

Macro-Appraisal Theory and the Context of the Public Records Creator*

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Résumé

Cet essai porte sur le contexte de la création des documents publics et sa relation conceptuelle avec l'évaluation des documents publics. Le but premier de cet essai vise à suggérer aux archivistes une voie alternative pour comprendre, interpréter et représenter le contexte de création institutionnelle à l'appui des processus intellectuels et des méthodes pratiques conduisant à l'identification des dossiers à valeur archivistique.

Abstract

This essay is about the context of the public records creator and its conceptual relation to the appraisal of public records. Its primary purpose is to suggest an alternative way for archivists to understand, interpret, and represent institutional creator context in support of intellectual processes and practical methods leading to the identification of records for archival preservation.

Through much of the twentieth century, heavily influenced by theories of bureaucratic organization originally articulated by Max Weber, archivists have generally understood the institutional environment as a distribution of authorities and powers within a hierarchical administrative structure. Consequently, they have appraised, preserved, and described government and corporate records largely within the contextual frame of organization and meaning established by structural administrative relationships. By exploring aspects of recent social theory and their potential application to archival appraisal endeavour, this essay will offer a different view of how public institutions work, organize, decide, and act-interact. It will conclude that traditional structuralist approaches to archival appraisal based on ideal Weberian models of efficient administrative organization (*perfect bureaucratization*) possess neither the conceptual nor the methodological capacity fully to reveal and document institutional records creator context in its current and highly complex operational ethos. It will also present some preliminary ideas on how the archival principle of provenance may be adjusted

to accommodate the appraisal and preservation of institutional records in relation to their compleat creator context(s). In this undertaking, I shall be following in the footsteps, but diverging slightly from the paths, sign-posted by David Bearman and Terry Cook, both of whom have argued that the context(s) of institutional records creation--and thus the provenance(s) of institutional records--ought to be determined in correspondence with the de facto organizational framework established by the creator's virtual behaviour as a corporate entity (functionality), rather than in the observation and revelation of the creator's de jure positioning in static structures and fields of administration.

My approach draws upon this hypothesis but goes a step further. It introduces the application of hermeneutic theories of text and discourse analysis to the context of the records produced by agents and organizations in the course of their functional activities and business transactions. Instead of studying creator context strictly from the perspectives of its structural administrative physiology and/or its internal-external functional relationships, I also propose to observe the creator within the context of its *discourse formations*. With the advent of new critical and philosophical methods in the humanistic disciplines represented by hermeneutics, deconstruction, literary criticism, post-structuralism, metahistory, structuration, etc., there are many explanations of discourse formation potentially available for appropriation by archivists.¹ In literary and linguistic theory, for example, discourse formation is conventionally thought of as any unity of "statement" larger than the complex sentence,² while in certain circles of sociological theory, it refers more directly to hermeneutic frames of meanings and intentions evident in texts, which are understood to mediate with the structural properties of institutions to "bracket" the constitution of social action in virtual time and space.³ In other broader philosophic and historical syntheses, it represents the textual linkages between types of statements, objects, concepts, subjects, and thematic choices defining discursive regularity, or a system of information dispersion, which may be inductively related to forms of organizational order and behaviour.⁴ By *discourse formation* in this essay, I mean the institutional networks and properties of organizational structure and function revealed in texts (records) when they are viewed as media of information integration and communication for the purpose of situating, transmitting, and recording messages about institutional activities, systems, processes, etc. In other words, to relate this particular notion of discourse formation more properly to the forum of archival appraisal, the concept of the records creator will be conceived as "statements" or "messages" embedded in records about "reference points," the context of which is both information (the text) and explanation (the narrative account).⁵

In offering a discursive definition of creator context, I am recommending to archivists, in the current theoretical vernacular, the "thin" in addition to the "thick" interpretation of its meaning.⁶ Without discarding the analytic platform of administrative structure, which continues to have value as an appraisal tool and must necessarily be considered for various practical reasons, and taking into account the new archival understanding of corporate business processes and functionality as discussed by Bearman and Cook, I am suggesting that institutions also inscribe their records in institutional discourses that inform institutional agents of localized conditions and organizations of power, action, functionality, process, and system. I intend to argue that this "context in the text" offers a crucial perspective on creator

context for archivists involved in the appraisal of public records, and further, that it may only be properly ascertained and understood by dedicated readings of both creator “documentation” and the records produced by institutions in the actual operational fulfillment of assigned tasks and objectives. Finally, by linking the analytic framework established by the discursive interpretation and representation of creator context to the process of archival appraisal, I shall try to outline a supplementary strategic approach to the acquisition of public records, and to the assignment of their archival value as recently proposed by theories of macro-appraisal.

It is significant that both Bearman and Cook, two of the leading theoreticians in the archival field, implicitly recognize the value of reading, insofar as they insist upon the analysis and assessment of creator *metadata* as a vital step in the determination of records creator context. Their understanding of metadata, however, extends well beyond encrypted or transparent technical code encapsulating records within computer-based information systems, which is the “seminal” sense of its meaning, and is more broadly perceived as *metatext of context*, or texts about texts. Bearman’s observations on the reading of metatexts are primarily confined to the archival comprehension of electronic information systems documentation, the possibility of inserting archival utilities in the metadata content of electronic systems architecture, and the assignment of archival profiles to data to enable linkages between records and the context of their creation “of which they are evidence.” The textual connotation of this approach resides in his advocacy of linguistic connectivity between specific and controlled data “vocabularies” and “user presentation language” leading to a meaningful *documentation* (or context) of computer-generated information and organizational record-keeping accountability.⁷ Cook, on the other hand, does not limit himself to the electronic medium and the functional requirements for record-keeping in information systems, and probes more deeply into the dimension of text by promoting the advantages of researching records for both evidential and “informational” (largely socio-cultural features of citizen-state interaction) archival purposes and accountabilities.⁸ For these and several other reasons that will become apparent, my views on creator context are much more closely attuned to Cook’s perspective than to Bearman’s. Nevertheless, Cook’s notion of “records research” is primarily related to the methodology of his structural-functional macro-appraisal engagement of institutional organizations, which places first order of emphasis on the proofs and illustrations of context contained in published and near-published creator literature (metatext) as an operational means of establishing appraisal priorities, and afterwards, once the actual appraisal evaluation is underway, requires that metatextual perspectives are either validated or altered in consultation of the records.⁹ In what follows below, I shall similarly argue that archivists commonly encounter two levels or sources (or discourses) of context in their appraisal endeavours: texts (records) and metatexts (texts about texts). I shall also argue, however, from the perspectives of both hermeneutic intuition and practical “hands-on” appraisal experience, that these two discourses do not always provide corresponding interpretations and information views of creator context. Furthermore, because it frequently discloses the true complexity of creator context in the public sector, I believe an understanding of records as formations of discourse provides a highly important and necessary reading supplement to creator documentation. In the final analysis--and this is where I differ slightly from Cook--I believe that the reading of records for understanding of creator context

should be initiated from the very outset of macro-appraisal, as part of the general process devoted to the identification and mapping of significant creator sites within large or complex institutional organizations, rather than at a later or subsequent stage of records assessment in either confirmation or amendment of the knowledge offered by creator metatext.

To pursue these propositions in more detail, this essay will address three broad but interrelated issues. First, I shall examine the intellectual utility of making decisions upon the archival status of records according to the determination of preformed values at the object level, that is, on a record-by-record basis. Do the methodology and litmus of these traditional archival appraisal tests retain credibility, and are they sufficient to satisfy the contemporary goals and objectives of the public archive? Can the dissection and classification of records by characteristics of value continue to sustain and inform archival strategies of public records acquisition, both in view of the challenges posed by the massive proliferation of public information since the decade of the 1960s, and especially by the recent and radical impact of electronic communications technology upon the creation, management, and storage of records?¹⁰

The second issue concerns the structural determinism offered by the conventional principles of archival theory: whether the understanding of institutional organization as an administrative hierarchy of power and authority continues to have validity for a contextual explanation of creatorship in the public sector, or whether this long-standing archival conception of bureaucratic order and organizational formation now warrants some redefinition or rehabilitation of its basic intellectual ground rules in their application to public records appraisal. Considering that these "rules" emerged from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century administrative theory, and further, that the simple organizations that this theory was intended to explain have since evolved into highly complex organisms, do the standard archival prescriptions and conventions still apply? Should archivists now seek to recast the principles that have heretofore guided their appraisal decisions and largely accounted for the contents of the public archive?

Finally, this essay will offer in juxtaposition to the administrative structure of the public records creator, the para-formation of creator context offered by the hermeneutic reading of records as discourse. In the sense in which I use it, the notion of para-formation refers to the virtual (or conceptual) existence of an alternative organization, view, and explanation of institutional creator action, functionality, and process that is circumstantially based on discursive formations and boundaries of texts. This is to say that institutional discourse formations are not only evident in records; they also regularly define, reconstitute, and recount the circumstances that generated the records in the first place, i.e., the context of their creation, through the medium of narrativity and the communication of information. As we shall see, the discursive para-formation of institutional creator context is not a narrative "fiction," but a meaningful representation and interpretation of institutional action and organization directly linked to actual events.

Of course, administrative structures of bureaucratic organization continue to provide a basic foundation upon which to build a contextual understanding of public records creators for the archival purpose of evaluating their records. They also remain the principal objects of the conventional sociological focus on institutions, and feature

prominently as a component of new social theory interpretations of organizational order and behaviour, in the latter case linked most significantly to the idea of *structuration*. A purely structural interpretation of bureaucratic context is, however, both a highly subjective archival dialectic and not necessarily complete in its revelation of creator organization and activity. The view offered by the hierarchical structure of administration is but one of several perspectives that may be employed to study and explain creator contextuality, and in fact, it may not be the most advantageous line of sight for archivists. All too often, it bears the filter of preconception and presumption upon the nature and formation of organizational order. While it is a frequently convenient angle, it sometimes fails to capture the entire picture.

The alternative sight-line this essay will explore is the view offered by the discursive analysis of texts. In any interpretation of context, the very use of the word *discourse* inevitably conjures up a panoply of multi-layered meanings and understandings. Some of these will be seamlessly incorporated here in an attempt to relate discourse analysis to archival appraisal from an applied, practical perspective. Readers familiar with the literature of social theory will immediately recognize that my analysis of institutional discourse and its relation to creator context represents an "archival-minded" hybrid of various concepts and ideas. To endow discourse analysis with practical archival utility, I concentrate necessarily on the representation and meaning of organizational action indicated by a "group" or "unity" of narrative relations read in recorded statements that are contingent upon an institutional structure, behaviour, activity, function, or process. In other words, the discursive formation of texts establishes para-formations of creator organization that reflect creator functionality, process, and agency (action). In certain respects, my archival perspective on discourse resembles most closely the reasoning of Anthony Giddens in his writing on the theory of structuration, which attempts to address the conundrum implicit in the dual nature of social structure--that is, how social structures are constituted by human agency revealed in the hermeneutic interpretation of "actioning" texts, and yet at the same time are the very medium of this constitution. Especially in view of the growing complexity of computer-based information systems, and both the multi-contextual and transitory nature of recorded information itself, this is a problem that archivists will begin to face more frequently as they undertake to appraise and select contemporary records for future preservation.

My basic hypotheses are these: Discourse formations evident in texts (records) reflect what transpires in the institutional context, and their archival reading in complement of metatext (creator documentation) will lead to the preservation of a better archival memory of institutional activity than is presently obtained simply by following the structuralist prescriptions of administrative theory models. To test these assumptions, I shall focus on the para-formations of creator organization that variously obey or build a communications architecture in order to transact institutional business and/or disseminate-exchange information for this purpose. This is a creator context contemplated by the reading and understanding of records as correlative statements of meaning and intentionality (purpose), order and regularity (formation), function and process (systematicity). Archivists may wish to recognize in these organizational discourse formations an affinity or connection with record-keeping systems. For reasons that will become evident below, I prefer to call them "binding-sites" or "nodes" of virtual records creation.¹¹

Ultimately then, this essay is about *reading*, or more exactly, about *archival reading(s)*. It accepts the notion that archivists are voracious readers and consumers of texts. It also recognizes that there are several aspects to archival reading that insinuate themselves into every phase of archival practice, but most prominently into the core activity of appraisal: the obligation to read, which preeminently establishes the archives as a knowledge domain of texts and discourse; the decision upon what to read, which identifies and privileges certain texts as a positive context for records appraisal; and the act of reading, which involves the assumption of meaning in texts leading to the realization or determination of archival value in records. In fact, the latest public records acquisition strategies have rightly advocated an agenda of reading in order to increase archival knowledge of creator context, and to guide archival decision-making upon records acquisition priorities. Which texts have been chosen? How will the reading of these selected texts affect the outcome of appraisal? What is the connection between archival reading and the elucidation of archival values in records? What are the new archival memory truths (if any) to be revealed as a consequence of reading texts? These are some of the questions that this essay will attempt to address in the pages that follow below.

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Over the course of the last decade, new analytic concepts devoted to the archival understanding of information systems and the evaluation of records have emerged to challenge the canons of theory and practice offered by traditional forms of appraisal. In terms of their potential philosophical impact upon and methodological utility to the archival profession, by far the most controversial and ambitious of these schemes are the various strains and models of strategic records acquisition articulated under the general rubric of *macro-appraisal* theory. For reasons of both practical necessity and intellectual integrity, the hypothesis of a macro-appraisal approach to records acquisition has been most vigorously used by large government and institutional archival repositories. This is primarily due to the growing heterogeneity of their creator universe and the increasing modal complexity of public records “production” and its information “outputs.” It also recognizes an urgent and corresponding need to identify records of archival value with greater precision and clarity of purpose. Note the variety of archival plans and projects lately inaugurated to support macro-appraisal thinking and tactics: the records acquisition “Logic Model” developed by the National Archives of the Netherlands, the new macro-appraisal acquisition strategy plan for government records followed at the National Archives of Canada, the research undertaken at the University of Pittsburgh to devise functional specifications for record-keeping systems, the investigation of the concepts of functionality and “recordness” being conducted in Australia, and the documentation strategy and functional analysis initiatives proposed for application at state and other public institution levels in the United States.¹² Setting aside the issue and implications of operational resource restrictions and other practical constraints, which actually constitute something of a “red herring” in the matter of records evaluation and selection,¹³ it is nevertheless perfectly clear, as suggested by the growing acceptance of and general inclination towards an orientation of records acquisition strategy, that new conceptions and resolutions of appraisal theory are required by the public records archive to reaffirm its status as a primary memory site of socio-cultural understanding

and interpretive decipherment. How is it possible to identify and select the best or most valid archival record from the vast and complex reserves of public documentation available for preservation? Which appraisal tools will archivists use to excavate the recorded sediment of society's public information archaeology and/or predict the future locations and contours of its most significant documentary fossilization?

Judging strictly from the tenets of its present statements, the macro-appraisal hypothesis appears to offer a radical solution to these problems. In its seminal formulations, this is a method of records appraisal and archival selection that establishes an intellectual order of records acquisition priority based on the contextual significance of their sources or sites of creation, i.e., properties and qualities of creator value determined by examining organizational formations (structures), institutional programme activities (functions), and business transactions (processes). In essence, it concentrates the appraisal efforts of the archivist at the tier of the records creator, rather than at the information substance of the record. In other words, macro-appraisal theory advocates a course of archival records selection intellectually conducted from a global systems analysis of perceptual organizations--both structurally from the top down and horizontally through administrative formations along functional and/or processive pathways--rather than as a reconstructive process of archival understanding dredged from the bottom of the information pool, where the "billions" of records actually reside. It emphasizes the archival value of a structured model site, functional activity, or institutional process of business transaction, as opposed to the archival values of records; it assigns primacy of importance to the value of the evidential context in which records are created, rather than to the value of the information that records may contain. In certain respects, macro-appraisal theory appears to offer an archival oxymoron: a text-free interpretation of texts.

In perhaps its most acute form, as advanced by the Dutch records acquisition "Logic Model," the macro-appraisal hypothesis, amongst other significant exclusions, makes no provision whatsoever for archivists actually to examine the records they are to acquire. Here, all appraisal decisions are prescribed by the definition and description of tasks and sub-tasks in relation to the functional environment of government. Once a task or act has been properly described and ranked in a gridded order of acquisition priority by reference to the administrative environment of primary "archive-builders" (or records creators) within the bureaucratic superstructure, all documents related to its task and act locations are transferred to the archives. It is important to note that the Dutch acquisition strategy will not generally comprehend documentation other than policy records, since this approach does not now cover government programme implementation or interaction with the civil constituency. Only in very exceptional circumstances, therefore, will case files (paper or electronic) be included in its functional analysis, let alone be acquired, and then merely to provide exemplified evidence of administrative process. In effect, in addition to eliminating the reading and evaluation of records from the process of appraisal, archival value has been interpreted exclusively to mean evidential value. And whither informational value? It has been practically and theoretically suffused by the meaning and representation of evidence! In the programme literature that accompanies the Dutch Logic Model, this is ironically described as "maximally objectified subjectivity."¹⁴

Significantly, neither the acquisition strategy for government records employed at the National Archives of Canada, nor the programmes of documentation strategy

and functional analysis being developed in the United States, among other proposals, would entertain any premise that conceives to remove entirely the evaluation of the record from the prospect of archival appraisal. Nor would these plans accept necessarily the contention that the archival value of records resides solely in their capacity to provide evidence of organizational structure, function, or transactive process. On the contrary, in addition to the sense of *recordness* offered by codified arrangements of organization and acts of functional and/or juridical intention within administrative structures, these strategies make room for broader, *total archives* interpretations and meanings, including the notion that institutional records creators and their records also serve social and cultural accountabilities. Moreover, they explicitly involve the appraisal of records, especially at the level of the case file, to either confirm or amend earlier macro-appraisal analyses and decisions. While there are certain uniformities of conceptual approach to be observed in the several hypotheses of macro-appraisal strategy recently to have gained institutional currency, it should not be immediately assumed that they have all reached (or intend to reach) uniform appraisal conclusions, that they have adopted identical operational goals and objectives, or that they propose to follow identical intellectual assumptions leading to the acquisition of a generically similar archival-evidential record. In fact, there are a number of critical theoretical differences between the various macro-appraisal models, and between their associated methodologies of practical application. For example, federal government records acquisition strategy in Canada and documentation strategy initiatives in the United States both accept (to varying degrees) the routine of records evaluation according to archival value taxonomy, but there are yet fundamental points of divergence on matters of conceptual substance and methodology sufficient to promise different appraisal outcomes--and perhaps different archives.¹⁵

Irrespective of these particular "theoretical" deviations, there is one point of strategic consensus residing at the heart of macro-appraisal. This is the proposition that a more rational, legitimate, and comprehensive archival documentation of the past may be obtained by a determination of archival value according to a contextual understanding of the systemic functions and transactive processes responsible for the *creation* of records, rather than by assessing individual records on an *ad hoc* basis according to premeditated archival tests and measures of their evidential or informational values. Consequently, the general intention of macro-appraisal is to remove from primary archival consideration the preservation of records by virtue of their preformed qualities and characteristics of archival-historical merit, in order to concentrate on the value of their aggregated meaning and representation as revealed by the contextual ethos of their creative inspiration. It first assesses the archival value of records by analyzing their formational context(s) of organization, systematicity, business transaction, and process of communication; by mapping information flows, identifying records creator sites, and connecting information with communication pathways. It assigns to secondary importance the reconstructive interpretation of creator context emerging from archival impositions or reflections of organizational order offered by the evaluation of records in their raw, abstracted, disordered state. Hence, in any of its current versions, at least those with which I am familiar, macro-appraisal theory invariably has the occupational side-effect of increasing the distance between the archivist and the ultimate objects of an archival acquisition programme – the records.

