As Ham has stated, "in a profound way we are also a product of our decisions."⁸⁹

It is possible to detect these kinds of problems in other fields concerned with documentation. In Sweden, and other nations, history museum professionals have turned to careful planning because "it was clear that unless plans were made to document contemporary life, museums would be leaving behind the same kind of fragmented collections of their time that they inherited from past generations of curators."⁹⁰

The planned archival appraisal process is especially important because a decision to save records is also a decision to destroy some other records. Due to the preservation requirements of recorded information and the limited resources of the archival repositories, not all of this information can be saved. Planned selection is often the result of both the peeling away of documentation that does not have value and the focus on documentation that is the most important. There is some universality in the combination of preservation-destruction; field archaeology has noted that "all excavation is destruction" in order to identify evidence of past settlement.⁹¹

Planning can conjure up numerous spectres for archivists and other information professions, especially when it comes to a function such as appraisal. One librarian noted that the benefits of planning (minimizing risk, facilitating control, etc.) were counterbalanced by loss of communication, drop in motivation, lack of an opportunistic stance, and, most importantly, loss of creativity.⁹²

The concept of planning as it is used in the archival documentation strategy must be clarified, in order to prevent undue confusion. Planning is careful research, evaluation, and reflection relative to the aspects of society and its people and institutions that are sought to be documented. Planning is also the mechanism by which various groups are brought together to enable such reflection to take place. The development of a documentation strategy should enable greater creativity to occur in the appraisal process, thus ensuring a better documentary heritage.

*Principle Nine: The archival appraisal selection criteria should rest not on unpredictable **future** research practices and trends but upon the more predictable sense of determining what are the salient and important features of contemporary institutions and society.* There have been numerous suggestions made by archivists through the years that their selection and preservation of archival records is for future researchers. Technically, this is true. Records brought into the archives will not be used until *some* point in the future, but many archivists have also suggested either that they must be able to predict future use and acquire records for it, or that they must be in the business of collecting to encourage new kinds of research. While encouraging use is a legitimate role for the archivist, any kind of prediction is an unreliable and inadequate basis for appraisal decisions. Andrea Hinding speculated that "outguessing the future by more than a few years is a game that no one, by definition, can win."⁹³ A more valid statement of this is that of Luciana Duranti: "*permanent value* is the capacity of consigning to the future the essence of a society's culture; it is the power of making permanent a society by making its culture a vital part of any future culture."⁹⁴ Jenkinson commented that archives acquired

from the past should not be destroyed because it is impossible to predict their future use and unwise to superimpose the values of the present day on past decisions that led to the formation of those archives.⁹⁵

This concept of Jenkinson's, which is contrary to more recently formulated notions such as reappraisal, sampling, and weeding, questions the basis of a relevant archival appraisal theory; certainly Jenkinson's advice must be used with caution, since he also stipulated that "destruction is an operation which can only be practiced with undoubted safety in one case—that of word-for-word duplicates."⁹⁶ Such a notion must be moved aside in the light of the vast bulk of modern archives and the increasing complexity of modern documentation and information systems. Other information specialists have also struggled with this concern. Benjamin Bates, for example, has suggested that the "value of information comes from its use at some future point, and is influenced by the circumstances of that use." However, he noted that the problem is that "information goods cannot be given a definitive or concrete value prior to their use, and that information goods may be used more than once."⁹⁷ This suggests that archivists need to rethink the basis for their appraisal decisions, fixing such decisions to a more concrete foundation than something as indeterminate as future use.

Characterizing the archival appraisal process in this manner brings up the old bugaboo of "objectivity." As soon as one raises the matter of trying to conduct appraisal in a manner that is planned, in order to capture the important issues of any institution, period, locality, or aspect of society, the questions of who decides what is important enters into the discussion and the notion of objectivity becomes the prime concern. We know that we are inadequate to the task. In an impressive analysis of our knowledge of the past, David Loewenthal concluded that the "past as we know it is partly a product of the present; we continually reshape memory, rewrite history, refashion relics."⁹⁸ Characterizing the work of history museums and historical societies, Thomas Schlereth observed that "there is bias in every method of collecting" and that the major method of dealing with this bias is to be aware of it.⁹⁹ Archivists could say the same.

How does objectivity fit here? Where do archivists' concerns with this matter really originate? For American archivists, at least, the concept derived from their origins as a profession in the old framework constructed by the scientific historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We have since learnt that the concept of objectivity was a misreading of the intentions of the German historical school of Leopold von Ranke. As Peter Novick eloquently states, von Ranke and his followers did not intend history to be a nomothetic (law-generating) activity, but rather an ideographic (particular-describing) one; Americans took it as the former. Even if this were not the problem, the American archivist would still be required to reconsider the matter of objectivity. Archivists continually return to the argument about the centrality of historical study in their education and the need to understand their researchers' research methods and trends—yet the past twenty or thirty years has found the history profession in disarray over such concerns as objectivity and disinclined to stress method over subject content or political relevancy of their research in its published form. "By the seventies and eighties," according to Novick, "American professional historians' attitudes on the

objectivity question were so heterogeneous that it was impossible to identify anything resembling a dominant sensibility." In addition, as he poignantly pointed out, the "evolution of historians' attitudes on the objectivity question has always been closely tied to changing social, political, cultural, and professional contexts."¹⁰⁰