Considering the circumstances that have contributed to the emergence of macro-appraisal thinking, this is perfectly understandable. In many ways, macro-appraisal theory is the logical intellectual product of renewed archival efforts to define operational space and significant accountability roles (primarily business, but also social and cultural) for the archival process within the modern institutional records/information management environment. The task of preserving records of enduring archival value, with all that this entails, has for many years been largely consigned to the end of the records disposition life-cycle, primarily as a function of post-transfer archival records selection. I think it is fair to say that the operation of traditional records "scheduling" for public institutions has produced mixed archival results and, in fact, many archives have benefitted from fortuitous direct transfers of caches of important records. The institutional records and "collections" that archives are wont to highlight and advertize to users have not necessarily been acquired by virtue of an organized and rational disposition process.¹⁶ In a strategic reversal of this passive "reception" approach, macro-appraisal now moves the archives directly into institutions (and other as yet undefined "areas") to identify record-creator sites that have produced and will continue to produce records worthy of archival preservation, after which the options of records disposition may be exercised under archival terms and conditions: transfer, protect, devolve, destroy. To implement this kind of acquisition strategy, it is not possible to make archival value decisions at the individual record level.

Without question, the macro approach to archival records appraisal offers immediate practical advantages for archives charged with onerous and complicated preservation mandates. It also bears certain theoretical possibilities, provided that the present versions of its practical appraisal application are accepted as prototypes or experimental models, rather than as immutable acquisition templates from which to cut all future editions. Its most obvious strengths lie first in the capacity to provide focus and sharpen objectives towards the delivery of an organized and comprehensive records acquisition programme in an age of superabundant information and modally complex creator venues.

In addition, the macro-appraisal hypothesis recognizes the many limitations and incapacities implicit in conventional classification categories of archival selection criteria when conscripted as foundational guidelines for records acquisition initiatives, principally by promoting the notion of a contextual analysis of records creators over subjective historical meditations upon the value of information in records and other "antiquarian" forms of "records-collecting."¹⁷ Especially in its relation to the environment of public records, traditional archival appraisal methodology based on taxonomies of preformed archival values and records-centred evaluative judgements have become destabilized by sheer information bulk and redundancy, as well as by the emerging hyper-complex face of bureaucratic administration, the existence of multiple-media electronic and other forms of records creation, and the evolution of complicated networks of business transaction and communications connexion between records creators, records users, and records-keeping systems. Further, the manifest modal capacity of information to transcend organizational boundaries clearly has the potential to confound (in some cases) the structures of administration that ostensibly define the identity of public records creators and the archival provenance of their records. It is for this reason that the introduction of functionality as an

additional platform of records creator analysis represents the most important contribution of macro-appraisal. Not only has it the salutary effect of drawing archival appraisal attention up from the nearly fathomless “well” of inchoate information at the individual record level to a compound surface of records context (structure and function); it also promises a synthetic approach to records analysis that more accurately reflects the dynamic nature of their creation, transactionality, and communication within the public sector. By concentrating on the operational functions of records creators as well as the formation of their internal and external reporting structures, archivists are potentially able to survey and map the connective flows and relational processes that frequently permit recorded information to cross the static borders of administrative organization fixed in the mindset of traditional archival knowledge. The intention is both to overcome structuralized provenance bias in the definition and delineation of archival value, and to identify and target functions and activities producing records worthy of archival preservation regardless of their *in situ* structural location within the public domain.¹⁸

On the other hand, I am not at all convinced by the Dutch assumptions expressed in the PIVOT/Logic Model currently used by the National Archives of the Netherlands: that a better quality of archival documentation is to be preserved by removing the record from the strategic prospect of macro-appraisal entirely in favour of records creator analysis, or that the context of a records creator can be fully ascertained and understood without consideration of the organizational para-formations represented by its records (texts) as formations of discourse. Macro-appraisal methodology of the genre proposed by the Dutch Logic Model is entirely based on the presupposition that an archival knowledge of creator context--structure, function, process--is determinable without reading or otherwise examining records. It furthermore assumes that the comparative archival worth of creator sites can be directly inferred from an additional series of presuppositions concerning the authority status of their structural positioning within hierarchically graded organizational systems, and the significance of the jurisdictional competence associated with their administrative functions. These presuppositions entail the danger that the evaluation of the records creator, from which the archival values of records will be logically deduced for the purposes of their archival preservation, is ultimately based on a precariously narrow empirical foundation.

The current propositions of macro-appraisal strategy have not yet been sufficiently liberated from the methodological (and operational) residue of the archival past to realize fully the enormous analytic and theoretical implications associated with a programme of records acquisition based on records creator value. Archivists have been traditionally conditioned and predisposed to study and evaluate records, not records creators. The administrative order of the records creator used by archivists to arrange and describe records has also, in the conspicuous absence of any other acceptable interpretation of creator context, been variously deployed as an archival order of creator explanation that permits archivists to identify and select records for preservation. Macro-appraisal now invites archivists not only to consider the value of records creators in preference to the value of their records for reasons of acquisition strategy; it has also introduced the necessity of adopting a new classification scheme of archival value standards based on qualities, properties, and characteristics of records creator context. These criteria of creator value (macro-appraisal criteria) are expected

to emerge from a global systems analysis and processive understanding of institutional sites of records creation, and, in addition to traditional structuralist interpretations of this creator context, from the application of the concept of function to the environment of public administration. This represents a quantum leap of logic for a profession that has barely recognized the current dialectical dimensions of its own appraisal practices, and hardly advanced beyond the teachings of primitive administrative theory. Almost inevitably, despite the resolution to raise records appraisal sights to a higher analytic plane or macro field of vision, the object and nature of the designated archival acquisition targets, as well as much of the theoretical equipment and conceptual ammunition dedicated to their specification and interpretation, remain tightly bound to traditional forms and techniques of archival records appraisal experience.¹⁹

Along with several other macro-appraisalists who have recently questioned the efficacy of records acquisition strategies based on an archivally engrained administrative order *mentalité*, and who have consequently begun to advocate new directions for appraisal based on functional analysis and record creator research, I have come to these conclusions for a number of reasons. First, many of the existing macro-evaluation schemes perforce embrace an appraisal methodology rather than a theory of appraisal, due in part to the necessity of dealing with specified record creator clients existing “administratively” within bureaucratic structures either subject to archival enabling legislation, or falling within the general purview of dedicated archival mandates. This represents a largely routinized and conventional form of archival classification procedure, which, prior to the archival appraisal and records selection process, interposes an archival framework of analysis rooted in an archival interpretation of the order of system. Second, archivists commonly “strain” the records they decide to appraise through the formational filters of the creator administrations either perceived to be responsible for their production, or which are “logically” imposed for the purposes of their archival arrangement and description. These formations of archival order represent a purely structural interpretation of the various creator contexts and axioms of organizational experience that subsequently provide for the identification and delimitation of archival sources of documentary unity and records connexion (fonds).

In fact, public records archivists regularly imprint a template of archival order, and ultimately an *archival order of value*, upon the records they identify for appraisal and selection. Regardless of the predetermined level of appraisal analysis, this conception of archival order largely represents an impression or interpretation of original institutional order rooted in the taxonomy of archival records arrangement and description: in a corpus of records classification principles that either ignores or screens out the inconvenient sites of information complication that exist (from an archival-order perspective) in the institutional environment. The corollary to these deductions is that the blending of appraisal and selection theory with arrangement and description theory, despite its testimonial in many of the standard archival texts and its advocacy in some professional circles, is both intellectually misguided and generally debilitating of the archival record. Archival appraisal and records selection, and archival arrangement and records description, represent two distinct and separate paths of archival thought process and purpose. Archival order does not necessarily resemble the state of original/liminal operational order implicit in institutional discourse, nor do its rules of arrangement and description offer a sufficiently adequate

analytic template for records appraisal objectives.²⁰ In other words, to put into question one commonly held occupational assumption, the concept of the archival fonds does not in and of itself provide a legitimate contextual perspective (archival, historical, or otherwise) from which to deduce and explain the activities of records creators and the nature of their recorded information outside of the archival domain. Let me try to expand upon these observations with the object of providing some positive direction for the future theoretical course of macro-appraisal strategy in its application to public records.

2

Despite a considerable body of conflicting evidence and several convincing statements of alternative analytic approach, the prevailing conception of bureaucracy and administrative organization found in archival literature continues to be grounded in the hierarchical framework of relations established by the elementary principles of Weberian sociology.²¹ This is undoubtedly due to the intimate connexion of the archival principle of provenance and the concept of the archival fonds with the structuralist paradigms of organization described by Weber in his *oeuvre* on institutional order (notably in his essay "On Bureaucracy"), and recapitulated through the twentieth century in the synthetic renditions of Peter M. Blau, Robert K. Merton, Seymour Lipset, Edward Shils, Hans Heinrich Gerth, C. Wright Mills, and Herbert A. Simon, to name but a few of the prominent disciples.²² Somewhat surprisingly, given the perfectly obvious nature of the conceptual linkage, this connexion of archival-sociological theoretical relationship was only recently exposed for archivists by David Bearman and Richard Lytle, who rightly attributed the current incapacity of provenance as an archival medium of institutional records analysis to its practically exclusive foundation in primitive structuralist models of organizational hierarchy (mono-hierarchy) decidedly of Weberian origin.²³ Reading the standard texts of archival theory (Schellenberg, Jenkinson, et al.) on the subjects of bureaucracy, public records, and their constituent organizational orders, even those of the most recent vintage (notably Duchemin), is commonly to encounter an episteme of archival interpretation purely of structuralist semantics and syntax. With very few exceptions, all of these authorities subscribe to an archival perspective that engages the notion of bureaucracy through a convention of records classification, arrangement, and description--an archival taxonomy unreservedly preoccupied with types, or characteristics, or categories of documentation identified and delimited by reference to sources and orders of knowledge entirely based on Weberian structuralist connotations of power and authority.²⁴ Indeed, the suffusion of traditional archival appraisal methodology with neo-Weberian concepts of hierarchical power structures and superior-subordinate authority relations is now so utterly complete that few archivists actually recognize the pervasiveness of their ideological impact on contemporary archival thinking. As Michael Lutzker has poignantly remarked, "the hierarchical conception of bureaucratic order has been incorporated [and largely uncritically] into the professional archivist's consciousness."²⁵ Notably, this includes a misreading or, more accurately, a dedicated vocational reading, of Weber himself. For various reasons, archivists have decided to ignore the restrictions and qualifications Weber imposed upon his own bureaucratic model as a "pure type" of bureaucratization derived by abstracting the most characteristic and efficient bureaucratic aspects of all known organizations. This is a

state of bureaucratic affairs which, in Weber's erstwhile opinion, could never be completely realized.

Three interrelated factors lie at the root of this archival interpretation of Weberian doctrine: a particular perception of the archivist's role within the historical process, a convenience of intellectual translation, and the absence of any real philosophic foundation for the critical acts of records appraisal and selection beyond a general orientation or methodology of records evaluation appropriated from the extant archival rules supporting records arrangement and description. Structuralist models of institutional order provide a matchless information "packaging" for a profession largely driven occupationally to classify and describe records species, rather than to interpret, decipher, or reflect upon the meaning, representation, and value of records within the actual/virtual context of their creation. They are extraordinarily well suited to the archivist's principle aim, which has been traditionally perceived as the achievement and observation of a condition of positive order in the archival domain. This is an "ordering intention" endemic to archival practice which obeys several key occupational imperatives: to recognize, to demonstrate, and to impose orders of organization and value ostensibly indigeneous to recorded information in its raw, abstracted, preliminal state. These are also the imperatives that call up and invest archivists with a particular appraisal subjectivity involving the determination of archival value specifically in relation to the formational properties of records creators operating within a pre-ordained archival order, including the identification of potential sources of disruption and complication, and the extirpation of those recorded things that are out of place or do not fit the synchronicity of the accepted order-template.²⁶ In all of these instances, the sense of order articulated by the archival ordering intention resides prescriptively in *a priori* knowledge of creator context purely of an administrative abstraction cued by structuralist persuasions of its archival conception: the principle of *provenance*, the concept of the *fonds*, and the regulation of *respect des fonds*.

Originally conceived as tenets of an archival "ordering theory" for the purposes of records arrangement and description, these principles of archival order have been modified to entertain a structuralist approach to archival appraisal by virtue of their congeniality to the codified formations of administration and bureaucracy identified by Weber. They have also been insinuated by archivists, inadvertently or otherwise, into a consensus of archival exposition on the value and signification of bureaucratic-institutional records through a catechized promotion of and concentration upon their administrative-structural attributes. In effect, they constitute an archival ideology of order produced and reproduced by virtue of an archival *mentalité* of bureaucratic world-view in which administrative-structural signs of system are privileged as necessary, authoritative, even natural ways of recognizing meaning and value in the order of bureaucratic things, while others are suppressed, ignored, or hidden in the processes of records arrangement and description that bring the institutional world to archival consciousness. As Brien Brothman has insightfully surmised, archivists do not simply acquire or preserve records of value; they actually create value, that is, their own orders of value, by putting records in their proper place, by making places for them, and ultimately, by electing to describe them.²⁷ It naturally follows, given the current predilection for neo-Weberian models of institutional organization, power, and authority, that the archival appraisal and selection of public records is

predominantly sustained by an understanding of value measured against and emerging from their evidential capacity to reflect and reproduce a sense of archival order. This is an occupational conception of administrative order overtly designed to forecast, corroborate, and describe the archival-structural conditions of organic continuity and systemic intelligibility ostensibly indigeneous to uncaptured reserves of bureaucratic information as archival self-fulfilling prophesy. It is also intended to raise institutional texts from their presystematic or pre-organization status to an archival order of empirical cognition by classifying and arranging their information outputs according to a structural consciousness of interpretation writ in descriptive standards, rules, regulations, and statements of archival order-knowledge and explanation.

It must be said that supporting and surrounding this archival interpretation of bureaucracy and its "intrinsic" administrative-structural orders is a considerable amount of circular and hence uncritical thinking. Despite pretensions or aspirations to the contrary, the present archival formulae of public records evaluation, especially as expressed in the current meaning of "evidential value," are merely the extension of an archival conception of order derived from the practice of archival records classification. Hence the process of public records appraisal articulated by generations of archival theorists is primarily an act of confirmation, rather than an act of interpretive decipherment or information systems thinking comprehension. It proceeds from an "empirical" knowledge-base conditioned by and contingent upon what the archivist pre-apprehends about the organizational order and status of bureaucratic information as "observed" in its preliminal administrative state, which is, conveniently of course, its presumed natural state as predicted by the archival consciousness of Weberian bureaucratic order-knowledge disposed by archival records arrangement and description.

It would be manifestly unfair to suggest that the difficulties associated with a purely structural interpretation of bureaucracy and its records have been entirely ignored by archivists. Public records "macro-appraisalists," for example, have certainly been attempting to devise new ways of decoding or unpacking the bureaucratic complex, of analyzing and selecting records, of establishing the institutional archive. Consider the efforts of the National Archives of Canada, which have proposed an agenda for public records appraisal that encompasses both a structural and functional analysis of records creators within the operational milieu of their records-creating environment. The recent application of the concept of functionality to public records by the National Archives provides an indication of the sort of valuable and reconstituted appraisal thinking replacing traditional archival theory for records acquisition purposes. Here, the departments, agencies, boards, offices, and commissions of the Canadian federal government have been identified according to prescriptive legislative requirements²⁸; they have also been subsequently placed into an intellectual order of appraisal priority on the basis of their perceived functional importance within the global bureaucratic superstructure, principally by reference to macro-appraisal criteria devised by evaluating the significance, operational capacities, and impact upon the civil constituency of national bureaucratic responsibilities, policies, activities, and programmes.²⁹ Proceeding from a contextual knowledge of the public records domain based on the structure of their administrative organization, the macro-appraisal model employed by the National Archives also explores the processive connections between formational structures, operational functions, and business transactions in order to

identify, map, and target creator sites likely to produce records of archival value. Further, and perhaps the most critical admission of this particular acquisition strategy, the records continue to occupy a place in the checklist of macro-appraisal considerations, though of a diminished prominence and ranking. Nevertheless, in direct contrast to the records acquisition programme envisaged by the Dutch Logic Model, macro-appraisal decisions at the National Archives of Canada continue to be validated by an extensive evaluative examination of the records produced in operational consequence of creator formations, activities, and behaviours. Ultimately, following several stages of macro-appraisal analysis conducted at the level of the records creator, the NA strategy requires that the records be subjected to various tests and measures of their memory value, including the importance and quality of their information content confirmed by reading in relation to legislated records preservation responsibilities.

In certain respects, however, the conceptual resolutions generally advanced by public records acquisition strategies and macro-appraisal models have not yet been fully developed from a theoretical perspective. In particular, there appears to be some reluctance (more accurately perceived as operational barriers) to pursue to either its theoretical or practical conclusions, the potential analytic/appraisal breakthrough offered by an archival application of the notion of functionality to the environment of institutional records. One of the principal impediments has been the rapid and largely unqualified importation of social theory, or "potted" versions thereof, into the mainstream of archival appraisal knowledge without any substantive discussion of its multi-form socio-disciplinary purposes, messages, and meanings. Social theory has arrived, finally, amidst considerable professional fanfare and, it must be concluded, with something of an ironic twist, insofar as archivists have for years been *de facto* and perhaps unwitting disciples of *structuralism*, while the record-creating environment they appraise and describe has long since ceased solely to reflect structuralist modalities. How even more ironic, therefore, that other conceptions and hypotheses of social theory should now begin to gain archival ascendancy at its expense, as if it were somehow no longer worthy of consideration. The importance that has lately been ascribed to functionalist interpretations of institutional order and organization provides the obvious case in point. Some public records appraisal strategists have been less than rigorous in their zealous promotion of functionality as a new archival means of institutional analysis for the purpose of records evaluation and selection, primarily by neglecting to realize completely the conceptual ramifications associated with an archival adaptation of its epistemology. Nearly every current records acquisition strategy or macro-appraisal theory refers in some manner to a new functionalist approach to the institutional records creating environment. In fact, *functionalism* has become something of an archival panacea for the problems and failures associated with public records acquisition programmes exclusively founded on administrative principles of bureaucratic structure. Yet from what I understand of functionalism as social theory, I sometimes wonder if the implications of such an interpretation are either critically understood or even intended to be considered by archivists beyond a literal translation of the word.³⁰ It is certainly curious that the *language of functionality* should have entered the archival lexicon without any reference to the writings and interpretive sociological syntheses of Émile

Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, or Claude Lévi-Strauss et al., let alone the anti-functional ruminations of Anthony Giddens, perhaps the most important social theorist of the last two decades.³¹

Exactly what does a functionalist understanding of the bureaucratic records environment offer that is different from or superior to the traditional structuralist approach? Has the functionalist manifesto been examined critically against the archival order-exposition disposed by structuralism, or even the anti-structuralist posture of post-structuralism? As the current archival appraisal adaptation of functionality stands, is there not something of a false dichotomy in operation here? Has not the notion of “function” always been implicit in archival appraisal lore--if we understand the idea of function strictly in its limited sense of meaning as the allotment or distribution of tasks inside a structure as articulated by Weber--and is it not the case that the representation of structure vs. function, or even structure or function, is finally misleading, which is why social theorists have recently occupied themselves with promoting *structural-functionalism*? The truth is that, until very recently, archivists have seldom used either term--either structure or function. Both, however, in a limited way, have always been implicit in and presupposed by archival theory. The functional notion of task specialization has largely gone unrecognized, but has always tacitly figured in the archival approach to the appraisal of public records.

Perhaps none of this is so surprising. Macro-appraisal strategists have only just begun to explore the meanings and languages of theory other than what is particularly indigenous to archival “science,” and to recognize the added dialectical requirement of lexical rigour in any theoretical and/or methodological debate. In the past, archivists have borrowed language from other disciplines, and unabashedly so, but the looseness with which terminology is currently bandied about must give cause for concern. For example, David Bearman’s archival adaptation of a Business Systems Planning (BSP) lexicon is significantly different from the Giddensian language of social theory employed by Frank Upward to explain and support similar notions of institutional records-keeping functionality and recordness for records. As the concepts of functionality and recordness begin to find a place in archival theory, it is vitally important that the language of their discourse begin to coalesce and agree, lest archivists find themselves “speaking in tongues.” Ultimately, the absence of rigour in the archival discussion of functionality and recordness may have a dilatory effect upon their general professional acceptance, especially in view of the reinvigorated sense of archival structuralism that has recently surfaced in custodial descriptive thinking.

In several respects, the potentially liberating and salutary effect of structured systems thinking or social theory upon information systems analysis and records appraisal formulae has been tempered significantly by a contemporary entrenchment of hierarchical-structuralist concept of institutional order within the archival domain--more specifically, by the recent concentration upon and development of the *Rules for Archival Description*, or what is commonly known in the Canadian archival profession as *RAD*.³² While it is hard to object to the present course or ostensible intentions of the *RAD* project, one would like to see a more creator-sensitive approach to the theory and definition of the archival fonds, which tends to avoid the possibility of contextual multi-creator “groupings” in favour of linking records to conventional administrative structures. Generally speaking, however, at least from a reading of

the literature currently in print, the programme, propositions, and regulations of *RAD* as a means of archival fonds specification and description inside archives, appear to be headed in a viable direction.

In fact, it is not the *RAD* project that is difficult to accept, but rather the suggested and *de facto* application of its observations and principles outside the immediate physical and/or intellectual precincts of the archives, especially in relation to the evolution of a theory of archival appraisal. A somewhat insidious development that has lately emerged as a by-product of the efforts to codify the rules of archival description, is the gradual suffusion of “descriptive standards thinking” with “appraisal thinking.”³³ Admittedly, the intellectual separation of the process of archival description from the process of archival appraisal is a notion that archivists find difficult to entertain, either theoretically or practically. As previously suggested, these two elements of professional theory and praxis form a monolithic confluence of archival order-knowledge that has traditionally dominated the imagination and course of archival interpretive syntheses. In several instances, they are now offered as an alternative to the strategic direction of macro-appraisal records acquisition tactics. From an analytic vantage, however, the practical appraisal convenience promised by descriptive standards “order templates” and “information boxes” is undermined considerably by their conspicuous failure to encounter and comprehend records that do not necessarily fit a predetermined conception of archival order-knowledge. What is particularly disturbing about the incursion of descriptive standards theory into the realm of appraisal theory is the suggestion that archivists know--or can presume themselves to know on the basis of what is either known or accepted as to be known (in essence, what has been previously described or has the potential to be described in an archives according to structuralist archival-order cognition)--which bureaucratic activities are worth recording and, ultimately, which bureaucratic records are worth preserving. One is bound to say, beyond the circular thinking implicit in such an interpretive scheme, that there is much here reminiscent of the information universe understood by the ancient Greeks.

In all of this, *RAD* has been misappropriated. What has transpired, and this almost inevitably is a “spill-over” of its theory and practice into what undoubtedly represents an enormous gap in our archival appraisal knowledge. There is an almost total lack of professional discourse upon the most critical of all archival questions: what constitutes a set of valid reasons for a decision either to preserve, ignore, or destroy a record?³⁴ Earlier on, I mentioned that the rules of archival arrangement and description offer a convenient methodological platform upon which to build records appraisal decisions. In fact, archivists have generally been unable or unwilling to escape the structural gravity of traditional archival order: the power of the principle of provenance interpreted within the Weberian framework of perfectly structuralized administrative bureaucracy continues to exert an irresistible pull. In his seminal and often brilliant essay on archival appraisal, “Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage,” Hans Booms analyzes the issue of provenance dependence with a blunt but highly illuminating clarity. “Provenance,” he says, “is a principle of arrangement, not a selection principle.” Yet, owing to the fact that archivists have traditionally come to regard the *origin* of material as a primary value criterion and, more especially, to consider records of “good provenance” as possessing *a priori* value, the principle of provenance “has obscured the need for the concrete, binding

value principles archivists seem unable to define,” and in their place, has offered “surrogate appraisal methods.” In this way, the notion of provenance, indispensable as it is for archival arrangement, “has also provided a formal, ideological basis for undertaking records disposal.”³⁵ Owing to its exclusively structuralist representation, this is an archival appraisal ideology of limited, unnecessarily ephemeral, and largely insulated interpretive vision. The world of the public archive, with its primary emphases upon canons of hierarchy, structure, authority, and synchronicity diacritically connected with traditional notions of provenance, has contrived to envelope the archivist in an occupational environment of institutional order-knowledge based on associations and patterns of stability, predictability, and homogeneity. These archival laws block and filter out the elements of complication, discordance, chaos, disruption, and disorder (as observed from an archival-order perspective) that coincidentally mark and articulate the world of bureaucratic records in the historical process, that is, the diachrony of information. Even by boosting the level of appraisal analysis to the tier and context of the records creator, as proposed by the latest macro evaluative schemes, the archival selection of public records still largely reflects the product of an archival order-explanation and interpretation of the institutional environment. Nevertheless, there are signs that macro-appraisal is on the cusp of a significant movement away from structuralism.

Witness some of the principal sources of context that are usually advanced by macro-appraisal strategy to establish a records creator and its documentary components in an operational priority ranking of archival acquisition: task, order, act-location, mandate, responsibility grid or matrix, authority and policy statement (what some archivists are now calling metadata).³⁶ In most cases, these sources of context are merely the rhetorical reflection of an authorized, jurisdictional, juridical, and administrative construct operationally assumed by records creators for bureaucratic financing and reporting purposes. They do not necessarily represent the actual nature or activity of a records creator in either its structural or its functional-processive background: how it operates; how it evolves and mutates; what records it generates; what records pool(s) it shares, modifies, and to which it contributes; what the value of its records signify. What they do manage to convey through statements of “official culture,” however, is a confirmation and self-affirming re-enforcement of the hierarchical-structuralist conception of bureaucratic organization and understanding disposed by existing conceptions of archival order-knowledge. For example, anyone who has encountered the standard literature offered by departments and agencies of the Government of Canada upon the nature of their administrative activity or fields of jurisdictional operation, would be inclined to suppose that their internal infrastructure is entirely a matter of uniformly isolated or compartmentalized offices and vertically arranged chain-of-command reporting connexions or affiliations, practically based on the division of administrative labour, the assumption of administrative power, or the allocation of administrative decision-making. One might also assume that, at the global level of bureaucratic superstructure, there is similarly constituted a hierarchy of administration founded primarily on the importance, control, distribution, and usage of resources. Judging solely from the information presently available in both published and near-published texts such as annual reports, administrative policy manuals, authority summaries, mandate statements, or role and responsibility guidelines (all produced in categorical abundance by federal

departments and agencies), no one would likely suspect that these apparently self-contained units of administration frequently act both in concert and conflict with one another. They do so by virtue of their implication in processes procedurally ordained by bureaucratic task orientation, in *ad hoc*, quasi-formal measures devoted to bureaucratic problem-solving, or in their implication in the resolutive steps of administrative rectification and reform invited by the dynamics of change. In effect, the image of the Canadian federal bureaucracy normally evoked by official government literature is largely one of inter-structural or inter-institutional operational stasis.

This static interpretation of bureaucratic context is also graphically conveyed by the Canadian Government in many of its standard organization charts. Employing a rudimentary signage, essentially consisting of an arrangement of labelled rectangles of administration outlined and connected by solid black lines against a white background, these diagrams typically model primary and internally concentrated mechanisms of formal bureaucratic structure. Consequently, most federal organization charts are either purposely or inevitably designed to ignore any operational entanglements that might compound or confuse primary-internal matters of jurisdiction and mandate. They commonly neglect the signification of any informal or secondary-external linkages regarded to be either extraneous or tangential to the ultimate purposes, objectives, and intentions of dedicated administrative units or agents; they frequently nullify the presence and correlative indications of institutional interaction, and the para-formational nature of administrative organization engendered by bureaucratic process and transactional activity. This is clearly evident in the basic configuration of the diagrams as officially codified and resolutely terminal arrangements of administrative organization—in the conspicuous absence of any “dotted tracings or influence arrows or shaded areas” that might otherwise contrive to complicate their intended completion of meaning within a largely routinized and jurisdictionally isolated framework of reference.³⁷ Hence, according to the interpretation offered by the conventional schemata, Canadian ministries, branches, divisions, and offices of the federal bureaucracy are both discrete and sovereign within the specified grounds of their operational assignment. Surrounding the official administrative “boxes” marked in black is merely a white and shapeless void.

It is the prevailing silence of these white *tableaux* that I especially wish to address. The graphic encasement of bureaucracy and its organizational segments in non-dimensional static relief has the peculiar effect of disconnecting “administration” from its contextual background. The use of white *tableaux* as segmental surround not only creates an impression of infinite administrative stability, as if bureaucratic structures commonly exist in a wholly intransigent and immutable state; it also eliminates any hint of contextuality potentially offered by the situated character of their agency and interaction in time and space. In a sense, the all-pervasive encapsulating presence of *white* as semiotic surround undermines the possibility of true anatomic representation. It disarticulates and coincidentally breaks the operational synchrony of bureaucratic interrelations and connexions. Perhaps even more important, it obliterates the representation of the contemporaneous traces of intentionality, contradiction, change, and conflict of interest associated with bureaucratic agents at the level of internal structural formation and external collective functional organization, consigning them to a non-graphic status of latent implication. Almost inevitably, the depiction of bureaucracy to be observed in the majority of

Canadian Government organizational diagrams is singularly sterile (though the nature of the exclusions have a certain interpretive potency), given the transactional dynamics normally attending the formulation of federal policies and programmes, the cooperative nature of most federal capital ventures and projects, and the state of administrative metamorphosis which periodically impinges upon the institutional organization of federal decision-making and its programme delivery processes. All things considered, one is obliged to accept that government organization charts often possess a contextually limited and dubious value as reference indicators of national bureaucratic activity in Canada.

There are some significant changes afoot, however, in both the conception and the writing of operational metatext by institutions. In Canada, the Treasury Board Secretariat is currently mapping common business transactions and activities across government with a view to streamlining federal information requirements along functional lines (the Treasury Board Blueprint), while other federal agencies are now in the process of devising corporate business plans to budget resource allocations and expenditures against programme accountabilities (Programme Review). Undoubtedly, this new generation of "metatext" will have a beneficial impact on archival macro-appraisal initiatives and strategies. Already in several instances, the National Archives of Canada has been able to make advantageous use of this new "functional" literature. Furthermore, the recognition of appraisal utility in a functional understanding of institutional behaviour has convinced NA archivists to reconsider and probe more deeply into existing creator metatext, with some noteworthy results. In the general absence of creator metatext defining organizational and corporate functional/business activities, however, it is still largely in reference to administrative elements and sources of context, to the abstracted rhetorical and graphic explanations of official order that both confirm and reflect the structure and knowledge boundaries of the archival domain, that macro-appraisal theory must inevitably rest its decision-making concerning the priority identification and evaluation of public record creators and their records products for acquisition strategy purposes. For this and many of the other reasons noted above, but finally by separating the archivist from original documentation for the purpose of increasing archival acquisition efficiency, the macro-appraisal impulse has inadvertently lost sight of one of its principal sources of context--the record.

I do not mean to suggest that public records archivists should now return, if in fact this was formerly the accepted practice, to an evaluative process based on the subjective information content analysis of records on a file-by-file, or document-by-document basis. Nor do I mean to challenge the fundamental premise of macro-appraisal, which assigns and coordinates the archival assessment of records on the basis of records creator knowledge: formational properties, patterns of functional activity and processive behaviour, and structural organization. Rather, I wish to propose a macro-appraisal hypothesis that more sensitively places the public records creator in its actual/virtual operational context.

This is a context that, while accounting for the rhetoric of official explanation and description, ultimately moves the archivist into theoretical territory well beyond the cloistered walls of the archives, the *RAD*-based descriptive nostrums lately offered to influence the direction of appraisal, and the general vocational observance of the

rule of archival order-knowledge. In essence, it is a context of creator knowledge that is primarily derived from and understood through the reading and interpretation of texts. More precisely, to draw upon but one of several potential explanations of this interpretive philosophy (Foucault), it is a context of creator composition based on a theory of knowledge that identifies, defines, and distinguishes between regularities or patterns of organization and order implicit in texts by virtue of their unification in discursive narrative formations. Contrary to the environmental location of texts in systems or formations of creator order exclusively by reference to the meaning and representation signified by external experiences, acts, institutions, techniques, social groups, and perceptual organizations, this is an interpretive approach that examines the internal narration and narrativity (words, language, grammar, statements, objects, and enunciative qualities) of texts as discourse, that is, as formations of lexic expression and linguistic communication: as narrative systems or orders of information encodation and dispersion. In other words, it seeks to identify and understand the intentions, purposes, and activities of records creators through the elements and sources of context evident in the construction and narrativity of their records, which coincidentally articulate unities and systems of creator order and organizational formation. This is attempted by reading texts to uncover the configuration of their processive connectivity, modes of logical succession and information dispersion/exchange, types of reasoning and induction, narrative composition and defining statements, and forms of analysis and synthesis--all of which contribute to the assembly of discourse. The primary contention is that formations of order and organization, regardless of the nature of their external empirical manifestations, are actually the product of the internal narrativity of regularities and systematicities embedded in texts and their contextual linkage in discourse.

Coincidentally, however--and I would argue that this has the effect of bringing such "philosophizing" discourse analysis practically into the archival appraisal arena--it is also recognized in certain sociological and social theory quarters that the narrativity of texts is reflective of (with some discursive idiosyncrasy) external rules, procedures, processes, habits, and routines of formational order and organization.³⁸ Here again, we arrive at the central concept in Anthony Giddens's theory of structuration, which is to enquire into how it comes about that structures (in this case institutional structures) are constituted through action discursively revealed in texts, and reciprocally, how such action (institutional action or institutional discourse) is constituted "structurally."

The theory of structuration suggests that structural orders of system are inevitably the result of a long and often sinuous presystematic development of linguistic experience and narrative articulation that provides them with a threshold of information and communication context. Removed from the context of its texts and discourse, from the modality of its diacritical narrative expression, the structure of order is silent, undefined, and incomprehensible. It does not exist. To put the matter another way, discourse and structure produce each other--and conjointly--when texts evolve into discourse for the purpose of information dispersion, at the moment of interaction or intersection between information and communication. There exists a significant point of conversion, from the primitive state of raw data or pure information to a formation or process of recorded communication, sometimes existing within

recognized structural-functional boundaries, and sometimes existing without or beyond conventional systemic comprehension. Giddens has identified this process of communication as the *hermeneutic moment* of organizational para-formation, or *social structuration*.³⁹ An archivist engaging in a similar interpretation might suggest that there are certain institutional moments in space and time, typically evident in situations of operational process and transaction, when records exist temporarily in a state of “virtual” or “conceptual” provenance.⁴⁰ In other words, neither the structure of administration nor the modality of organizational function is sufficient to determine the full identity and context of a records creator. Rather, it is also necessary to understand creator formations determined by discursive linkages and relationships of information connectivity between functional agents (regardless of their encapsulating organizational structure) implicated in operational processes for the purpose of conducting business and completing/communicating its transaction. Ultimately, this hypothesis of contextual location and interpretation, called the philosophy or theory of hermeneutics, concludes that context is a matter largely internal to the dimension of texts and discourse. For archivists engaged in the formulation and application of institutional records acquisition strategies, this proposition is of critical importance. It suggests that the understanding and examination of discourse can provide an additional, often useful, and frequently more faithful explanation of texts and the inspiration and intention of their original creators than may be gained through traditional structuralist methods of external empirical observation and evidential archival order imposition.

The hermeneutic analysis of texts and discourse also points to a conceptual problem at the heart of the macro-appraisal approach to public records acquisition, and, it must be admitted, to the potential application of hermeneutic intuition in the archival instance. It suggests that creator context should be primarily ascertained and understood through the meaning and narrativity of its texts assembled in discourse, rather than by external explanations of the context in which its texts are created and situated; however, since public records creators commonly produce texts that document their activities at the hermeneutic moment of their processive transaction or communication (records), as well as other texts (metadata or metatext) that explain the context of their creation (reports, authority manuals, mandate statements, policy guidelines, etc.), can, or should, archivists differentiate between texts? In the opinion of Jacques Derrida, “everything is text.” Which texts, however, should archivists be reading in order to decipher and understand their context? Are there creator texts that provide records with a context and explanation of their administrative jurisdiction, authority, and accountability, but which may be finally, in some instances, disconnective of their virtual creative inspiration, intention, and/or modality of production? All of this begs several critical questions. Are public records archivists bound to engage themselves in the preservation and revelation of public memory exclusively linked to administrative acts of juridical intention, or are there other purposes, meanings, and messages implicitly encoded in public records worthy of their attention? Is the documentation of an institutional act or function sufficient to understand the entire (and virtual) process of their transaction and/or communication? What are the objects and purposes of the public records archive?