Objectivity in archival appraisal should always be a concern: it was, in fact, one of the concerns that led archivists to worry about the underdocumented elements of society in the 1960s and 1970s. Now objectivity needs to be seen as a goal in guiding appraisal decisions, not as something that hamstrings the appraisal process aimed at developing a reasonable documentary heritage that will be welcomed by both records creators and researchers wanting the kinds of information found in archival records. What are the options? Should the archivist allow the records creator to decide? Should the element of random survival dictate? Should the researcher, not considering objectivity but certainly deciding relevant information for his or her own specific slant and interest, make the appraisal decision? Or should the archivist, in tandem with and cognizant of researchers' needs and the records creators desires, be the guiding force in determining what records will be selected and re-selected for preservation and other special treatment in order to ensure long-term use?

Some archivists have become preoccupied with the time distance they require (or think they require) from the records they are appraising. Their concern is that it is difficult to know what features of an institution or society will be important in the future. James R. Beniger, in his work on the origins of the "information society," addressed this problem directly: "one tragedy of the human condition is that each of us lives and dies with little hint of even the most profound transformations of our society and our species that play themselves out in some small part through our own existence." Reflecting on the reasons for this, the problems with it, and its results, Beniger offered a different lesson for the archivist: "Because the failures of past generations bespeak the difficulties of overcoming this problem, the temptation is great not to try." Instead, he suggests it is possible to be sensitive to this. "This reluctance might be overcome if we recognize that understanding ourselves in our own particular moment in history will enable us to shape and guide that history."¹⁰¹

Principle Ten: Archival appraisal is an incomplete process if it is done without consideration of the information found in non-textual records that archivists often do not take responsibility for in their work. Archivists talk about their mission to document society and then proceed to concentrate all their energies and resources on only one aspect of "documentation." George Lipsitz, in an analysis of American popular culture, noted that "historical memoirs and historical evidence can no longer be found solely in archives and libraries; they pervade popular culture and public discourse as well."¹⁰² Information valuable or essential to understanding any topic, geographic area, event, movement, an individual's life, a family's development, or a society can be found in a tremendous number of "sources." Artifacts, archaeological remains, popular culture, oral tradition, folklore, publications, movies and television, and archives and manuscripts are all essential for documenting society. What are the relative importance of these sources? Is there a hierarchy of values attached to them? How do, or should, they relate to each other? Can

archivists, concerned with documenting the culture of their institution or society, really afford to ignore such materials as come from popular culture and other sources?

Popular culture is the group of perspectives that people develop in their every day existence as they interact with societal norms, authorities, and institutions. John Fiske, in his provocative writings on this topic, has noted that the “people make popular culture at the interface between everyday life and the consumption of the products of the cultural industries” and that “popular culture is made by various formations of subordinated or disempowered people out of the resources, both discursive and material, that are provided by the social system that disempowers them.”¹⁰³ The results of these interfaces are texts that outsiders can use to interpret the people’s activities and lifestyles and that the people themselves use to give meaning to their own existence. These texts are far different from traditional archival sources. For John Fiske, then, a text is a beach, a mall, or the image of the popular singer-actress Madonna. In other words, as George Lipsitz has found, television, music, film, and literature have become a significant source of providing a collective memory for people, giving structure to their lives and helping to provide them with a sense of meaning. The same case can be made for material culture, the remains of buildings, everyday objects, and other artifacts. In an essay on documenting the built environment, Nancy Carlson Schrock has suggested that the “best sources for information about the built environment are the buildings or landscapes themselves,” although their destruction and alteration have made other sources especially important.¹⁰⁴

The potential meaning of material culture and the importance and difficulty of its selection for preservation can be seen in how a museum seeks to use material culture remains (and, of course, other more traditional textual sources) to interpret the past for the public. An excellent glimpse into this process was seen in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania’s recent exhibition, “Finding Philadelphia’s Past.” The exhibition sought not only to interpret the history of Philadelphia, but also to provide understanding about the role of collecting artifacts and archives. The exhibition showed that one institution cannot gather all the important relics and information sources of the past and that items collected for one purpose often take on different meanings as time passes. The symbol of the exhibition became Benjamin Franklin’s bifocals, “to remind museum-goers of the need to look at the exhibition with dual vision—with one eye to what is there, one to what is missing; one eye to earlier interpretations of an object, one to more recent interpretations; one eye to what an artifact meant to its prosperous owner, one to what it meant to less privileged members of the society.”¹⁰⁵

Archivists need Franklin’s bifocals and a better working relationship with colleagues such as history museum curators. A discussion of the Swedish documentation effort noted, for example, that the “programme was originally conceived as a means to strengthen the collections through the acquisition of contemporary artifacts. As the actual work began, however, collecting became secondary to the overall objectives of documenting society.”¹⁰⁶ In another of Thomas Schlereth’s essays, he noted that the “principal task of material culture studies is an epistemological one; it is an attempt to know what can be known about and from the past and pre-

sent conditions of mankind.” The use of material culture remains adds to our documentary evidence: “Such [material culture] data can provide the historian with an opportunity to explore a facet of the past,” Schlereth suggests, “first-hand as it were, not as translated by someone in the past, writing down experience or orally transcribing what he encountered.” Archivists sometimes suggest that the evidence from the transactional textual record is somehow superior to other evidence. Schlereth states otherwise: “Material culture is consequently seen as one type of historical evidence that might mitigate some of the biases of verbal data that (in the American historical experience) are largely the literary record of a small group of mostly white, mostly upper or middle class, mostly male, mostly urban, and mostly Protestant cadre of writers.”¹⁰⁷

Connecting all of this is the sense of collective memory. Kenneth Foote wrote that “consideration of the collective, independent nature of institutional memory ... implies that the cultural role of the archivist is hard to isolate from the contributions of other institutions and traditions.”¹⁰⁸ In fact, some archivists have identified such connections in a manner that should cause us to wonder why as a profession we have not done better in this regard. Clark Elliott argued that “we have chiefly the remains of one form of communication (written documents) from which must be inferred other forms of communication (oral) that have left no artifactual remains. We must also use the written documents to infer the relations of both these communication modes to larger events in history.”¹⁰⁹ In other words, archivists have long been concerned with the role of records in documenting events, institutions, and society. It is a natural extension to include artifacts, as Hugh Taylor suggested when he wrote that

we need to give a great deal more study to the cultural impact of our media of record to the ways in which they “work us over” as we communicate with them, and to develop a kind of meta-diplomatics as we come to understand how maps, photos, film, sound recordings and fine arts are to be “read” if they are to be interpreted accurately and their impact on us and society in general assessed. This is essential for effective appraisal, since we may have to recognize the most appropriate medium out of many to preserve an event.¹¹⁰

The documentation strategy approach provides the needed bridge between archivists and other disciplines—as well as to the records creators—to resolve such problems.

A more pervasive notion of documentation is essential in considering the nature of and processes for documenting society. Museums have recently come to realize the complexities of their roles in interpreting local public culture, as well as being a part of this culture, causing them to develop more energetic activities in dealing with the community.¹¹¹ Such concerns have been expressed by information scientists in the matter of information retrieval and use. Michael Buckland, reviewing the work of European information scientists, has noted their emphasis on documents as being “any expression of human thought” and as evidence. As Buckland notes, “if you claim to be interested in information science, then you have to go beyond dealing with text and records of communication and include those other undoubtedly informative phenomena [such as “material objects, objects having traces of human activity..., explanatory models and educational games, and works

of art”].”¹¹² As the symbolic nature of archival sources is more important than is often readily acknowledged,¹¹³ proponents of documenting society have to see that architectural remnants, industrial sites, artifacts, and other material manifestations of the past have to be accounted for and may say something far more important than—or at least substantially different from—archival sources. The best way to determine this may be to develop more systematic documentation projects, with the documentation strategy as a conceptual guide.

Principle Eleven: The nature of archival appraisal planning requires the archivist to be involved actively in the selection process, operating with the assistance of the archivist’s selection criteria and theory. This activism includes being as close to the beginning of the records life cycle as is possible, likewise not a new concept. Margaret Cross Norton stated that the “archivist as the ultimate custodian is also interested in the creation of records. After the records have been transferred to the archives it is difficult to weed the files and too late to supply gaps where necessary records have not been properly made.”¹¹⁴ Norton, in considering the archivist’s relationship to the records manager, went even further in the archivist’s connection to the creation process: “The archivist’s training in research methods, his intimate knowledge of the history of his government, and his experience with the various ways in which records are used for purposes other than administration qualify him to take an active part in the creation of government records.”¹¹⁵ It is especially important for this kind of activity to be followed in working with modern electronic records, in which the systems are fragile and quickly replaced; without intervention, documentation in electronic form will be lost long before the archivist ever has a chance to identify and save the record. For some archivists, this concern has been expanded to include the need to assist selectively in the creation of documentation.

An interesting idea to consider might be whether the records life cycle can be extended to include the kinds of documentation created outside of institutions with regularized archival and records management operations. Some study needs to be done on the extent to which the papers of individuals, families, and small organizations such as civic associations and family-owned businesses may have specific times when they fall prey to destruction. Could we discover, for example, regular patterns in the cycles of existence of small businesses which would indicate to archivists when they should be most concerned with the safeguarding of their records (provided it has been determined that these records will contribute sufficiently to the greater objective of documenting society)?

Principle Twelve: The main purposes of planned archival appraisal are to document institutions, people, and society. Part of this planned documentation is to be sensitive to the underdocumented and often powerless elements of society. Archivists, influenced by the work of social historians, have been especially concerned about the documentation of certain aspects of society. This concern led to a number of efforts to develop special subject archives that collect with the intention of filling in gaps. These efforts have not led to the development of any new archival appraisal theory, although there is certainly a basic principle here. Danielle Laberge has stated that archivists must be cognizant of all elements of society and to the fact that some of these elements may not be well-represented in

or protected by the kinds of archival documentation most often preserved. This led her to articulate a specific principle that “archivists ... must remember in designing selection and sampling criteria to protect as far as possible representative slices and samples of case file information in order to document the basic rights of groups and individuals in society.”¹¹⁶ Others have observed how a society’s collective memory tends to be connected to that society’s nature of power.¹¹⁷ Representative documentation is again an important postulate of archival appraisal. Who is to say that this should not be viewed as an aspect of every institutional archival programme’s work—since most institutions are responsible for or accountable to society?