Without any accumulated evidence or regularly tested appraisal experiences to support the contention, it is difficult to say whether a hermeneutic reading of records

for knowledge of creator context offers a superior analytic platform from which to launch appraisal probes into the public information void from a macro-strategic perspective, or that it will definitively deliver a superior archival record, in comparison with other proposals advocating the examination of records in validation or correction of the initial assumptions obtained in the reading of creator metatext. Do they not, in any case, represent mutually important and complementary occupational “readings” of texts? Clearly, both of these approaches accept the hypothesis that any final conclusions reached concerning creator context without reading records are demonstrably narrow, precarious, and potentially invalid.⁴¹

They would also accept, certainly in the hermeneutic instance, that the archival reading of records for information of context is problematical. Archivists familiar with the writings of the historical hermeneutic luminaries (Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jurgen Habermas, Jacques Lacan, Paul Ricoeur, Hayden White, et al.), will be all too aware of the controversies surrounding the intellectual relationship between text and context.⁴² Once a largely unexamined presupposition of historical investigation, it has now become a problem, not in the sense of being simply difficult to establish by formerly vaunted empirical rules, but rather in the sense of becoming undecidable, elusive, and uncreditable in the same way as the so-called “rules of evidence.” And yet, as so eloquently explained by Hayden White, the very undecidability of the question of where the text ends and the context begins and the nature of their relationship ought to be considered a cause for celebration. It provides a vista onto a new and more fruitful activity for the archivist by authorizing a posture before the archive of history that is more dialogistic than analytic, more conversational than assertive or judgemental.⁴³ It problematizes the text-context distinction by viewing all documents as media of communication “shot through” with ideological assumptions articulated by various messages and message destinations; creators, actors, and receptors; organizational and para-formational sites of message delivery; intentioned meanings and purposes.⁴⁴ In principle, at least for the archivist, historian, or any other “reader” equipped with the proper tools, any text or recorded artefact can “figure forth” the mentalité and possibly even the world of emotional investment and practice of its time and place of production. Precisely how this context may be obtained--that is, what implements should be selected from the hermeneutic “tool-shed”--nevertheless remains a matter of considerable academic debate.

Despite the implications of this last statement, archivists, in particular public records archivists involved in the development of macro-appraisal strategies, should consider both the lessons and implications of hermeneutics, not only as a highly useful supplement to structural and functional creator knowledge, but also as an harbinger of the diminished quality of the archival “harvest” to be stored for posterity by subscribing exclusively to archival order (descriptive standards-based) appraisal tactics. For a profession whose occupational business and vocation is primarily dedicated to the preservation of records, to words and texts in context, to documentary meaning and representation, to formational sources of recorded information and their modes of communication, to remembrances of the past and future, there is imminent danger promised by the encroachment of descriptive standards thinking into the intellectual forum of appraisal analysis and archival decision-making on the value of records. Supposedly neutral in our appraisal evaluations, our manifest appraisal “objectivity” (neutrality and objectivity are not the same thing) is destined to remain

highly subjective in the specification and imposition of an archival fonds-based contextual knowledge of the records creator, previewed and pre-described by structuralist conceptions of archival order-explanation. It will become all the more so should we continue to substitute and impose routinized records management solutions for matters requiring archival-philosophic integrity and sensitivity; should we accept (or even create!) without qualification or reservation the rhetoric of the official story and its coincidental archival-order interpretation and taxonomic standards; should we regularly over-balance the content and meaning of records creator literature against the unity of discursive content and meaning implicit in its records; should we fail to recognize, in many instances, the evident disconnection between the substance of the external explanation of records creator activity in metatext, and the actual activities of records creators revealed through the discourse of their texts. There is also the danger that public records archivists will eventually be perceived merely as passive instruments of juridical intention and constituted authority "caught" in the act of assembling recorded evidence for purposes of their administrative accountability, rather than as active agents of social consensus and remembering. As an archivist, I find these prospects alarming, bordering on the unacceptable.

There is a school of thought sponsored by some archivists that places a heavy vocational-curricular emphasis upon what is called the "history of the record." For these archivists, the essence of archivy, if I may use this expression, is partly the revelation and sustenance of the past observed through the preservation of recorded information and communication (its identification, interpretive decipherment, and description) by reference to the history of records-keeping--that is, the history of the various physical orders and continuities of intellectual composition to which records have been subjected, both at the point of their original creation, and either subsequently or retroactively through systemic modification and conversion.⁴⁵ Archivists generally acquire this knowledge by reference to official literature (metatexts) outlining records creator activities and behaviours, what is often called "administrative history." To be sure, as records archaeologists of the past and records architects of the future, this is one course of archival knowledge that archivists must attend. Its instruction has an enormous bearing on our capacity to understand the meaning, representation, context, and value of records. Yet, if we are eventually to articulate a successful macro-appraisal strategy for public records, one which can make some significant claim to intellectual legitimacy and real archival-theoretical potency, the history of the public record must also be supplemented by the reading of records (texts) as an intrinsic and primary source of context, that is, as a source of institutional knowledge and a source of institutional order; as a contextual frame of reference for bureaucratic structure, function, agency, and process. In practical terms, this amounts to the archival recognition of all records as text, all homogeneities of text as discourse, and all discourses as sites of nodes of information dispersion. I call this the study of "archival hermeneutics."⁴⁶

3

What does all of this actually mean for archivists? How does the philosophy of hermeneutics potentially offer a logistic application for archivists confronted by a public records creator possessed of, say, a large paper record-keeping system,

computer main-frames with multiple local and regional database operations, an automated office system, decentralized LAN and stand-alone PC applications, E-Mail, Voice-Mail, and various electronic inter-NET link supports, and a multi-port library system with voluminous holdings of published and near-published reports, studies, and articles of operational significance and mandated subject reference (grey literature), to mention nothing of the enormous subterranean records cavities excavated by quasi-formal information sharing, pooling, and resourcing? Can the identification and interpretation of discursive formations really assist the archivist in his/her endeavours to make macro-appraisal decisions upon the preservation and disposal of records in such a circumstance? How does an archivist react when a creator of great structural size, organizational intricacy, and enormous information displacement is interactively implicated at several key internal and/or external levels in a multi-functional (and therefore para-formational) processive transaction that requires an essential degree of its operational input (arbitration, review, regulation, approval, resourcing, etc.), but for which it is not authoritatively responsible or held autonomously accountable? Further, from a broader, occupational perspective, can archivists make any practical use of discourse analysis, given that it substantially reduces/limits the interpretive utility of records considered through official structural groupings and administrative arrangements (which is precisely the way most public records archives must necessarily conduct their acquisition business), that is, through the media of highly structuralized inventories and disposal schedules of records offered by creators for archival review and assessment?

Despite the obvious operational conundrum suggested above, there are several practical applications for hermeneutic epistemology in relation to records creator analysis and macro-appraisal decision-making. First, there is the capacity to verify the identity of primary sites of activity and operational process within administrative structures against the knowledge offered by creator metatext on the status, organization, and constitution of "offices."

In the current vernacular of government, Offices of Primary Interest (OPI) are the entities of administrative structure within institutions that are primarily accountable or held autonomously responsible for dedicated or generic public functions such as policy development, programme implementation, service delivery, etc. Traditionally, archivists have relied upon administrative programme literature produced by institutions to inform bureaucratic agents upon matters of internal jurisdiction, authority, accountability, and reporting protocols as the basis for recognizing and understanding the operational context of these offices, and for placing them in an order of potential archival interest and appraisal priority. To a certain extent, macro-appraisal continues this practice as a legitimate starting-point for archival analysis and decision-making upon the comparative value of creator sites. Increasingly, however, the traditional approach is being combined with and in some instances succeeded by, forms of functional analysis. In the application of variform structured systems models and other "functional" interpretations to the allocation of resources and tasks to designated offices inside bureaucratic institutions, macro-appraisal attempts to locate the core-essential and evidentially resident sites of bureaucratic action, rather than simply accepting the precepts implicit in the Weberian structural model of bureaucratic organization, which predicts that the most important decisions, and coincidentally the most important records of these decisions, are to be found at

the upper office echelons of institutional administrative hierarchies. This is not to suggest that a “top-down” structural approach to an archival understanding of institutional actions and the value of records representing these actions is rejected; it has been significantly tempered, however, by the consideration of bureaucratic organization as a product of process and functionality, i.e., by examining bureaucratic organization as a system of tasks and transactions inter-connected by function-based communications pathways, in addition to its standard representation as an administrative structure of power and authority with mono-hierarchical reporting linkages. Briefly stated, macro-appraisal typically adds another analytic dimension to the archival repertoire in order more accurately to reflect and take account of what actually happens in institutions and institutional networks (how they work, organize, decide, and act-interact), and to arrive at better appraisal priority decisions at the creator level. In effect, at least as it is now engaged at the National Archives of Canada, macro-appraisal views institutional organization as both system and structure. Essentially, this represents a structural-functional approach to record creator analysis and appraisal.

As with the traditional structural approach to creator assessment, “archival” functional analysis largely depends on reading metatext for information of creator context; as is now rapidly becoming apparent, however, we are not necessarily speaking of the same metatexts in both instances. While this opinion is clearly understood by a number of prominent macro-appraisalists, it is most cogently expressed by David Bearman. One of the most significant conclusions drawn by Bearman in his recent undertaking to define an accountability framework and functional specifications for record-keeping systems in organizations, is the need to focus archival attention on the context of the organizational systems documentation supporting the creation of records at (and even before) the moment of their production in the course of “business,” rather than on post-acquisition records description initiatives based on extant administrative literature, which is essentially accumulated or integrated by archives as bibliographic or authority source in relation to the idea of the archival fonds. In Bearman’s view, if archivists are ultimately to understand and preserve evidence of what actually transpires inside institutions, they must be aware of and take into account creator “self-documenting documentation,” which notably translates to, in many cases, an entirely different set of creator metatexts, i.e., creator systems documentation: data contents and values, rules, and regulations within organizational systems delineating business functions and transactions. Earlier on, I alluded to the conspicuous absence of this kind of systemic creator documentation in the Government of Canada. It is probably more accurate to say that the organizational systems metatext identified by Bearman does exist, but that archivists have not previously been searching for it. They have either not identified it as a primary source of creator context, or it has not been generally accessible through or offered by traditional information-gathering routes such as contacts with records managers and/or the reading of site-specific records management policy and administrative programme literature. Up until very recently, it has certainly not usually been factored into archival appraisal decisions upon creator context and its value ranking. In addition, the production and location of Bearman’s “creator documentation” frequently resides elsewhere in institutions from the traditional sources and sites of archival consultation upon creator context. It is virtually absent

in the information at the disposal of archivists in records management offices. Rather, it is more likely to be found with the specialists engaged in information technology and electronic systems design, in the operational business and programme areas, and often resting with local financial policy analysts who produce corporate business plans to obtain a share of and justify resource allocation.

Regardless of the nature or origin of the metatext consulted by archivists to acquire information of and establish creator context (either functional creator documentation or structural administrative literature) for archival purposes, a hermeneutic “reading” of the records created by accountability or responsibility sites (offices) within institutions permits a test of the accuracy of the metatext in relation to macro-appraisal strategy identification of primary appraisal targets. It bears the important capacity to measure the archival value signification and ranking of creator context(s) indicated by archival readings of metatexts against the archival value signification and ranking of creator contexts(s) indicated by the narrativity and discourse formation(s) of organization read in the records themselves. Do these two views of creator context value coalesce and agree? Is the appraisal “target” identified by metatextual reading finally the appraisal “site” that potentially offers the most complete, important, or relevant institutional memory of the actions under consideration? If a creator site is endowed with record-keeping accountability for particular functions or transactions within an institution, is this necessarily the site from which archives will acquire records to meet archival accountability? These are questions that continue to have practical application at certain archives presently engaged in macro-appraisal. For example, the appraisal knowledge gained by the identification of discourse formations in records represents the critical roles of validation and amendment assigned to “records research” by Terry Cook in his macro-appraisal methodology for the disposition of government records at the National Archives of Canada. This also represents a nascent archival accounting for part of the social theory equation proposed by Anthony Giddens towards an understanding of the duality of social/institutional structure, that is, the “structural half.”

A second application for hermeneutic understanding to macro-appraisal is partly linked to the functional systems approach to offices of primary interest (OPI) briefly outlined above, and practically concerns the other half of Giddens’s equation of structuration: the actions of agents inside structures, or the “hermeneutic half.” This is the capacity to locate, understand, and evaluate corresponding offices of creation (OC), i.e., “other” office sites within institutional structures that produce records as a consequence of their functional implication in a virtual process of bureaucratic policy formulation, business transaction, or problem resolution. In this case, archivists are not reading or validating creator metatext--because there is no metatextual accounting for virtual creator context--but rather are reading the texts (records) themselves. This is properly the role of discourse analysis in an archival setting, which may disclose the existence of alternative or temporary organizational paraformations acting in consort with or operating in parallel to regular administrative channels, but offering different or unique information of creator context and action otherwise undetectable without the reading and discursive analysis of records. Are there other “accountability” sites or locations within institutional structures with processive-functional linkages to prime business transactions, often without recognized official status, but which nevertheless ought to be considered and in some

way documented by archivists? As we shall see below, the National Archives of Canada has recently concluded in several notable instances that offices of creation can provide useful context for and evidence of institutional actions beyond what might be preserved simply by following metatextual perspectives, partly based on the organizational contexts (discourse formations) evident in the narrativity of records. Finally, hermeneutic theory may also be useful in the archival wading through information pools with multi-creator input, usage, and storage (increasingly the *modus operandi* of scientific data in electronic form, for example), where the identification of structuralized provenance sources is unlikely to explain sufficiently or finally outweigh the cumulative value of “virtually” created/shared information.

One of the latest and increasingly important trends in archival appraisal thinking, the effects of which are evident in some macro-appraisal strategies (certainly in the case of the Dutch “Logic Model”), has advanced the notion that the identification of administrative structures of primary operational interest (OPI), and the acquisition of their “functionally related” records created *in structura situ*, are sufficient to document any institutional activity under potential appraisal consideration, regardless of the nature, number, and effects of the processes of operational transaction and/or recorded communication in which it may be implicated. By evidential recourse to the autonomous and structuralized site of their originating authority, all institutional business transactions (processes) may be documented as accountable and retrievable recorded archival memories. This is called the archival sense of *recordness* or, more evocatively, *new provenance theory*.⁴⁷

While there are certainly many merits and benefits to consider in this approach, they are not all (nor should they be) necessarily linked to the actual archival evaluation of records. What it clearly offers is some much needed advice and guidance to institutions upon the creation and maintenance of a corporate memory that is understandable, usable, available, accountable, and retrievable. It provides institutions with a legitimate means of establishing context for their corporate records, which are increasingly in jeopardy of becoming “contextless” owing to the impact of electronic communications technology (particularly the use of the personal computer and the advent of the electronic document), and the generally aprovenancial nature (in traditional archival-structural terms) of its current intellectual exchanges and physical storages. This is of vital importance to archivists, who are preeminently interested in appraising and preserving *records*, that is, documentary aggregates with a discernible context of creation and/or custodial affiliation, rather than in accumulating disparate pieces of *information*, or bits and bytes of data. Imposing a sense of “recordness” upon institutional memory, however, should not be confused with setting an archival agenda for its acquisition, especially in view of its *de facto* connection to the taxonomy and regulations of archival records description. In limiting the sense of transactional recordness strictly to the context of administrative structure or function (the two concepts are often used synonymously here), this “appraisal strategy” also limits the records acquisition objectives of the public archive in several critical ways. Primarily, it reduces the notion of institutional process—that is, the progress, course, evolution, and boundaries of institutional action (what social theorists call “agency”)—to single acts of institutional intention autonomously conceived by single institutional agents within single institutional structures. This particular archival conclusion is disappointing, insofar as the “theory” of recordness accepts the primacy of process

over structure as the most significant source of creator context, which is substantially the argument of this essay. Nevertheless, rather than commit the process of creator *action* to archival memory--i.e., the actual activity of records creation stretching across institutional space and time, in essence, the conceptual or "virtual" context of the public records creator--the archival theory of recordness is content to identify and evaluate single and accountable institutional sources of process *initiation*. Ironically, in attempting to shed "structuralized" provenance dependence by recourse to the notions of institutional transaction and process, the concept of recordness ultimately returns to the traditional structuralist knowledge domain of predetermined archival order: the incumbent observation and description of a network of institutional relationships "by means of objective, consistent, meaningful, and usable documentation" consonant with archival laws. Consequently, social action and intentionality are reduced to a single and ubiquitous "pre-action... of [records] filing," which "brings together in association people in an organization who are 'actioning' documents." The records management life cycle of the "record" continues to govern the space and time of its creation, purpose, and intention.⁴⁸ In other words, all social actions and intentions are finally, for the purposes of recorded memory, archival actions and intentions; the context of the public records creator dwells exclusively within an archival frame of meaning ruled by structuralized connotations of provenance.

There is one school of recordness, however, that has recently contrived to partly break the structural bonds of archival order. I am referring here to the efforts of the "Pittsburgh Project" led by David Bearman and Richard Cox. These archivists and their project team are currently studying the possibility of specifying functional requirements for institutional record-keeping systems "in accordance with common business practices" based on structured systems theory and elements of archival practice.⁴⁹ Rather than impose archival rules that institutions must follow to inventory and describe their record holdings successfully according to archival order cognition, they are attempting to codify qualities, properties, and characteristics of recordness that transform information into "records" and make it susceptible to corporate management as well as to archival analysis and appraisal. It might well be argued that there is substantially little difference between the description of records within the context of their creation according to the new laws of archival order (*RAD*), and the codification of archival rules to qualify information as records, since both of these initiatives determine a particular form of order-view and organizational accountability for the institutional information environment, whether this be of an archival or a business systems origin. The sense of "recordness" contemplated by the Pittsburgh Project permits the creator to "document" itself according to its own sense of operational consciousness so long as the common medium of discussion is *records*.⁵⁰ On the other hand, the inherent structuralist bias of *RAD*, and its evident conceptual incapacity to deal with flattened, horizontal, or dotted lines of administrative authority and functionally related sources of records creation, actually imposes an archival order of interpretation on the meaning of institutional behaviour and the communication of institutional information. Nevertheless, despite its useful codification of rules pertinent to the archival constitution (recordness) of a record, I have certain reservations about some of the goals and purposes of the Pittsburgh Project. My principal objection concerns its concentration on recordness as a

manifestation of memory linked to administrative accountability and the transaction of corporate business. In this dedicated archival observation of institutional memory, public records are preserved by archives exclusively for their evidence of administrative process, and in ignorance of their other properties as historical artefacts or documentation of society and culture. In my opinion, an archive is not only accountable for the preservation of administrative memory, but also for the complete memory of the *communitas* as reflected in the mirror of its entire recorded past. To put it simply, an archive is preeminently a socio-cultural institution.