This notion of representativeness probably extends to other organizations such as museums; “useful and representative collections for the study and presentation of American social history” is, for example, a task of American history museums.¹¹⁸ A librarian, looking at the criteria for preservation selection, has also noted that one purpose of preservation is to “provide scholars of the future with access to some kind of representative collection of documentation.”¹¹⁹ Archivists have expressed major interest in appraisal for evidential purposes, to serve their organizations; but these organizations have great social responsibilities as well.

There is some legitimate question, however, about the degree of consensus among archivists concerning this issue of representativeness. David Bearman has suggested that the “profession does not agree whether this record is intended to be ‘representative’ of all of recorded memory, or ‘representative’ of the activities of members of the society, or ‘representative’ of those aspects of social activity perceived by members of the society at the time as important to the understanding of the culture. Most archivists apply appraisal criteria to records, not to activities or social policy processes, and therefore assume that the goal is not to skew the record as received.”¹²⁰ These are good points. Terry Cook has begun to articulate an appraisal theory that encompasses the notion of public interest, suggesting that any other approaches to appraisal must be open to modification by the greater interests of the public.¹²¹

The documentation strategy affords a perspective that will resolve where archival appraisal ought to be going, especially as such issues as being sensitive to various groups and interests becomes ever more important in a society concerned with such matters as multiculturalism and political correctness.

Conclusion

The archival documentation strategy is a planning mechanism for the archivist to use in working through the landmines represented by the fact that all recorded information has some continuing value. The documentation strategy provides a mechanism for a careful and systematic reduction in the bulk of documentation. The strategy adds to a solid set of selection criteria. It takes into account the specific nature of modern recorded information. It is built on the best possible understanding, that of present—not uncertain future—concerns and needs. The documentation strategy opens up the means for understanding how to document all of society, using textual, graphical, and artifactual information. All of these attributes are built upon a solid archival appraisal theory and other archival theory.

Leonard Rapport, in his article on archival reappraisal, noted that, in his opinion, "appraising is at best an inexact science, perhaps more an art; and a conscientious appraiser, particularly an imaginative one with an awareness of research interests and trends, is apt to know nights of troubled soul searching."¹²² The documentation strategy is one way of improving the nights of all archivists. And it supports the fact that, as Terry Cook has stated it, "appraisal is a work of careful analysis and of archival scholarship, not a mere procedure."¹²³ The archival documentation strategy is a mechanism intended to aid such analysis and scholarship.

Notes

- 1 See, for example, the following essays: Helen W. Samuels, "Who Controls the Past," *American Archivist* 49 (Spring 1986), pp. 109-24; Larry J. Hackman and Joan Warnow-Blewett, "The Documentation Strategy Process: A Model and A Case Study," *American Archivist* 50 (Winter 1987), pp. 12-47; Hans Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage," *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987), pp. 69-107; Judith E. Endelman, "Looking Backward to Plan for the Future: Collection Analysis for Manuscript Repositories," *American Archivist* 50 (Summer 1987), pp. 340-55; Philip Alexander and Helen W. Samuels, "The Roots of 128: A Hypothetical Documentation Strategy," *American Archivist* 50 (Fall 1987), pp. 518-31; Richard J. Cox and Helen W. Samuels, "The Archivist's First Responsibility: A Research Agenda for the Identification and Retention of Records of Enduring Value," *American Archivist* 51 (Winter/Spring 1988), pp. 28-42; Margaret Hedstrom, "New Appraisal Techniques: The Effect of Theory on Practice," *Provenance* 7 (Fall 1989), pp. 1-21; Terry Abraham, "Collection Policy or Documentation Strategy: Theory and Practice," *American Archivist* 54 (Winter 1991), pp. 44-52; Terry Cook, "Many are Called but Few are Chosen: Appraisal Guidelines for Sampling and Selecting Case Files," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991), pp. 25-50; Hans Booms, "Überlieferungsbildung: Keeping Archives as a Social and Political Activity," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92), pp. 25-33; Helen W. Samuels, "Improving Our Disposition: Documentation Strategy," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92), pp. 125-40; Richard Brown, "Records Acquisition Strategy and Its Theoretical Foundation: The Case for a Concept of Archival Hermeneutics," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92), pp. 34-56; Terry Cook, "Documentation Strategy," *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992), pp. 181-91; Thomas J. Ruller, "Dissimilar Appraisal Documentations as an Impediment to Sharing Appraisal Data: A Survey of Appraisal Documentation in Government Archival Repositories," *Archival Issues* 17, no. 1 (1992), pp. 65-73; and Terry Eastwood, "How Goes It With Appraisal?" *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), pp. 111-121.
- 2 The professional debate on archival knowledge and theory that I refer to is typified by the discussion that began with Frank Burke's 1981 essay, "The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States," *American Archivist* 44 (Winter 1981), pp. 40-46. This debate is worth a side trip in this consideration of archival appraisal theory and the documentation strategy. Burke, in his essay, argued that archivists must define their theory, separate it from and then relate it to practice, and that this theory will not be developed until there are archivists working full time as educators who have the time to enunciate and test this theory. Burke was immediately rejoined by Lester Cappon, who questioned his definition of theory and the practicality of developing such theory, in his article "What, Then, Is There to Theorize About?" *American Archivist* 45 (Winter 1982), pp. 19-25, and Michael Lutzker, who turned to look at other disciplines (in this case, sociology and Max Weber) that "offer constructs that can deepen our understanding of how institutions function" (and hence their records) in, "Max Weber and the Analysis of Modern Bureaucratic Organization: Notes Toward a Theory of Appraisal," *American Archivist* 45 (Spring 1982), p. 119. Gregg D. Kimball, a Burke student, contributed to the debate in 1985, and also urged the empirical process of developing archival theory instead of "law-like theorizing" that Burke seemed disposed to in his original contribution: see, "The Burke-Cappon Debate: Some Further Criticisms and Considerations for Archival Theory," *American Archivist* 48 (Fall 1985), p. 371. While Kimball summarized and criticized earlier contributions to the debate, John W. Roberts, in 1987 and 1990, presented the most extreme views when he defined the concern with archival theory as merely evidence of the archivist's "emotional need for greater professional acceptance." Roberts saw

little that is unique to archival work, arguing that a "knowledge of historical scholarship and of the content of particular collections become the essential components in making informed, professional decisions about appraisal, description, and reference." Archives, states Roberts, is a "fairly straight-forward, down to earth service occupation" in his "Archival Theory: Much Ado About Shelving," *American Archivist* 50 (Winter 1987), pp. 67, 69, 74 and his latter treatment, "Archival Theory: Myth or Banality," *American Archivist* 53 (Winter 1990), pp. 110-20.

- 3 T. R. Schellenberg, "The Appraisal of Modern Public Records," *National Archives Bulletin* 8 (Washington, D.C., 1956), p. 44.
- 4 Bronowski has, for example, more precisely tried to characterize these differences. He wrote that "in one way scientific knowledge is wholly different...from the knowledge which I shall characterize as being carried by the arts. Science offers explanation. I hold that the work of art carries a kind of knowledge which is not explanatory," but which is more experimental in the sense that the "work of art is an experiment in which, if we enter the life of other people, we experience the conflict of values which faces them." Archivists are, of course, in their quest for documentation searching for explanations of institutional and societal development through evidence and information. J. Bronowski, *The Visionary Eye: Essays in the Arts, Literature, and Science* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 60, 169.
- 5 Terry Eastwood stated that "it is not a question of creating rigid laws, which in any event do not exist even in the physical sciences, to explain reality, but rather a question of recognizing patterns in the generation and management of archives in any given legal and social reality and in any time": "Nurturing Archival Education in the University," *American Archivist* 51 (Summer 1988), p. 235. Frederick Stielow attempted to construct a foundation for archival theory by first defining a realistic notion for theory itself: "The concept of theory does not demand fustian exposition. It is simply the codification of rational and systematic thinking, the conscious development of general principles or guides to explain or analyze": "Archival Theory Redux and Redeemed: Definition and Context Toward a General Theory," *American Archivist* 54 (Winter 1991), p. 17.
- 6 Samuels, "Who Controls the Past," p. 115.
- 7 Lewis J. Bellardo and Lynn Lady Bellardo, comps., *A Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators, and Records Managers*. SAA Archival Fundamentals Series (Chicago, 1992), p. 12.
- 8 Hackman and Warnow-Blewett, "The Documentation Strategy Process," p. 20.
- 9 Abraham, "Collection Policy or Documentation Strategy," pp. 44-52.
- 10 This can be seen most clearly and recently in Roberts, "Archival Theory: Myth or Banality," which views archival appraisal as an archival function that requires little theoretical knowledge. I suspect that many of Roberts's ideas are shared widely by archivists in the United States, the implications of which are that you do the best you can within your own institutional setting and do not worry about the consequences. Everything is subjective, and there is no real sense of common archival principles or any knowledge base. Roberts's attitudes, a confusion between archival theory and professionalism (which are related but quite different), work against any need to consider carefully the selection process except that you try to satisfy your own needs and the needs of your time as far as the preservation of information is concerned. He is right that archival theory is underdeveloped, but he refuses to see any value in or need for a knowledge of archival work. Roberts can only see the documentation strategy as a plea for the "indivisibility of archives, and a structure for increased consultation in the documentation process through the use of committees" (p. 114). Roberts cannot see how the documentation strategy relates to other archival appraisal approaches and principles (it is interesting that he ignores the more theoretical writing on the topic by Helen W. Samuels that relates the strategy as a response to a fundamental shift in the very nature of documentation). His essay is more a reflection, perhaps, of personal frustration (although what, I am not sure) about the profession. But his totally utilitarian approach to archives is widely shared, primarily because most practicing archivists in the United States have no formal education in archival science except for a few workshops and what in-service training they might have been able to acquire.
- 11 Burke, "Future Course," p. 42.
- 12 Cappon, "What, Then, Is There to Theorize About?" p. 21.
- 13 These various definitions are from the *Oxford English Dictionary*.
- 14 See, for example, Elizabeth Lockwood, "'Imponderable Matters': The Influence of New Trends in History on Appraisal at the National Archives," *American Archivist* 53 (Summer 1990), pp. 394-405, in which an archivist's historical knowledge and training is seen to be more of a determinant of appraisal practice than anything else.