4

It might appear, from what I have said above, that I am opposed to the use of provenance as a fundamental principle of archival appraisal. In fact, I believe it has a vital role to play in strategic acquisition formulations of macro-appraisal, so long as it is not confined to traditional structuralist rigidities and connotations. To succeed as an archival-theoretical construct, therefore, the idea of provenance requires some reconception of its definition and application in order to accommodate the idea of “functionality” and the archival memory account of institutional processes. In his essay, “Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage” (which first appeared in 1972), Hans Booms correctly diagnosed provenance as an archival manifestation of historical determinism, especially the manner in which it has traditionally supported a highly subjective and structuralized records evaluation dialectic. His original resolution of this impediment to “true” records appraisal was simply to discard it in favour of historicity (what he called “contemporary valuation”). Booms made no attempt to grapple intellectually with or reframe the meaning of provenance. He instead merely substituted another form of subjectivity (historical interpretation) in its place. This is an unsound, unmanageable approach to archival appraisal, and is, in the end, detrimental to the objects and functions of the public archive. Twenty years later, in a second North American publication, “Überlieferungsbildung: Keeping Archives as a Social and Political Activity,” Booms admitted the utility of establishing the provenance of records (“provenance must remain the immutable foundation of the appraisal process”) as a preparatory step in the procedure of their archival appraisal. Here he suggests that without the context of provenance (and rightly so), “archival appraisal inevitably risks becoming unstructured and amorphous.” Unfortunately, in turning (or returning) to provenance, he does not confront the legitimate criticisms that he himself had formerly levied against the structural bias of its administrative theory foundation. Nor does he finally offer any clues as to how provenance qualifies his “staunch position” upon the virtue of contemporary valuation (now called the “contemporary chronicle”), save a variation upon the macro-appraisal *credo*—that records “divorced from the context of their creation” will result in a “useless collection of sources.”⁵¹

Like Booms and the emerging generation of North American macro-appraisal strategists (David Bearman, Terry Cook, Richard Cox, Helen Samuels, et al.), my own inclination is to maintain provenance as a primary principle of archival appraisal. I also want to test, flex, and break down its ossified “structuralization”: to recalibrate, rework, and reframe its meaning to accommodate the functional and processive implications of macro-appraisal strategy. In the work of recalibration, a hermeneutic

approach to archival appraisal linked to the reading of texts and the analysis of discourse can have both a salutary theoretical impact and a practical application.

Before one can consider the viability of a relationship between hermeneutics and archives, however, there are certain problems of conceptual choice that must be resolved. If there is an alternative either to the templates for public records appraisal implicitly proposed by descriptive standard regulations, or to the "scientific" approach to documentary intentionality and meaning lately advocated by "new diplomatics," I believe it must come from the hermeneutical sphere of text and discourse analysis. Yet there exists such a wide range of possibilities within the general realm of hermeneutic thought, that one is necessarily obliged to make some decisions concerning their compatibility with the objects and functions of an archive. For example, Michel Foucault's understanding of discourse is highly instructive, making some insightful connections between the ontology of text and the information "archaeology" of the archive. Yet it is fraught with ambiguity on the contextual relationship between structural formations of organizations based on centralized relationships of power, and the functional order of systems based on decentralized relationships of anti-power. (While Foucault has been conventionally labelled a structuralist, he consistently characterized himself as an anti-structuralist!) More congenial to the purposes of archival appraisal, I would suggest, are the theory of structuration offered by Anthony Giddens and the theory of "text" articulated by Paul Ricoeur, both of which attempt, albeit from very different perspectives, to reconcile structuralism (order), functionality (action, phenomenology), and the intentionality (meaning, representation) of texts as discursive media of creator context.

What these two social theorists attempt to explain is the relationship between structure and action--in particular, the manner in which the actions of an agent within a structure can cause it to broach, rupture, and even escape its organizational zones and strictures to define a place of para-existence or para-formation in an organizational sense. Giddens accounts for these possibilities by suggesting a duality of purpose in social-administrative structure (the idea of "structuration"), in which the behaviour(s) of the agent, its "agency," or its "action(s)," interacting and intersecting with its encapsulating structure(s), can cause temporary rifts--hermeneutic moments or structures of para-formation--in its organizational fabric, sometimes leading to *reorganization*. Ultimately, this is how Giddens would explain the inherent probability and dynamics of change that characterize the administrative ethos of modern bureaucracy. In effect, Giddens challenges archivists to make a decision upon a fundamental occupational issue: are they simply interested in documenting structured moments or frozen "acts" in monumental time/history (the traditional assumption of archival science) or need they be aware and take account of anti-structural temporal moments of virtual organizational action?

For Ricoeur, on the other hand, it is the narrativity of texts--both the subjective interpretation of their multi-layered meanings and purposes manifested through their constituent language and the acts and communications of their reading(s), and the objective understanding of the formational structure(s) implicit in their narrativity (temporality, frame of relation, sequencing of actions and events), expressed and revealed by the creator/narrator--that truly offers the possibility of understanding their context, their objects and functions, and the modalities of their production.

What especially marks Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory of text for potential archival adaptation is his conciliation of the interpretation of texts based on the reading of their narrative content, and the objectivation of their context through an understanding of their discursive narrative structure.⁵²

To relate Ricoeur's philosophic formulation to archival appraisal thinking, it is the discursive narrativity (formation of context) revealed in text by the creator/narrator that distinguishes records from information (which lacks such a formation of context). In fact, it is not possible to determine meaning or value in texts without an understanding of their discursive formation, which assigns to them a status beyond pure information: what archivists call *records*. Similarly, in applying this reasoning to the context of the records creator, it is possible to suggest that organizational formations possess a self-conscious sense of "being" manifested in their narrativity--supported by discursive encodings (records) that archivists may be justified in regarding as valid representations of organizational formations and in treating such representations as explanations of them. Herein lies the critical problem for archivists: which texts, or which discourses, possess the most relevant interpretations and/or understandings of creator context? Is it the metatexts (metadata) that organizations create to account for their operational subsistence and activities, or is it the texts (records) that are created by organizations in the virtual fulfillment of their objectives and functions? How can archivists rationalize Ricoeur's hermeneutic "quasi-world" of narrativity and discourse, of "looking into text" for its context, given the hypothesis that all objects and outcomes of archival memory, whether these be related to the records creator or to its records, exist necessarily within the domain and interpretation of text(s)?

This is certainly not an easy question to answer, and extends the scope of this essay well beyond the parameters of its basic purpose and competence. Both as a point of departure for future discussion and by way of a conclusion, however, I would suggest that aspects of the theories offered by Giddens and Ricoeur have a practical relevance to the objectives of macro-appraisal. What these thinkers have articulated in different ways is a virtual (or hermeneutic) zone of para-formation that exists between, beside, or beyond conventional organizational structure or function. This organizational "area" constitutes both a spatial and temporal positioning of social or institutional operational activity (action) that may be (and ought to be) documented by archivists. I offer as testimony one example where an application of the hermeneutic reading techniques advocated by Ricoeur and Giddens have recently had a positive impact upon macro-appraisal thinking in the National Archives of Canada: the archival assessment of the records created and controlled by the Policy and Coordination Group of the federal Department of Transport (Transport Canada) within its central registry records-keeping system.⁵³

The central registry system has evolved to the point where it is common to government record-keeping in Great Britain and most Commonwealth countries. What has recently transpired in Canada, especially in large federal departments and agencies, is a radical "loosening" of the controlling ties of traditional centralized records management. The record-keeping system of the Department of Transport provides an instructive illustration. Here, all paper records (of any nature) related to a particular subject or activity were formerly maintained under a unique file number

within a subject file block generically related to that subject or activity: that is, according to a block-numeric subject file classification typical of a central registry. One could expect (theoretically) to find all records related to a specific subject on a unique file or its constituent parts/volumes, regardless of their various sources and/or offices of creation. These file numbers were centrally controlled, i.e., allocated to users by the records manager according to operational need and upon formal application, in order to guarantee (theoretically) the integrity of a single management and distribution of recorded information across the Department, as well as to facilitate operational accountability and records/evidence retrieval. Over the years, of course, there have developed many exceptions to these regulations, since the central registry system (the present version of which was installed by the Department in 1936), could not possibly accommodate or respond to the growing needs of its users in a department now comprising 22,000 employees administering twenty-seven major legislative acts, let alone the enormous impact of electronic technology upon the creation, transmission, destination, and storage of its records. In 1985, the Department was finally obliged to recognize that the central registry was obsolete; it subsequently devolved the office of records management to approximately twenty "local" sites, each with the capacity to control, open, close, and distribute file numbers according to the requirements and specifications of their user-clients.

In effect, the Department now operates a decentralized central registry, in which records creators and records users are empowered with the authority to manage their own information. In practical terms, this means that any office within the Department involved in a corporate programme or activity, however marginal this involvement may be, is permitted to open files to document its specific contribution to an "actioning" process, and even to document activities elsewhere, including those of non-departmental origin or initiation. Rather than sending documents to a single, centrally located, and controlled registry file uniquely accountable for all information related to a particular activity, all offices of administration are now able to create their own corresponding registry files. Whereas offices were formerly confined to file numbers exclusively assigned to their field of jurisdictional competence or administrative responsibility, they now have complete access to the full range of file numbers available within the registry system. Only two qualifications of this "power" have been stipulated: (1) all file numbers must conform to the corporate subject file classification plan, and (2) the file block number employed by the office of primary interest is the file block number to be used by all other offices across the Department. (Experience has shown that even this regulation is not always followed!) Even so, there could be as many as twenty primary files alone bearing on the same activity, function, process, or subject. The latter qualification does not extend, however, to the selection of secondary, tertiary, and quaternary subject numbers. Consequently, there are now thousands of files within the departmental registry bearing identical file numbers containing duplicate, partly duplicate, or completely different information content.

This has resulted, both through retroactive file number conversion and a virtual "explosion" of site-specific file "openings," in an enormously complex record-keeping environment. According to National Archives estimations in 1985, for example, there were as many as 676,000 unique subject secondaries organized under 2,500 primary subject file blocks; it is suspected that the number of secondary subject files has at

least trebled since that time to total approximately two million. This figure does not include the thousands of tertiary and quaternary files variously expanding subject secondaries, or their multi-part file volumes; nor does it account at all for case files. Under just one subject secondary related to aircraft pilot licensing, for example, there are now 450,000 individual case files dating back to 1940. Moreover, this estimation is only composed of what is known by the National Archives as the so-called "headquarters" records. Regional records represent something else altogether! Perhaps even more imposing for the archivist are the contemporary complications arising from file "duplication." There are normally five or six headquarters files created in the Department with (or without) an identical file number on any given subject, and there can be as many as fourteen or fifteen, depending upon the scope of the programme, project, or activity in question. Transport Canada distinguishes between these files by using an alphabetic prefix to the file number, which links every file to its Office of Creation (OC). Unfortunately for archivists, these OC designators may be composed of up to six letters, since the Department, in its current zeal for all things "decentralized," has endowed even its smallest administrative units with records creation and management powers, and provided its seven regions across the country with their own unique codes, which may or may not be utilized. The final ingredient contributing to this records management "stew" is the nearly constant state of administrative metamorphosis that has existed in the Department since the 1970s. As the administrative organization of the Department is characteristically unstable (and will continue to be under federal programme review), the alphabetic prefixes to the file numbers now change ceaselessly and remorselessly in a concerted effort to maintain a semblance of records management order.

In effect, all of the administrative entities within the Department of Transport continue to create records directly related to their primary operational functions; however, they now also create records of "analogous" information--sometimes duplicate, sometimes unique, sometimes a combination of both--related to their own particular involvement or interest in departmental processes of policy formulation, programme delivery, or problem resolution, or to parts of these processes. They make copies of documents and incorporate them selectively into their own information holdings. They also modify and convey original records, or parts of records, from one office of administration to another. Terry Cook has many times provocatively argued that archivists must discard their professional mentalité of "paper mind" if they aspire to cope with electronic records and the technological capacities of the new electronic communications environment.⁵⁴ Presently at Transport Canada, to turn Cook's analogy around, what we evidently have in operation is an "electronic mind" working with paper records: while the new information management scheme anticipates electronic communications abilities and capacities, the technology has not yet been installed.

Given a records management environment of this physical size and organizational complexity, how does an archivist decide where the most significant documentation of an institutional act, function, or process resides within its administrative structure, and/or which records have permanent archival memory value?

The answer to this question depends upon the appraisal philosophy that is adopted by the archivist, and the goals and objectives of the records acquisition strategy that

are being followed. If the strategic approach is purely “archival-structuralist” in conception, the question is itself probably not valid, since the ordering intention and interpretive synthesis of archival structuralism ultimately ignores documentary representation of processive connectivity: either the primary information disposed by process can be traced back to a single creator and/or documentary source of evidential-probative, initiating authority (possible, but increasingly difficult to verify), or analogous records concerning the information input-output of each of the creators implicated in a transactive process may be captured eventually in an evidential “stovepipe”⁵⁵ consideration of the records produced in fulfillment of their respective operational responsibilities (wholly fortuitous). In the first instance, the preservation of an archival record of the transactive process relies exclusively on the integrity of a single, jurisdictionally framed and authority-based provenance of texts. In the second, the processive record finally relies on the reconstructive capacities evident in the archival arrangement and description of records subsequently established by administrative histories, fonds-series linkages, authority controls, and subject cross-references. Of the rules for archival arrangement and description currently in operation or presently under consideration, only the Australian system of “series description” has any real potential or ability to account for *processes* of records creation (*RAD* is rather limited here), and this because it recognizes the *de facto* existence of the “actual” or “virtual” record, albeit from the custodial compromise of a post-appraisal perspective. In any case, hermeneutic instruction and its philosophic intuition has little to offer the archivist engaged in records selection following wholly structuralist prescriptions, since the primary archival acquisition target is not the accumulation of records produced/compiled by creators connectively involved in a transactive process, but rather the archival documentation created at or by the initiating source of each transaction. The answer to the question posed above, for all intents and purposes, is practically self-evident, though I am bound to suggest that this solution is impossible to implement (either intellectually or practically) in any records management environment even remotely resembling the scenario described above for the Department of Transport.

If the strategic approach invokes a contextual combination of structural-functional and processive (actioning) considerations, which is substantially the proposed leitmotiv of the macro-appraisal approach to records acquisition, the question requires a rather different response. Here, if I understand the intention correctly, archivists are concerned not only with the structural reference points of recorded transactions, but also with the records disposed by the “action of transaction,” that is, the typology, evidential meaning, and provenance of records “virtually” created by agents in the midst and as a consequence of operational functionality and process. At this appraisal juncture, the introduction of a hermeneutic interpretation of texts may provide the conceptual catalyst required by archivists to encounter, identify, evaluate, and describe records creators operating virtually *de facto* (as opposed to officially *de jure*), and the records coincidentally produced and accumulated by the para-formational nature and pan-creator communications effect of institutional processive connectivity. This would truly represent a departure from the appraisal methodology of the archival past, and potentially offers a more sensitive macro *reading* of the public information environment (how and why public records are created) than may be otherwise conveyed by purely structuralist appraisal thinking. While the inclusion of the notions

of “structure” and “function” in recent archival thinking represents something of an occupational advance (more likely an admission of practice), it is nevertheless a careful and conservative reaction to social and/or business theory designed to formalize, codify, and sanction intelligent archival endeavour based on traditional experience. In fact, there is actually very little here that would indicate a new conception of or an innovative approach to archival appraisal. It is also, despite a subscription to the theoretically “correct” rhetorical gloss, somewhat impotent in the face of the challenge posed by the macro-strategic intention to consider records creator functionality, which must inevitably extend the notion of dedicated creator information to the context of multi-creator dispersion and communication, from closed Weberian structures of functional task specification described by “administrative clients” to open formations of functionally connective task process engaged by *actioning agents*.

The difficulty presently confounding the macro-strategic endeavour to follow through on this appraisal objective resides fundamentally in the absence of any archival theory that admits the notion of functional-processive connectivity as a constituent source of records creation susceptible to archival appraisal. Provenance, which surely represents the only theoretical construct legitimately offered by “archival science,” is conventionally defined (lately reinforced by *RAD*) as a purely hierarchical-structural concept. Under present conditions, it cannot (and does not) countenance the contextual possibility of a process-based or “virtual” records creator. Despite the largely para-formational origin and organization of public information, archivists are inevitably encouraged to capture a single, physically-bound scripture and lexicon of texts; they are not able, by virtue of their structuralized provenance dependence, to escape the imposed limits of archival order to explore the conceptual dimension of public records creation: to encounter, comprehend, and appraise, from an archival acquisition perspective, the records whose provenance exists virtually beyond, between, and beside the organizational confines of structural boundaries.

Clearly, what distinguishes structural or jurisdictional provenance from conceptual or virtual provenance is the boundary of texts and/or the discourse of bureaucratic information. From an archival-structuralist perspective, provenance is a purely physical-formational concept, i.e., the perimeter of archival order established by the texts of an autonomous, sovereign, and discrete records creator. By contrast, from an archival-hermeneutic perspective, provenance resides in a conceptual or virtual process of information dispersion and distribution: in a discursive network of sequential or relational statements upon an organizational behaviour, activity, or intention, i.e., the boundary established by the narrativity and vocabulary of texts enjoined in discursive formation.⁵⁶ Prospectively, therefore, the hermeneutic interpretation of textual boundaries has a greater utility for macro-appraisal strategy, since it attempts to address the intellectual intention of functionality by conceiving to locate groupings, or binding-sites, clusters, or nodes of records accumulation, and to enclose their domain by reference to the autonomy and conditions of the *process* that gives rise to their existence.⁵⁷ Depending upon the nature, object, and level of the creator domains that are identified by recourse to discourse analysis, moreover, these boundaries can be translated to correspond with dedicated concepts of archival order-formation such as the file, the records-keeping system, the storage medium, and the records creator. The results of such a translation may sometimes, but will not necessarily, correspond with the results obtained by analyzing creator context through the media of official

literature or its structuralized systemic and graphic explanations. This potential divergence represents the primary intellectual value of hermeneutics in the archival setting: its interpretation of knowledge is susceptible to archival usage through its consideration of the signs and sites of records homogeneity. Nevertheless, it offers a significantly different view of records creation by concentrating on the process of information dispersion and communication revealed through the narrativity of its records, rather than on the latent and formal structures designated by creators to contain and report upon the fields of their functional activity.