- 15 Hedstrom, "New Appraisal Techniques," p. 2.
- 16 This latter dimension has caused many non-Americans to criticize the United States archivists as documentalists rather than archivists. This is obviously meant to be a criticism. However, I would contend that 1) the archivist needs to take on some of the additional roles of the documentalist given the changing nature of documentation; 2) archival theory is not static, which the anti-documentalists seem to suggest; and 3) archivists can, at the least, cooperate with documentalists and others of a similar ilk to ensure that the documentary heritage is maintained (this can be achieved, of course, through the documentation strategy).
- 17 Hedstrom, "New Appraisal Techniques," pp. 3-7. See also Chapter Two in F. Gerald Ham, *Selecting and Acquiring Archives and Manuscripts*, Archival Fundamental Series (Chicago, 1992), which provides an excellent brief summary of the half-dozen prevailing models of archival appraisal.
- 18 Judith A. Perrolle, *Computers and Social Change: Information, Property, and Power* (Belmont, CA, 1987), p. 30.
- Another approach, which is beyond the scope of this article, is to study the manner in which records are created, used by their creators, and re-used by their creators and others. The reason why this is beyond this study is because archivists and others have not analyzed this issue as effectively as they probably should have done. Hugh Taylor stated that "it is very curious and perhaps significant that, despite all the massive corpus of writing about management and administration, so little attention has been given to the impact of the various records" ("My Very Act and Deed": Some Reflections on the Role of Textual Records in the Conduct of Affairs," *American Archivist* 51 [Fall 1988], p. 461). Clark Elliott has stated the same matter more bluntly: "Documents are at the center of the concern of historians and archivists, and yet neither profession has directed very great attention to a consideration of writing as social communication and to the functional relationship of documents to historical events" ("Communication and Events in History: Toward a Theory for Documenting the Past," *American Archivist* 48 [Fall 1985], p. 358). All this extends back to the fundamental conception of theories.
- 19 Michael Buckland, *Library Services in Theory and Context*, 2nd. ed. (New York, 1988), Chapter Five.
- 20 The historical literature is full of studies which have essentially drawn upon surviving scraps of documentary evidence in order to develop broad interpretations of past societies. The increasing use by historians, for example, of material culture and archaeological evidence is indicative of this approach. My comments are not intended to disparage such efforts but are rather meant to suggest that these approaches should not be used by archivists to recommend that such uses guide appraisal decisions in documenting localities or any other systematic appraisal of modern documentation.
- 21 Allan Pratt, *The Information of the Image* (Norwood, N.J., 1982), p. 48.
- 22 Maynard Brichford, *Archives & Manuscripts: Appraisal & Accessioning*, Basic Manual Series (Chicago, 1977), p. 7.
- 23 Luciana Duranti, "So? What Else Is New?: The Ideology of Appraisal Yesterday and Today," in Christopher Hives, ed., *Archival Appraisal: Theory and Practice* (Vancouver, 1990), p. 2.
- 24 F. Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," *American Archivist* 38 (January 1975), p. 6.
- 25 Sir Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration*, rev. 2nd ed. (London, 1966), pp. 137-38.
- 26 *Ibid.*, pp. 148-49.
- 27 Thornton W. Mitchell, ed., *Norton on Archives: The Writings of Margaret Cross Norton on Archival & Records Management* (Carbondale, 1975), pp. 232-33.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 239.
- 29 Schellenberg, "The Appraisal of Modern Public Records," p. 5.
- 30 Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage," p. 77.
- 31 One commentator on the use of online information systems and hypermedia has suggested that the premise underlying the use of such systems is to provide as much information as possible, but that this "can simply offer someone, who is already under stress, more information to process, whether or not that information relates directly to the tasks at hand." Philip Rubens, "Online Information, Hypermedia, and the Idea of Literacy," in Edward Barrett, ed., *The Society of Text: Hypertext, Hypermedia, and the Social Construction of Information* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 17.
- 32 Daniel Boorstin, "A Wrestler with the Angel," in *Hidden History* (New York, 1988), p. 4.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

- 34 Kenneth Dowlin, *The Electronic Library: The Promise and the Process* (New York, 1984), p. 14.
- 35 Thomas Schlereth, *Cultural History and Material Culture: Everyday Life, Landscapes, Museums* (Ann Arbor, 1990), pp. 121-22.
- 36 J.R. Pole, *Paths to the American Past* (New York, 1979), pp. xii-xiii.
- 37 The famous Grigg Report (the basis of public archives in Great Britain), based upon the Jenkinson approach, advocated that appraisal was the responsibility of the records creator and should not reflect the interests or biases of academic researchers. The first review of any records would be made five years after the records are closed by the departmental officer, not the archivist. Records passing this review would be analyzed again twenty-five years later to identify research value; this is the point where the archivist first becomes involved.
- 38 Taylor, "My Very Act and Deed," p. 467.
- 39 See, for example, J. Geraint Jenkins, "The Collection of Material Objects and Their Interpretation," in Susan M. Pearce, ed., *Museum Studies in Material Culture* (Washington, D.C., 1989), pp. 119-24.
- 40 Ham, "The Archival Edge," p. 5.
- 41 Edward F. Barrese, "Adequacy of Documentation in the Federal Government," *Information Management Review* 5 (Spring 1990), pp. 53-58.
- 42 Consider, for example, that most corporations lack any institutional archives or any other provision for the identification, preservation, and use of their archival records. They often fail to see the importance of their own records.
- 43 David Bearman, *Archival Methods, Archives & Museum Informatics Technical Report 3* (Spring 1989), p. 2.
- 44 Mitchell, *Norton on Archives*, p. 240.
- 45 Schellenberg, "Appraisal," p. 5.
- 46 Boorstin, "A Wrestler," p. 23.
- 47 Such a definition of effectiveness is based upon the definitions of library effectiveness and output devices used to measure that effectiveness. See, for example, Nancy A. Van House, Beth T. Weil, and Charles R. McClure, *Measuring Academic Library Performance: A Practical Approach* (Chicago, 1990).
- 48 Brichford, *Appraisal & Accessioning*, p. 1.
- 49 Malcolm Getz, *Public Libraries: An Economic View* (Baltimore, 1980), p. 107.
- 50 Jenkinson, *Manual of Archive Administration*, pp. 139-40.
- 51 Duranti, "So? What Else Is New?," p. 12.
- 52 JoAnn Yates, "Internal Communication Systems in American Business Structures: A Framework to Aid Appraisal," *American Archivist* 48 (Spring 1985), pp. 141-48.
- 53 Brichford, *Appraisal & Accessioning*, p. 1.
- 54 David Klassen, "The Provenance of Social Work Case Records: Implications for Archival Appraisal and Access," *Provenance* 1 (Spring 1983), pp. 5-26.
- 55 Rizzo, *Management for Librarians*, pp. 202-03.
- 56 Bearman, *Archival Methods*, pp. 14-15.
- 57 Charles McClure, "Planning for Library Effectiveness: The Role of Information Resources Management," *Journal of Library Administration* 1 (Fall 1980), p. 4.
- 58 Peter Drucker, *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (New York, 1974), p. 71.
- 59 Mitchell, *Norton on Archives*, pp. 250-51.
- 60 Schellenberg, "Appraisal of Modern Public Records," p. 7.
- 61 Brichford, *Appraisal & Accessioning*. Such criteria have also been extended to museum artifacts, another factor suggesting connections between the archivists and museum curators: see *20th Century Collecting: Guidelines and Case Studies*, Special Report, *History News* 47 (May/June 1991).
- 62 Lockwood, "Imponderable Matters," discusses this but does not seem to be particularly concerned about it.
- 63 *Intrinsic Value in Archival Material*, Staff Information Paper 21 (Washington, D.C., 1982), pp. 1, 3.
- 64 Trudy Huskamp Peterson, "The National Archives and the Archival Theorist Revisited, 1954-1984," *American Archivist* 49 (Spring 1986), pp. 129-30.
- 65 Getz, *Public Libraries*, p. 45.
- 66 The standard explanation has been, of course, that electronic records pose severe technical problems that have been outside the scope of the archival profession's traditional training or that these records violate certain basic tenets of archival theory. These explanations are not totally satisfactory.