To return to the problem immediately at hand, how does this hermeneutic approach to institutional functionality and process enhance the prospects of macro-appraisal in the records acquisition situation described above for the Policy and Coordination Group of Transport Canada? If it is temporarily conceded that public records archives must deal with “institutional clients” rather than with “actioning agents” and/or communications processes, how is it possible to make sense or use of hermeneutic instruction? As we have seen, the primary intention of archival macro-appraisal is to locate, identify, and evaluate records creator sites according to their contextual value, upon the assumption that their relative operational importance, both structurally and functionally considered on a global client basis, necessarily yields a better archival record than may be obtained by studying the merits of records, regardless of their creator source, on an historical subjective basis. A hermeneutic (more accurately a quasi-hermeneutic) archival interpretation of this objective would suggest that the most valuable sites of public records creation ought to correspond with and be placed in an order of appraisal and acquisition priority according to the boundaries of the bureaucratic discourses that document the transactive processes engaged by creator functions. In other words, from a logistic perspective, while hermeneutic macro-appraisal essentially remains client-based, it permits transcendence of the interpretive order restrictions imposed upon creator context and/or records evaluation conceived by hierarchical-structuralist provenance persuasions. Rather than the acquisition of a single, standardized set of creator texts to document a single creator function, archival hermeneutics advances the utility of acquiring a multi-creator set of texts to document what is typically in the public sector, regardless of the function or transactive process involved, an inter-connected information context disposed by the narrative discourse of agent formations. Such an approach allows for a more sensitive archival reading of records creator context by identifying agents (offices) of implicated functional interest rather than submitting to single and sovereign sites of mandated and structuralized authority; it also admits the possibility of treating certain creators collectively on the basis of their generic functional and transactive roles in the global bureaucratic process.

The National Archives has decided to acquire all the records of the Policy and Coordination Group of Transport Canada related to significant policy functions created by the offices of their primary interest (OPI) within the Group as identified by the Department’s corporate legislative and responsibility matrices. These matrices were supplied by the Department to the National Archives as “metadata texts” supporting the formal request for an archival authority to dispose of its Policy and Coordination Group records. In addition, however, recognizing that a complete archival memory of policy formulation processes within the Department was not strictly confined to the records of their OPIs, the National Archives also decided to acquire records from

a number of other creator sites, both within and without the administrative domain of the Group, that is, records produced by Offices of Creation (OC). This determination was based on the significance of OC contributions to formations of bureaucratic discourse on the subject of policy revealed by contextual “readings” of the implicated transactional texts. In other words, the National Archives also intends to acquire the “recording elements” of various departmental discourses on actions of policy formulation that frequently (in this case) transcend their structural sites of process origination and initiation. In the appraisal report submitted for the approval of the National Archivist, the process of policy formulation--captured by archival memory preservation of its entire discursive narrativity or operational “actioning”--was represented as the context of the “creator,” rather than the single initiating site of its operational authority and accountability. This approach to creator context, building on earlier efforts in the appraisal annals of the National Archives, temporarily called for unprecedented methodological steps to support its practical implementation in terms of archival terms and conditions for records transfer. Ultimately, however, these should prove to be successful, especially in view of the Department’s resolutions to be “paperless” by the year 1998, and to install a document management software with an electronic archival “office” capacity on its internal mainframe storage. It is expected that these two records management features will greatly reduce the custodial problems that the National Archives must presently solve in order to fulfill the records preservation responsibilities associated with its appraisal decisions.

Most significant for archivists here, however, is the admission by the National Archives of Canada that the context of the public records creator is not entirely restricted to its jurisdictional boundary as an autonomous administrative entity: it also extends to other creator domains inter-connected by an initiated sequence of functional actions and the discursive narrative processes of their recorded communication. What effect this hermeneutic approach may have on the prospects for codifying archival rules of arrangement and description, and their associated authority controls for records retrieval, remains to be seen, especially in view of the largely anti-structural environment of computer-based information systems. In the interim it has certainly, at least in this particular instance, destabilized both the conventional notion of provenance purely as an archival-order manifestation of administrative structure, and the relevance of the primary standard of its archival memory measure, i.e., evidential value. It also clearly acknowledges the utility of reading records in order to understand their creator context. This should not in any way be confused with the archival “dissection” of individual documents to assemble evidence of their juridical intent and authorship as advocated by neo-diplomatic theory; with the connection of the document to a single, exclusive source of “original” creatorship; or with the search for some actual or anticipated information content value for research purposes. Rather, it should be associated with a new macro-appraisal appreciation (or interpretation) of documents as synthesized narrative explanations of creator intent and context linked to action, transaction, and process; as an unravelling of the “total” records creator domain disposed by the meaning of documents within the formation of their operational subsistence as institutional discourse. By stepping outside the perimeters of administrative structure, by understanding institutional action and behaviour through a *reading* of their formational organization in texts, this entails necessarily a relocation and redefinition of

provenance to correspond with the virtual record, and suggests, perhaps, the beginning of a new way to preserve institutional memory in an archive.

In conclusion, what I am advocating is a macro-appraisal theory, hypothesis, or strategy that comprehends the reading and interpretation of texts both as a primary source of public records creator context and contextuality, and as an element of archival knowledge indispensable to public records analysis, representation, and meaning. Hans Booms was perhaps the first archivist to acknowledge the analytic utility of hermeneutics for records appraisal purposes. Without coming to any particular conclusion upon the conflict between objectivity and subjectivity engaged by reading and interpreting texts--what he calls the conundrum of *verstehen*--Booms nevertheless makes the point that the *mentalité* of the records creator is most legitimately ascertained and understood through the evidence of its contemporary sources, that is, its recorded context of narrative discourse. Difficult though its utility may be to quantify, measure, or assess from a project management approach to archival records appraisal (which may finally be the administrative object of macro-appraisal strategy), there is something irretrievably lost from an archival-historical perspective by denying time to the study of context in text (records). How does the reading and interpretation of texts support the intentions of macro-appraisal theory and what are the requirements for a new archival formulation of provenance to accommodate archival reading(s), or conversely, how do the present theoretical constraints of structuralist conceptions of provenance encumber and discommode the possibility of a true macro-strategic archival vision? Is it the case that the reading of records serves to unsettle and disturb their meaning and representation as promised by the "boxes" of order-knowledge conveniently offered by an archival ideology of appraisal drawn from outdated arrangement and descriptive notions? I sincerely hope so. On a closing note, it is worth quoting Andrezej Warminski's admonition:

A sure way to ignore or to mistake what texts as texts have to say about the institutions set up to transmit them, and about how they may or may not "escape institutional strictures," is not to read them.⁵⁸

Notes

- * This essay represents a substantially expanded and revised version of a presentation originally made at the Association of Canadian Archivists Conference in St. John's, Newfoundland, on 24 July 1993, and also reflects the results of my own selected readings in the ever-growing professional literature on archives and appraisal. Advice, assistance, and support was gratefully accepted from many knowledgeable sources, but I especially wish to thank Terry Cook of the National Archives of Canada, and Brien Brothman of the University of Massachusetts at Boston, who at various developmental stages in its transmutation, patiently listened to ideas, read drafts, offered comments and suggestions, and provided general intellectual guidance. As usual, any errors of commission or omission are entirely my own.
- 1 An excellent introduction to the notion of discourse formation is provided by Hayden White, "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," in H. White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, 1987), pp. 26-57. In the preparation of this essay, I also found highly useful the review and analysis of postmodern thinking in reference to literary criticism, post-structuralism, discourse analysis, deconstruction, chaos theory, hermeneutics, etc., contained in N. Katherine Hayles, *Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Science and Literature* (1990).
 - 2 White, *The Content of the Form*, p. 39; Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (A.M. Sheridan Smith, trans.) (New York, 1972), especially Part II, "The Discursive Regularities," pp. 21-78 (see "Discursive Formations," pp. 31-39), and Part III, "The Statement and the Archive," pp. 79-134.

- 3 This represents a very basic distillation of the theory of structuration proposed by Anthony Giddens (of which more will be said below) as excerpted from the essay by Richard Kilminster, "Structuration Theory as World View," in Christopher G.A. Bryant and David Jary, *Giddens' Theory of Structuration: A Critical Appreciation* (London, 1991), pp. 74-115, especially p. 77.
- 4 Foucault, "Discursive Formations," pp. 31-39.
- 5 In attempting to relate the notion of discourse formation to archival appraisal, I have inevitably, given the complexity of individual theories, arrived at a practical hybrid of definition. While it combines certain elements of literary, linguistic, and post-structuralist thought, it is more directly related to the new sociological observations upon the continuities established between the setting of social action in organizational structures, and the hermeneutic meaning of social action conveyed in discourses of text (Giddens). The notion of "narrativity" is variously explored by Hayden White (above note 1 and *passim*), but see also a practical demonstration of its interpretive potency in the reading and understanding of archival sources by historians as engaged by Nathalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France* (1987), and my review of this book in Richard Brown, "The Value of 'Narrativity' in the Appraisal of Historical Documents: Foundation for a Theory of Archival Hermeneutics," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991), pp. 152-56.
- 6 The "thin" description of context is normally associated with certain strains of sociology and especially social anthropology, which infer/interpret the meaning(s) of social behaviour(s) within structured models of cultural forms, and largely without reference to external conditions which may contribute to the "structuring" and organization of social activity. Two of the seminal and instructive studies in this regard are Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London, 1969), and Edmund Leach, *Culture and Communication: The Logics by which Symbols are Connected: An Introduction to the Use of Structuralist Analysis in Social Anthropology* (London, 1976). This approach must now be contrasted with more recent post-structuralist "textualist" approaches to "text;" also of "thin" description persuasion and philosophy, which have roots in hermeneutic theory and have variously surfaced in literary criticism, deconstruction, discourse analysis, and metahistory. In rejecting structured systems prescriptions of socio-cultural models (the control of texts, language, communication and behaviour by power structures within society), these *episteme* consider *inter alia* the significance of contextual meanings(s) communicated within the dimension of the narrative internal to text(s), rather than drawing conclusions from external ideological (and other) assumptions about and impacts upon their "production" and potential understanding.
- The "thin" interpretation of contextual meaning has been criticised by both historians and social theorists. Possibly the most severe historical criticism has recently come from the pen of the late Sir Geoffrey Elton in his (often irascible) and controversial book, *Return to Essentials: Some Reflections on the Present State of Historical Study* (Cambridge, 1991). More measured and informed arguments in favour of the "thick" description of context can be found in David Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition' c. 1820-1977," in Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 101-64, and in the introduction to what is now one of the standard works of early modern history, Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (2 vols.) I, "The Renaissance," pp. xii-xiv: "to study the context... is not merely to gain additional information...; it is also to equip ourselves ... with a way of gaining a greater insight into its meaning than we can ever hope to achieve simply from reading the text itself." Skinner's conclusion is reflective of the opinions contained in one of the truly great "thick" contextualist works on the meaning of texts in modern historical writing: John G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton, 1975).
- Sociological criticism of the "thin" description originally begins, I think, with Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London, 1975), especially pp. 7, 14, and 449, but see now the notion of "social structuration" offered in various versions by Anthony Giddens (first identified for archivists in 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, and Terry Cook, "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), now digested in a critical series of eight essays edited by Christopher G.A. Bryant and David Jary, *Giddens' Theory of Structuration: A Critical Appreciation* (Lancaster, 1991).
- 7 David Bearman, "Documenting Documentation," *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992), pp. 33-49, especially p. 43. Bearman's ideas on creator documentation are now more completely expressed in his collection of essays, "Electronic Evidence: Strategies for Managing Records in Contemporary Organizations," *Archives & Museum Informatics* (Pittsburgh, 1994) and in "Archival Strategies," *Archives & Museum Informatics* (1994), pp. 2-24.

- 8 These views underpin much of Cook's recent writings, most obviously in "Mind Over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal," and in International Council of Archives, *The Archival Appraisal of Records Containing Personal Information: A RAMP Study with Guidelines* (Paris, 1991), especially pp. 40-50.
- 9 Terry Cook has largely been responsible for formulating and implementing the macro-appraisal strategy for government records presently followed by the National Archives of Canada in its Records Disposition Division. Essentially, this strategy involves two operational stages of appraisal: (1) placing institutional record creators in an order of appraisal priority according to properties and qualities of creator value (macro-appraisal criteria) as outlined in an archival structural-functional analysis of the Canadian federal bureaucratic environment (Terry Cook, *Government-Wide Plan for the Disposition of Records 1991-1996* [NA Working Paper], [October 1990, up-dated March 1995]), and (2) confirming or adjusting macro-appraisal decisions through graduated primary research of evidential and informational records content (Terry Cook, *An Appraisal Methodology: Guidelines for Performing an Archival Appraisal* [NA Working Paper], [April 1991]). The primary object of this exercise is to concentrate NA appraisal efforts on the evaluation of records potentially of custodial preservation interest to the NA rather than to expend resources on client-driven records disposal (destruction) agenda, but it has also a very distinct intellectual perspective; see below note 12.
- 10 The most complete digests of the characteristics, criteria, and classifications of archival values in records remain those of T.R. Schellenburg, "The Appraisal of Modern Public Records," *Bulletins of the National Archives* 8 (Washington, 1956), pp. 233-78, and Maynard J. Brichford, *Archives & Manuscripts: Appraisal & Accessioning* (SAA Basic Manual Series) (Chicago, 1977), especially pp. 2-11. Considering the fundamental importance of these criteria to the archival process of selecting records for preservation, it is somewhat remarkable that they continue to be accepted largely without reservation or comment. In fact, there are just a few textbooks and manuals that provide basic information for archivists about the methodological application of this traditional appraisal taxonomy. Until very recently, as poignantly revealed by Richard Cox and Helen Samuels in their call for new archival appraisal techniques to be supported by new forms of archival analysis and research, ("The Archivist's First Responsibility: A Research Agenda to Improve the Identification and Retention of Records of Enduring Value," *The American Archivist* 51 [Winter and Spring 1988], pp. 28-46), archival appraisal thinking had not really advanced much beyond these first principles and codifications of practice, which substantially amount to "the piecemeal evaluation of isolated records for historical or other long-term value" (p. 30). The general state and extent of archival appraisal literature up to the mid-1980s is inventoried in a useful bibliography of works compiled by Julia Marks-Young (with précis of their salient points) in "Annotated Bibliography on Appraisal," *The American Archivist* 48 (Spring 1985), pp. 190-216, which may be supplemented with a European perspective offered by Ole Kolsrud, "The Evolution of Basic Appraisal Principles - Some Comparative Observations," *The American Archivist* 55 (Winter 1992), pp. 26-37, and Michel Duchéin, "The History of European Archives and the Development of the Archival Profession in Europe," *The American Archivist* 55 (Winter 1992), pp. 14-24. In many ways, the most satisfying and cogent piece on the subject of appraisal remains Hans Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage: Issues in the Appraisal of Archival Sources," Hermina Joldersma and Richard Klumpenhower, eds. and trans., *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987), pp. 69-107, which should be read with the important correctives he offers upon the utility of provenance in "Überlieferungsbildung: Keeping Archives as a Social and Political Activity," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92), pp. 6-24. Among other things, this essay will review some of the new trends in appraisal theory as proposed in the latest archival literature, especially the thinking of the "post-custodialists" and macro-appraisal "strategists."
- 11 In choosing this particular terminology, I wish to acknowledge the intriguing paper delivered at the Society of American Archivists Conference in Montréal, Québec (September 1992) by William Maher of the School of Archives and Library Science of the University of Illinois at Champagne, "Chaos and the Health of Archival Systems," upon which I was privileged to offer formal comment. Maher's archival adaptation of the scientific theory of "chaos" introduced and provided some useful and imaginative insight upon the notion of creator context, which I have incorporated into the argument of this essay.
- 12 For a description of the records acquisition programme contemplated by the National Archives of the Netherlands, see Max Beekhuis and Herman Oost, *Project Invoering Verkorting Overbrengingstermijn [PIVOT]. Logic Model: Institutional Research* (The Hague, 1992). The records acquisition strategy initiative for government records at the National Archives of Canada is outlined in a series of "in-house" working papers conceived and written by Terry Cook, *Government-Wide Plan for the Disposition of Records 1991-1996* (October 1990) and *An Appraisal Methodology: Guidelines for Performing an Archival Appraisal* (December 1991); see also in this regard, Sheila Powell and Daniel Barney, *Report of the Multi-Year Records Disposition Plan Working Group* (April 1991). The programme of the

"Pittsburgh Project" is variously conveyed by David Bearman in his collection of essays which compose "Electronic Evidence: Strategies for Managing Records in Contemporary Organizations," *Archives & Museum Informatics* (Pittsburgh, 1994), but see also the monograph by his Pittsburgh colleague Richard Cox, "The Record: Is It Evolving," *The Records & Retrieval Report* 10, no. 3, pp. 1-16. Australian thinking upon "recordness" and "functionality" is introduced by Sue McKemmish, "Recordkeeping, Accountability and Continuity: The Australian Reality," pp. 9-26, and Frank Upward, "Institutionalizing the Archival Document - Some Theoretical Perspectives on Terry Eastwood's Challenge," pp. 41-54, in Sue McKemmish and Frank Upward, eds., *Archival Documents: Providing Accountability Through Recordkeeping* (Melbourne, 1993).

The subject of documentation strategy in the United States has generated a voluminous literature and commentary, beginning with Helen W. Samuels, "Who Controls the Past," *The American Archivist* 49 (Spring 1986), pp. 109-24; Philip N. Alexander and Helen W. Samuels, "The Roots of 128: A Hypothetical Documentation Strategy," *The American Archivist* 50 (Fall 1987), pp. 518-31; Larry Hackman and Joan Warnow-Blewett, "The Documentation Strategy Process: A Model and Case Study," *The American Archivist* 50 (Winter 1987), pp. 12-47; Richard J. Cox and Helen W. Samuels, "The Archivist's First Responsibility: A Research Agenda to Improve the Identification and Retention of Records of Enduring Value," *The American Archivist* 51 (Winter and Spring 1988), pp. 28-46 (see also the ensuing commentaries of Frank Boles and Frank J. Burke in the same issue, pp. 47-51); Richard J. Cox, "A Documentation Strategy Case Study: Western New York," *The American Archivist* 52 (Spring 1989), pp. 192-200; Richard J. Cox, *American Archival Analysis: The Recent Development of the Archival Profession in the United States* (Metuchen, 1990); and Helen W. Samuels, *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (Metuchen, 1992). A new and reinvigorated perspective on "documentation strategy" has recently been offered by Richard Cox in "The Documentation Strategy and Archival Appraisal Principles: A Different Perspective," *Archivaria* 38 (Spring 1994), pp. 11-36, which, I think, successfully reworks its macro-strategic records acquisition intentions from practical methodology to intellectual concept to answer some of the (occasionally unfair) criticism it has suffered on the grounds that it represents a subjective process of records selection. In addition (and this is a theme underlying several of the arguments I will make below), Cox correctly (in my opinion) points to the mission of the archivist as the "documentation of society" (social accountability), rather than the "stovepipe" assembly of "single institutional or individual perspectives" (p. 15). For archivists interested in the nature of the current debate on the relationships between archival theory and practice, Cox's essay is a highly useful starting-point, and the footnotes are quite comprehensive of the literature.

On the general subject of macro-appraisal as archival concept and theory in North American archival practice, the seminal discussions have been led by Terry Cook. See in particular his essay "Mind Over Matter," pp. 38-70, especially pp. 52-57, as well as International Council on Archives, *The Archival Appraisal of Records Containing Personal Information*, esp. pp. 40-50.

- 13 See my comments on this matter in Richard Brown, "Records Acquisition Strategy and its Theoretical Foundation: The Case for a Concept of Archival Hermeneutics," especially pp. 34-35, and note 3. As explained by Frank Boles and Julia Marks Young in "Exploring the Black Box: The Appraisal of University Administrative Records," *The American Archivist* 48 (Spring 1985) pp. 121-40, especially pp. 133-35, the economics of appraisal potentially involve the "costs-of-retention" (storage, processing, conservation, reference charges), which may or may not have an impact upon the final acquisition recommendation, but these are considerations wholly separate from the intellectual process involved in the archival evaluation of records, i.e., circumstances of creation, analysis of content, use of records, access restrictions, etc.
- 14 Max Beekhuis and Herman Oost, *Project Invoering Verkorting Overbrengingstermijn*, p. 3. The records acquisition strategy "Logic Model" of the National Archives of the Netherlands, which includes the identification of government functions within an administrative grid called the PIVOT-Matrix, is not dissimilar in conception to the model proposed at the National Archives of Canada (see Richard Brown, David Brown, Marianne McLean, and Peter Robertson, *Acquisition Strategy Model* (National Archives of Canada, Historical Resources Branch, internal working paper, 1989), although, strictly as an approach to the disposition of national government records, PIVOT does not attempt to take into account the problems of records acquisition in the private/civil domain or interaction between the public and private sectors of society, which are dedicated and primary components of its Canadian national counterpart. My understanding and observations upon the archival application and operation of the Dutch Logic Model template are partly based on its programme literature, but primarily reflect conclusions drawn during a fascinating and free-flowing seminar-discussion in the Government Archives Division led by Max Beekhuis, one of the principals involved in its creation, and Peter Horsman, an electronic systems analyst involved in its implementation, upon their visit to the National Archives of Canada in August 1992.

15 Brown, "Records Acquisition and its Theoretical Foundation," p. 36.

16 Ibid., p. 35.

17 I am referring here to the appraisal criterion of research value, which is most often associated with American appraisal thinking, viz. Schellenburg, pp. 270-76, and Brichford, especially p. 13: "Successful appraisal is directly related to the archivist's primary role as a representative of the research community. The appraiser should approach records 'on the Fiery Chariot of his Contemplative Thought,' evaluating demand as reflected by past, present, and prospective research use." The most recent explanation of this archival value is found in Frank Boles and Julia Marks Young, "Exploring the Black Box: The Appraisal of University Administrative Records," which advocates the utility of a "Value of Information Module" variously based on topical analysis, historical and other research trends, and reference usage (pp. 129-33). Sir Hilary Jenkinson must originally be credited with the introduction of "neutrality" to modern archival science in *A Manual of Archive Administration*, first published in 1922, and subsequently revised and re-issued in 1937 and 1966. (I have used the 1966 edition published in London, England.) Jenkinson refused to countenance the possibility of archival records-collecting or records destruction as a "proceeding" to be linked to "the interests of the historian" on the grounds that the importation of subjectivity or a "line of inquiry" into the "records classes of Archives... gravely imperilled their unquestioned impartiality." The fact that an "Historian is known to have selected [a record] is fatal to it" (pp. 146-47). His "Golden Rule of Archive Making" (p. 153) dictated that the value of records is purely evidential: "that ... a set of papers should supply information as to the Authority which enables either the Office as a whole or any of its responsible officials to take action; as to the action which has already been taken on various occasions in the past; and as to the business actually in hand at the present moment." This view has continued to inform British archivy (see for example, Michael Cook, *Archives Administration: A Manual for Intermediate and Smaller Organizations and for Local Government* [London, 1977], pp. 78-94), and has also generally served as an appraisal *credo* for Canadian archival diplomatic thinking as expressed in the writings of Terry Eastwood, Luciana Duranti, and Heather MacNeil.

18 In this particular endeavour of macro-appraisal strategy, the connectivity of "functionality" to operational "work process" is critical to the contextual understanding of public records creation. Increasingly, archivists are beginning to realize that aggregations of public information cannot necessarily be solely attributed to a single creator, but are circumstantially more often processively produced by a combination of creators through their functional implication in a dynamic of communications architecture variously informed by public policy formulation, project staging, programme delivery, and the resolutions of bureaucratic problem-solving. The notion of functional-processive connectivity (or transactionality) has for some time provided a cornerstone to David Bearman's foundation of electronic data management comprehension, most recently expressed in "Archival Data Management to Achieve Organizational Accountability for Electronic Records," in Sue McKemish and Frank Upward, eds., *Archival Documents: Providing Accountability*, pp. 215-27, especially p. 218 and note 8, and in "Diplomatics, Weberian Bureaucracy, and the Management of Electronic Records in Europe and America," *The American Archivist* 55 (Winter 1992), pp. 168-81, especially pp. 170-71. Its importance as a conceptual ingredient in macro-appraisal formulae has also been acknowledged by leading public records acquisition strategists, including Terry Cook, "Mind Over Matter," pp. 52-57, and Helen Samuels, *Varsity Letters*, especially pp. 1-18 and 253-68.

Perhaps the most stimulating statements upon its relevance to institutional records/information analysis have lately been provided by two Australian archivists. In her essay, "Recordkeeping, Accountability and Continuity: The Australian Reality," pp. 9-26, Sue McKemish laments the absence of a "notion of transactional recorded information as an authoritative resource," and further, "the concept of 'recordedness,' i.e., of the authoritative and evidentiary qualities of recorded information generally, and in particular of the records of transactions created in the context of social or organizational activity" (p. 22). These insights are given more fullsome treatment by Frank Upward, who is to my knowledge one of the first archivists (aside from Terry Cook and myself) to try to adapt Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration for records appraisal purposes in "Institutionalizing the Archival Document," pp. 41-54. Here, Upward's primary concerns are to draw attention to the plurality of recorded information and the "density" of the institutional information fabric, the conceptual incapacities and restrictions associated with traditional archival structural-spatial properties, and by considering Giddens' theory of structuration in relation to the archival retention and control of documentary knowledge, the necessity of adopting a product-based (records-based) approach to appraisal leading to a transmutation of the principle of provenance: from an allocative source of evidential context to an authoritative resource concept and to its extra-archival operational deployment by record-keepers and records managers as a primary tool of information organization, storage, and retrieval (see on the latter point a second essay by Upward in the

same volume, "The Significance of Bearman's 'Simple Shared Goal' for Australian Records Managers," pp. 229-44). In certain respects, this approximates my own views on the current state of the public information environment, and especially the potential archival utility of Giddens' theory and its ramifications for the resignification or redefinition of provenance, which were first signalled in a paper delivered at the Association of Canadian Archivists Conference in Banff, Alberta (May 1991), "Modelling Acquisition Strategy at the National Archives of Canada: Issues and Perspectives for Government Records," and more recently in Richard Brown, "Records Acquisition Strategy and its Theoretical Foundations," pp. 34-56.

Nevertheless, there are some significant points of divergence between our respective readings of Giddens in an archival context, principally based upon the intellectual implications associated with the notion of the duality of structure as expressed by Giddens in his most outstanding synthetic work, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge, 1984). Despite the evident para-formational organization and processive ethos of records creation in the public sector--which is, following Giddens' structuration reasoning, the spatial-temporal (and ultimately hermeneutic) product of localized authority resources interacting and intersecting with the "intentionality of the agent" (the duality of structure)--Upward focusses his attention exclusively upon the power/knowledge side of this equation by tracing the transactionality of institutional records/information to the structural sites of their primary documentary authority and/or accountability. While admitting that the functional-processive context of public records creation "should not be neglected," he ultimately subscribes to a purely structural interpretation of the public records environment based on authoritative codes of provenance embedded in "products" such as records and especially records series--reflecting long-standing Australian favour and focus on the series--rather than on the context of "the institutional features in which records are created." This represents a recalibration and structural dimension boosting of the power of archival provenance reminiscent of the quasi-diplomatic approach to information analysis advocated by David Bearman (see the references above and his earlier collaborative article with Richard H. Lytle, "The Power of the Principle of Provenance," *Archivaria* 21 [Winter 1985-86], pp. 14-27), and especially by Lucianna Duranti and Terry Eastwood of the University of British Columbia (most recently by Eastwood in "Towards a Social Theory of Appraisal," in Barbara L. Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination*, pp. 71-89, especially pp. 81-83, and in "Nailing a Little Jelly to the Wall of Archival Studies," *Archivaria* 35 [Spring 1993], pp. 232-252: "The purpose of the archivist... is to preserve the integrity of archival documents as faithful and trustworthy evidence of the actions from which they originated," p. 237).

There is certainly much of import for archivists to consider in this theoretical synthesis; however, my own inclination is to explore the other side of Giddens' structuration equation, which notably consists of, in Eastwood's rather lugubrious judgement in, "the niceties of textual criticism" that untidily "get in the way" of something approaching a pure discipline of archival science: "Nailing a Little Jelly to the Wall," p. 237 (see also Terry Cook's riposte to Eastwood's opinion in "'Another Brick in the Wall': Terry Eastwood's Masonry and Archival Walls, History, and Archival Appraisal," *Archivaria* 37 [Spring 1994], pp. 96-103). This is the destabilizing or decentering of authority and the structural dissolution encountered in public records when they are engaged as a discursive medium of communications process, or what Giddens would call, somewhat ambiguously, a "disembedding mechanism" ("disembedding" in the Giddensian sense means the systemic or processive "lifting out" of social relations from local involvements and their recombination or linking across large spans of time and space, of which structuralized records/information authority resources can possess only a limited knowledge: Anthony Giddens, "Structuration Theory: Past Present and Future," in Christopher G.A. Bryant and David Jary, eds., *Giddens' Theory of Structuration*, pp. 209-10). Like Upward (and McKemmish, Bearman, Eastwood, and Duranti, et al.), my approach is essentially "product-based" (records-based), but contrary to the identification and contextual location of public records creators according to the documentary sources of their structuralized authority and accountability reference ("jurisdictional" or "authoritative" or "juridical" provenance), it rejects the absolute paramountcy of power-structure associations to focus on the discursive threshold, formation, and boundaries of communications processes as established by the narrative intentionality of agents/creators within texts, i.e., "virtual" or "discursive" provenance. On the general notion of "text-intention," see John M. Connolly and Thomas Keutner, "Interpretation, Decidability, and Meaning," in John M. Connolly and Thomas Keutner, eds., *Hermeneutics Versus Science?: Three German Views [Wolfgang Stegmüller, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Ernst Konrad Specht]* (Notre Dame, 1988), especially pp. 1-67. As indicated above, my understanding of discourse and discursive boundaries (context in text) is primarily drawn from Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, and Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. The archival-intellectual (and macro-appraisal) rationale supporting this position will hopefully become clear in the course of what follows below.

- It should be noted here, however, that this largely post-structuralist perspective on public records creator contextuality is one which Giddens would not likely favour, despite the fact that he has advocated the utility of hermeneutic understanding, commended the time-space constitution of social interconnections implied by discursive formations, and generally acknowledged the supplemental sociological value established by the mediation of frames of meaning in texts (see Roy Boyne, "Power-Knowledge and Social Theory: The Systematic Misrepresentation of Contemporary French Social Theory in the Work of Anthony Giddens," pp. 52-73, and Richard Kilminster, "Structuration Theory as World View," in *Giddens' Theory of Structuration: A Critical Appreciation*, pp. 74-115). As suggested by Upward, Giddens's principal concern is to legitimize empirical research in a structurally "localized setting" (Kilminster, p. 77), which is potentially superior to the hermeneutic results obtained when "filtered through signifiers or 'discourse' as understood in post-structuralism" (Giddens, "Structuration Theory: Past, Present and Future," p. 205).
- 19 I would also level the same criticism at the quasi-diplomatic appraisal methodology advocated by Frank Upward (above note 18) which, despite the sophistication of its Giddensian approach to records transactionality, and having recognized the enormous complexity of the public records-information domain, ultimately contrives to strengthen the traditional ethos of archival knowledge by reinvigorating the empirical-structuralist appraisal perspective. It has been suggested (by Upward, Bearman, and others), and I mean to challenge the conclusions of this argument, that evidential recourse to the autonomous site of operational process initiation will identify and locate all archival documentation relevant to a function, task, or activity as an accountable recorded memory susceptible to archival appraisal and preservation, especially in the information environment of electronic systems. While my own position is fundamentally informed by hermeneutical discourse analysis, I refer readers to another view offered in an important article by Gregory Mentzas, "A Functional Taxonomy of Computer-based Information Systems," *International Journal of Information Management* 14 (December 1994), pp. 397-410. Aside from introducing a typological classification of computer systems which may prove enormously beneficial to archivists engaged in the appraisal of electronic records, Mentzas argues that tasks and transactions within (office and other) electronic information systems are "goal directed and cannot necessarily be encoded to a precise procedure to be followed," i.e., a single site of process authority and initiation (p. 404). In fact, "their intention is to **model** [emphasis added] cooperation among many office agents, negotiation among parties, confrontation and argumentation, and the abilities to learn and reach goals... [but] none of them satisfies in an adequate manner all the decision-, information-, and communications-related process of an organization" (support of parallel work, assistance in group communication, negotiation and conflict, distribution of processing and reasoning facilities, techniques for multi-participatory planning, etc.). While the model may be important to capture from a purely archival-evidential view, I would suggest, using the reasoning of Mentzas, that a true archival memory of any institutional function or transaction (what actually transpires) also transcends its structured system boundaries.
- 20 On this account, I refer readers to the admonitions of Richard C. Berner in his book, *Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Analysis* (Seattle and London, 1983). Berner makes two critical points, both of which have substantially informed the argument of this essay. First, he is obliged to accept that "the historical analysis of archival theory and practice in the United States [and elsewhere for that matter] is limited to arrangement and description. Appraisal for documentary value is the only other phase of archival work that is unique to the field and susceptible to integration with arrangement and description as part of a general body of archival theory" (p. 4). Second, he declines to discuss archival appraisal theory due to the "primitive nature of its development," specifically on the grounds "that we have not yet moved significantly beyond the **taxonomic** [emphasis added] stage in dealing with appraisal." In fact, while "appraisal theory is still early in its gestation, arrangement and description have emerged from a protracted pregnancy, and have a coherence now that is lacking in appraisal practices.... A body of appraisal theory is perhaps the most pressing need in the archival field today" (pp. 6-7).
- 21 With the exception of a few archival scholars who have recently questioned the intellectual capacity of primitive sociology for the purposes of information systems and records analysis (notably in Canada, Hugh Taylor and Terry Cook, and in the United States, David Bearman, Helen Samuels, Richard Cox, and Margaret Hedstrom), archivists appear generally to be satisfied with the basic principles of institutional formation and interpretation offered in the writings of Max Weber and his academic school, despite the enormous changes wrought in the arena of public administration since the decade of the 1960s, and the coincidentally emerging hyper-complex environment of government business activity (trends in policy formulation, processes of communication and functional transaction, modes of programme delivery, and interaction with the private sector, for example). This is not to suggest that

Weber's paradigm of bureaucracy is entirely without value or potential archival utility, as eloquently explained by Michael Lutzker, "Max Weber and the Analysis of Modern Bureaucratic Organization: Notes Towards a Theory of Appraisal," *The American Archivist* 45 (Spring, 1982), pp. 119-30. Nevertheless, there is now available a vast literature on the subject of bureaucratic organization which presents a decidedly different perspective on how public institutions work, organize, decide, and interact.

The most provocative and insightful views have been provided by political scientists, concentrating on the lineages of the post-modern bureaucratic state under two primary and interconnected themes: public sector growth and expansion, and the dissolution-fusion of state/civil society boundaries through the sponsorship and organization of quasi-government bodies, the creation and operation of para-bureaucratic (para-statal) formations of intermediation interest, and the gradual disaggregation and deinstitutionalization of departmental authority, accountability, and autonomy with the deployment and use of regulatory and self-regulatory policies, tax expenditures, contracting powers, public insurance, and private sector investment. Of special interest to archivists in this regard would be several of the latest studies that identify and articulate the various allegiances of "clientage," "process linkage," and "dependency relationship" that both exist within the public sector in para-formational opposition to standard reporting and operational structures, and also occupy the "grey area" between government and the civil constituency, including in the Canadian context, Keith G. Banting, "Images of the Modern State," pp. 1-17, and Alan Cairns, "The Embedded State: State-Society Relations in Canada," pp. 53-85, in Keith Banting, Research Coordinator, *State and Society: Canada in Comparative Perspective* (Toronto, 1986), and Donald J. Savoie, *The Politics of Public Spending in Canada* (Toronto, 1990). In the general field of public administration, one could include Richard Rose, *Understanding Big Government: The Programme Approach* (Beverly Hills, 1984), especially pp. 29-62, "Causes and Consequences of Big Government," and pp. 151-81, "The Organization of Government"; Richard Rose, "Disaggregating the Concept of Government," pp. 157-76 and B. Guy Peters and Martin G. Heisler, "Thinking About Public Sector Growth: Conceptual, Operational, Theoretical and Policy Considerations," in Charles Taylor, ed., *Why Governments Grow: Measuring Public Sector Size* (Beverly Hills, 1983) pp. 177-97.; and the multi-volume works of G. Bruce Doern. I would especially recommend for archivists now considering the records appraisal utility of jurisdictional or authoritative provenance the essays by Ian Palmer, "State Theory and Statutory Authorities: Points of Convergence," *Sociology* 19 (November 1985), pp. 523-40, and Charles Tilly, "Prisoners of the State," *International Social Science Journal. Historical Sociology: Debate on Methods* 133 (August 1992), pp. 329-42, both of which expose, in a highly sobering fashion, the dissolution of "authority" as the critical reference point in the explanation of the functions and activities of government within the framework of the new mixed-economy welfare state typical of the new "post-industrial" West.