- 67 Kevin Lynch, *What Time Is This Place?* (Cambridge, 1972), p. 30.
- 68 Schellenberg, "Appraisal of Modern Public Records," p. 8.
- 69 Yates, "Internal Communication."
- 70 J. B. Harley, "Maps, Knowledge, and Power," in Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, eds., *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 300.
- 71 Samuels, "Who Controls the Past," pp. 111, 112.
- 72 Lutzker, "Max Weber," p. 129.
- 73 F. Gerald Ham, "Archival Choices: Managing the Historical Record in an Age of Abundance," in Nancy E. Peace, ed., *Archival Choices* (Lexington, Mass., 1984), p. 133.
- 74 Frank Boles and Julia Young, "Exploring the Black Box: The Appraisal of University Administrative Records," *American Archivist* 48 (Spring 1985), pp. 129, 131.
- 75 Frank Boles, "Mix Two Parts Interest to One Part Information and Appraise Until Done: Understanding Contemporary Record Selection Processes," *American Archivist* 50 (Summer 1987), pp. 358-59.
- 76 Samuel Muller, J.A. Feith, and R. Fruin, *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* (New York, 1968), p. 19.
- 77 *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- 78 Lynch, *What Time Is This Place?*, p. 37.
- 79 Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahn, *Archaeology: Theories, Methods and Practice* (New York, 1991), p. 42.
- 80 Leonard Woolley, *Digging Up the Past* (Baltimore, 1960; orig. pub., 1930), p. 18.
- 81 Schlereth, *Cultural History and Material Culture*, p. 382.
- 82 Peter Gathercole, "The Fetishism of Artefacts," in Susan M. Pearce, ed., *Museum Studies in Material Culture* (Washington, D.C., 1989), p. 76.
- 83 Stephen Jay Gould, *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History* (New York, 1989), p. 97.
- 84 Jenkinson, *Manual of Archive Administration*, pp. 141-43.
- 85 Schellenberg, "Appraisal of Modern Public Records," p. 11.
- 86 Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage," p. 82.
- 87 Faye Phillips, "Developing Collecting Policies for Manuscript Collections," *American Archivist* 47 (Winter 1984), pp. 31, 36.
- 88 Endelman, "Looking Backward," p. 342.
- 89 F. Gerald Ham, "Archival Strategies for the Post-Custodial Era," *American Archivist* 44 (Summer 1981), p. 216.
- 90 Harry R. Rubinstein, "Collecting for Tomorrow: Sweden's Contemporary Documentation Program," *Museum News* 63 (August 1985), p. 56.
- 91 Woolley, *Digging Up the Past*, pp. 40-41.
- 92 Dorothy J. Anderson, "The High Cost of Planning," *Journal of Library Administration* 6 (Spring 1985), pp. 9-16.
- 93 Andrea Hinding, "Toward Documentation: New Collecting Strategies in the 1980s," *Options for the 80s: Proceedings of the Second National Conference of the Association of College and Research Libraries* (Greenwich, 1981), p. 535.
- 94 Duranti, "So? What Else Is New?," p. 12.
- 95 Jenkinson, *Manual of Archive Administration*, pp. 144-45.
- 96 *Ibid.*, p. 147.
- 97 Benjamin Bates, "Information as an Economic Good: Sources of Individual and Social Value," in Vincent Mosco and Janet Wasko, eds., *The Political Economy of Information* (Madison., 1988), p. 77-78.
- 98 David Loewenthal, *The Past Is A Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 26.
- 99 Thomas Schlereth, "Contemporary Collecting for Future Recollecting," *Museum Studies Journal* 113 (Spring 1984), p. 26.
- 100 Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 593, 628.
- 101 James R. Beniger, *The Control Revolution: Technological and Economic Origins of the Information Society* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 1-6.
- 102 George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis, 1990), p. 36.

- 103 John Fiske, *Reading the Popular* (Boston, 1989), pp. 1-2, 6.
- 104 Nancy Carlson Schrock, "Images of New England: Documenting the Built Environment," *American Archivist* 50 (Fall 1987), p. 476.
- 105 Barbara Clark Smith, "The Authority of History: The Changing Public Face of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 114 (January 1990), p. 64. Other essays in this volume about the exhibition are by Gary B. Nash, Emma J. Lapsansky, and Cynthia Jeffress Little and provide, as a group, an illuminating exploration of the use of material culture and other historical records in public exhibitions.
- 106 Rubenstein, "Collecting for Tomorrow," p. 57.
- 107 Schlereth, ed., *Material Culture: A Research Guide* (Lawrence, 1985), pp. 7, 10, 12.
- 108 Kenneth Foote, "To Remember and Forget: Archives, Memory, and Culture," *American Archivist* 53 (Summer 1990), p. 380.
- 109 Elliott, "Communication and Events in History," p. 359.
- 110 Hugh A. Taylor, "The Totemic Universe: Appraising the Documentary Future," in Christopher Hives, ed., *Archival Appraisal*, p. 24.
- 111 See, especially, Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Levine, eds., *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington, D.C., 1992).
- 112 Michael Buckland, "Information Retrieval of More Than Text," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 42 (September 1991), p. 586.
- 113 James M. O'Toole, "The Symbolic Significance of Archives," *American Archivist* 56 (Spring 1993), pp. 234-55.
- 114 Mitchell, *Norton on Archives*, p. 234.
- 115 *Ibid.*, p. 248.
- 116 Danielle Laberge, "Information, Knowledge, and Rights: The Preservation of Archives as a Political and Social Issue," *Archivaria* 25 (Winter 1987-88), p. 49.
- 117 Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge, 1989). See also David Thelen, ed., *Memory and American History* (Bloomington, 1989).
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- 119 Ross W. Atkinson, "Selection for Preservation: A Materialistic Approach," *Library Resources & Technical Services* (October/December 1986), p. 349.
- 120 Bearman, *Archival Methods*, pp. 12-13.
- 121 Terry Cook, "Many are Called but Few are Chosen: Appraisal Guidelines for Sampling and Selecting Case Files," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991), pp. 25-50 and "Mind over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal," in Barbara L. Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor* (Ottawa, 1992), pp. 38-70.
- 122 Leonard Rapport, "No Grandfather Clause: Reappraising Accessioned Records," *American Archivist* 44 (Spring 1981), p. 149.
- 123 Cook, "Mind over Matter," p. 47.