- 22 Weber's classic essay on bureaucracy was finally published in the year 1922 as a chapter in his monumental text *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Part III, Chapter 6, pp. 650-78), and first appeared in English in an omnibus edition of his selected works now familiar to generations of students, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York, 1946), pp. 196-244. Supplemental Weberian meditations on the notions of power, authority, and institutional order, considered by some scholars to be more cogent and accessible than this essay, are also to be found in Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, trans.) (New York, 1947), especially pp. 329-41 on "Legal Authority: The Pure Type with Employment of a Bureaucratic Administrative Staff," and in W.G. Runciman, ed., and E. Matthews, trans., *Max Weber: Selections in Translation* (Cambridge, 1978), "The Development of Bureaucracy and its Relation to Law," pp. 341-56. The impact of Weber's ideas upon the foundation and evolution of modern social theory has been so profound that it properly defies description, but it was doubtless felt most keenly by the generation of academics who contrived to put sociology and political science higher on the liberal arts curricula of universities in Britain and North America during the decade of the 1950s. Some of the texts written during this period remain standards in the field of structural sociology and institutional organization, including Peter M. Blau, *Bureaucracy in Modern Society* (Chicago, 1956); Herbert A. Simon, *Administrative Behaviour* (New York, 1945); Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *Character and Social Structure: The Psychology of Social Institutions* (New York, 1954); S.M. Lipset, Martin Trow, and James Coleman, *Union Democracy* (Glencoe, 1956); as well as many of the essays found in Robert K. Merton, Ailsa P. Gray, Barbara Hockey, and Hanan C. Selvin, eds., *Reader in Bureaucracy* (Glencoe, 1952), and Edward Shils, ed., *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (Glencoe, 1949). Of the more recent works, I have found especially useful Wolfgang Mommsen, *The Age of Bureaucracy: Perspectives on the Political Sociology of Max Weber* (Oxford, 1974), and Anthony Giddens, *Politics and Sociology in the Thought of Max Weber* (London, 1972).

- 23 David Bearman and Richard H. Lytle. "The Power of the Principle of Provenance," pp. 16-19. (See also in this regard Terry Cook, "Leaving Safe and Accustomed Ground: Ideas for Archivists," *Archivaria* 23 (Winter 1986-87), pp. 124-25.) Bearman and Lytle reveal how the hierarchical attributes of Weber's structural model of bureaucratic organization, which have been largely assimilated by archival theory to the point of occupational "obsession," effectively "blunt" the potential "power" of provenance as a point of authority access and/or records organization-retrieval for information management purposes.
- 24 The seminal statement upon the utility of institutional hierarchical-structuralist semantics for current archival theory and practice is made by Michel Duchein, "Theoretical Principles and Practical Problems of *Respect des fonds* in Archival Science," *Archivaria* 16 (Summer 1983), pp. 64-82 (a translation of his essay, "Le respect des fonds en archivistique: principes théoriques et problèmes pratiques," which originally appeared in *La Gazette des archives*, 1977). Duchein's conception of the archival fonds, which offers as one of the five primary elements defining "creatorship" the assumption of a defined hierarchical position within an administrative organization (the others are a legal identity, an official mandate, a large degree of autonomy, and an organization chart), has been essentially co-opted by archivists involved in the international development of the *Rules for Archival Description (RAD)*, notably in Canada, by the Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards of the Bureau of Canadian Archivists (see Terry Eastwood, ed., *The Archival Fonds: from Theory to Practice* (Ottawa, 1992), which, aside from an informative introduction to the subject of descriptive standards by Eastwood (pp. 1-29), includes three critical essays: Terry Cook, "The Concept of the Archival Fonds: Theory, Description, and Provenance," pp. 31-85; James Lambert and Jean-Pierre Therrien, "Le principe du respect des fonds: une synthèse des opinions et des pratiques québécoises," pp. 87-193; and Heather MacNeil, "The Context is All: Describing a Fonds and its Parts in Accordance with the *Rules for Archival Description*," pp. 195-225). All three of these authors recognize that "the dynamic and transactional nature of [the] records creating reality inevitably dictates certain limits on our ability to capture it through archival descriptive systems" (MacNeil, p. 219), although there is some "slippage" of archival descriptive processes into the realm of archival appraisal theory, especially as articulated by Lambert and Therrien, who place the concept of the archival fonds (somewhat ambiguously) within the information management life cycle of the record: "l'opération du calendrier de conservation présume presque l'existence d'un fonds..." (Lambert-Therrien, p. 127). The key observations are surely made by Terry Cook, who, in rightly linking the fonds to a records creator from the archival custodial perspective of arrangement and description, does not presume to conclude that the complex dynamic of "creatorship" has an originating ethos intuitively linked to (what is finally) an artificial-intellectual construct conceived to codify the archival representation of institutional organization (Cook, pp. 73-74).
- 25 Michael Lutzker, "Max Weber and the Analysis of Modern Bureaucratic Organization," p. 124.
- 26 Brien Brothman, "Orders of Value," pp. 78-100; see especially p. 81 for his seminal identification and explanation of the notion of an archival "ordering intention." The concentration upon "archival order" as the governing principal of archival appraisal observation has also been signalled by David Bearman in "Documenting Documentation," pp. 33-49.
- 27 Brothman, "Orders of Value," especially pp. 80-83, and *passim*.
- 28 The federal government records creator-clients of the National Archives of Canada are specified by Section 2 of the *National Archives Act*, 38 Eliz. 1989, c.37, to wit all government institutions listed in Schedule I of the *Access to Information Act* and the schedule to the *Privacy Act*, 38 Eliz. 1982, c. 31. Upon passage of the *National Archives Act* (and there have since necessarily been adjustments to accommodate bureaucratic reorganization) these institutions represented a total of 159 federal agencies. This number does not include government institutions falling outside the purview of the *National Archives Act*, but with whom the National Archives of Canada has had a traditional/historic relationship of records deposit or recently established operational archival ties, such as Canadian National Railways, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the Office of the Governor General, the Senate, the Supreme Court of Canada, etc. At present count, these institutions number 14, making a total of 173.
- 29 A committee of archivists enlisted from the Government Archives Division and other NA media archives divisions, including Brien Brothman, Richard Brown, Brian Hallett, Jeffrey Murray, and Melissa Rombout, was convened to develop the macro-appraisal criteria and rank the client creators in order of appraisal and acquisition priority under the direction of Terry Cook, who was ultimately responsible for assembling and drafting the results of the committee's deliberations. See Terry Cook, *Government-Wide Plan*.
- 30 Nothing in the archival world appears to be less understood or professionally "settled" than the idea of "functional analysis." Archivists are virtually all over the intellectual map here, calling upon vague references to biological science, sociology, socio-anthropology, structured systems theory *et al.* for some kernel of core-essential definition and archival analytic prospectus. Some potential sense is made

of all this by the Australian archivist Chris Hurley in "What, If Anything, Is A Function," *Archives and Manuscripts* 21, no. 2 (1994), pp. 208-20.

- 31 Considering the contentious nature of the academic debates that have marked the intellectual boundaries between structuralist and functionalist epistemologies throughout the twentieth century, I find it puzzling in the extreme that archivists have rarely acknowledged the principals involved in these debates or the voluminous literature which has been coincidentally produced, despite the fact that they borrow directly from their terminology, dialectic frames of reference, and conceptual thinking. Archivists interested in "plunging" themselves directly into the midst of social theory and its controversies could ask for no better basic introduction than Roy Boyne, "Power-Knowledge and Social Theory: The Systematic Misrepresentation of Contemporary French Social Theory in the Work of Anthony Giddens," pp. 52-73, which, among other things, includes the "crucial premises for a non-functionalist manifesto" as articulated by Anthony Giddens (p. 62). Durkheim, Parsons, and Lévi-Strauss are household names in twentieth-century academic circles, and there is no need to list their contributions here. Anthony Giddens, however, is less well-known, despite wide acclamation by his peers, and his production in the field of social theory has been prodigious. The critical text in this regard is Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. See also my references to Giddens's theory of "structuration" in Richard Brown, "Records Acquisition Strategy and its Theoretical Foundation," pp. 42, 49-51, and note 15 (which lists some of his scholarship), and the brief discussion of Frank Upward's recent archival reading of Giddens above (note 18).
- 32 The hierarchical-structural nexus of the rules for archival description is clearly enunciated by the International Council on Archives, "Statement of Principles Regarding Archival Description," pp. 8-16, and "ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description," pp. 17-32, in *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992). The ramifications of this approach are explored in a series of essays to be found in this same volume, of which I would especially single out the offerings (from a critical perspective) by David Bearman, "Documenting Documentation," by Kent Haworth, (from a *RAD* perspective), "The Development of Descriptive Standards in Canada: A Progress Report," pp. 58-74, and Hugo Stibbe, "Implementing the Concept of Fonds: Primary Access Point, Multilevel Description, and Authority Control," pp. 109-37. Subsequent Canadian discussion of the nature of the archival fonds has also served to reinforce the hierarchical-structuralist impulse in *RAD*, including the views expressed in a special volume sponsored by the Canadian Council of Archives (above note 24).
- 33 Quite rightly I believe, David Bearman makes a crucial distinction between **records description**, which "characterizes archival materials by constructing a document or unit surrogate ... called cataloguing records, finding aids or archival inventories [which] represent a 'unit of material', or physical records," and **records creator documentation**, which "is focussed on activity in the records-generating institution ... [and] captures data about the relationship between the activity and the document created or received in that activity..." ("Documenting Documentation," p. 34). I also follow his premise that the "documentation of organizational activity ought to begin long before records are transferred to archives, and may take place even before any records are created--at the time when new functions are assigned to an organization" (p. 39). What I find difficult to accept, however, is the notion that records creator documentation can provide the full contextual basis for archival decision-making upon the value of records:

When it acquires a function, an organization establishes procedures for activities that will accomplish it and implements information systems to support it. If we understand these activities, procedures and information systems, it is possible to identify records which will be created and their retention requirements before they are created, because their evidential value and informational content are **essentially predetermined** [emphasis added]... Archivists can actively intervene through regulation and guidance to ensure that the data content and values depicting activities and functions are represented in such a way that will make them useful for subsequent management and retrieval of the records resulting from these activities (p. 39).

The danger here is, I think, practically self-evident. While Bearman suggests that proper creator documentation "will be useful for administrative control purposes," he also includes in this information management category the "determination of records disposition and negotiation of transfers during the pre-archival life cycle of the records" (p. 40), especially if, as he argues elsewhere, the documentation is created and compiled according to archival functional specifications ("Archival Data Management to Achieve Organizational," pp. 172-221), (this is the sense of "institutionalizing" the archival record articulated by McKemmish and Upward, above note 18). In other words, archivists should not only be able to determine the archival value of records purely on the contextual basis of creator documentation, but they should also take an active role in developing it according to archival standards of arrangement

and description, which finally, in Bearman's opinion, should reside in the functional analysis of creator activity and evidentiary-probative conceptions of organizational meaning and representation (jurisdictional-authoritative provenance). While I support the utility of functional analysis as a method of understanding records creator organization and agency, the proposition of authoritative-jurisdictional provenance, with all its manifest implications for records appraisal theory, is contested throughout this essay.

Indeed, despite Bearman's theoretical efforts to frame creator documentation and archival description (which are somewhat ambiguous on the point of their intellectual separation), there have been some notable "slippages" of creator documentation into the realm of archival taxonomy, particularly as regards the "pre-archival life cycle of the records." This is most obvious in the notion of "predescriptive standards" adopted by the British Columbia Archives and Records Service (BCARS) as explained by Glen Isaac and Derek Reimer, "Right from the Start: Developing Predescriptive Standards at the British Columbia Archives and Records Service," *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993), pp. 86-97. Isaac and Reimer are with Bearman to a certain extent, insofar as they distinguish between creator documentation and records description, which is finally reserved "for the post-arrangement stage of the process;" but the so-called "separation" is inscribed in a global "descriptive continuum" which documents each stage of the records life-cycle from creation to archival preservation, in recognition "that 'archival description' in the widest sense of the term covers every element of information no matter at what stage of management it is identified or established" (p. 87). Thankfully, Isaac and Reimer still recognize the utility of examining records, though there is every hint that this would be wholly unnecessary if creators would simply follow archival guidelines for records description (p. 95). If I read the essay correctly, they appear to subscribe to the view expressed by Kent Haworth, which suggests that "archival records are created long before they arrive in archival repositories" ("The Voyage of RAD: From the Old World to the New," p. 60), as if, through the filtering of descriptive standards at the moment (or even before the moment) of their creation, the archival value of records can be understood by the interpretive imposition of archival-order explanation upon the activity of records creators. This is precisely the predetermined archival order of records value I am disputing in this essay.

- 34 Some readers may well be surprised by this reproval. For at least the last ten years, the pages of both *Archivaria* and *The American Archivist* have witnessed an unparalleled outpouring of professional debate and discussion upon every conceivable aspect of archival records appraisal. Nonetheless, what seems finally to elude the discourse is the monumental fact of archival decision-making upon the fate of the recorded past, and the enormous socio-cultural burden associated with the preservation or destruction of records. Archivists are more than willing to discuss their roles and responsibilities, their academic theories, their strategic records acquisition programmes and plans, their pro-active agency in the "art" of memory and remembrance, and their intermediation between the record and the receptor/user of documentary heritage. They rarely (if ever), however, discuss the empirical results of their appraisal determinations. The practical, day-to-day archival judgements engaged upon the value of records are largely hidden from global professional scrutiny, known only to internal operational-institutional levels of approval and their dedicated files of decision-making record. How has the profession collectively tested its appraisal assumptions and measured their accuracy? Are archivists succeeding (or not succeeding) in the intention to offer for posterity a neutral documentary recollection of our culture and society? What criteria and methods would be helpful in assessing the extant and future archival chronicle of the past from both an empirical and philosophic perspective?
- 35 Hans Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage," pp. 69-107. The notion of "provenance dependence" (my wording) is implicit in the quoted passages drawn from pp. 87-88.
- 36 On this subject, I am greatly indebted to Heather MacNeil of the National Archives of Canada, who passed me a manuscript of her presentation, "Will Metadata Replace Archival Description?" to the annual conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists at Ottawa, Ontario, on 25 May 1994. This provocative paper, which was offered in debate with the views of David Wallace of the University of Pittsburgh (see his article, "Metadata and the Archival Management of Electronic Records," *Archivaria* 36 [Autumn 1993] for a summary) touched upon many important issues related to archival appraisal. One point raised by MacNeil during the debate, and it is a critical one, concerns the archival definition of "metadata," which has rapidly shifted, under some interpretations and qualifications, from the notion of data codes embedded in electronic systems software to the notion of "creator documentation" or "creator metatext," i.e., from "protocols" or "analogs" of creator transactions within an electronic information system, to explanations of creator subsistence, activity, purpose, and intentionality on a contextual scale.

The importance of this distinction should not be underestimated. Aside from the obvious lexical confusion that presently reigns over the archival meaning of metadata, there is a battle being waged

over the occupational ground and purposes of archival description, particularly in reference to electronic records. Should the archival description of records and records creator context occur after the creation of records and the archival determination of their value, or should it be part of a process of creator and records "documentation," which occurs prior to the creation of records during systems design as a means of establishing archival "recordness" for electronic information?

The outcome of this debate potentially has monumental professional implications. To a certain extent, however, it is also practically irrelevant and something of a non-starter. Archivists should not intervene in the specification of records value at the phase of systems design, especially if the intention is to shape or configure information for archival order purposes. Archivists come equipped with biases of formational order and organization that are inherently "archival": they are frequently structuralists bent on a particular mission; they possess an archival world-view. Do archivists truly wish to impose this view of organizational understanding of society, or are they memory chroniclers and annalists molded in the neutral Jenkinsonian School? On the other hand, as professionals dedicated to the understanding of information and record-keeping systems, archivists may be able and are advantageously positioned to offer some concrete advice to record creators upon establishing a management context for their information to render it understandable, usable, and retrievable. Can archivists really afford to ignore this further mission, given that they wish to acquire records in a context that is comprehensible to an archives?

From a macro-appraisal perspective, I have some sympathy for the views expressed by Wallace, insofar as they identify records creator "documentation," or "metatext," as an important source of records creator context. Inevitably, archivists are "readers," or "textualists," regardless of the creator sources, purposes, locations, and chronologies of the "contextual texts." In fact, macro-appraisal theory advances the notion that creator metatexts (creator literature and other information systems and record-keeping documentation) provide a useful and positive foundation upon which to build archival records evaluations. What I have trouble accepting is the argument that a "reading" of creator metatexts alone is sufficient to determine creator context, and ultimately, to identify records of archival value for permanent preservation. What I am suggesting in this essay, is that the reading of metatexts must be supplemented by a reading of the texts (records) produced as a result of functional and processive creator activity, in order to arrive at a more sensitive archival rendering of creator context within its full frame of discursive meaning and representation. In any case, Heather MacNeil's paper points to a particular confusion among archivists upon the definition and purpose(s) of metadata, which obviously needs to be addressed.

(A revised version of MacNeil's paper, "Metadata Strategies and Archival Description: Comparing Apples to Oranges," appeared in *Archivaria* 39 [Spring 1995], pp. 22-32, together with a restatement by David Wallace, "Managing the Present: Metadata as Archival Description," pp. 11-21.)

- 37 Perhaps the organization charts of the Canadian Government lack the intelligence and sophistication of their American counterparts, but I have personally yet to encounter any official Canadian organizational schemata that include the "dotted tracings and influence arrows" which Bearman and Lytle have found in US government diagrams as described in "The Power of the Principle of Provenance."
- 38 This particular explanation of context is largely based on my reading of the works of Michel Foucault, primarily his masterful synthetic interpretation of the notion of discourse in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, but also his understanding of "power structures" in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Alan Sheridan, trans.) (New York, 1977), and Colin Gordon, ed., *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (New York, 1980), especially "Intervista a Michel Foucault," (Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino, trans.) in Michel Foucault, *Microfisica del Potere* (Torino, 1977), pp. 78-108; "Pouvoirs et Stratégies," *Les Révoltes Logiques* 4 (1977), pp. 109-45; and "L'Oeil du Pouvoir," originally published as a preface to Jeremy Bentham, *Le Panoptique* (Paris, 1977), pp. 146-65. Other works that have contributed to and influenced the wording of this summary include Hayden White, "The Context in the Text: Method and Ideology in Intellectual History," in *The Content of the Form*, pp. 185-213; John M. Connolly and Thomas Keutner, "Interpretation, Decidability, and Meaning," in Connolly and Keutner, eds., *Hermeneutics vs. Science?: Three German Views*, pp. 1-67, and in the same volume, Hans-Georg Gadamer, "On the Circle of Understanding," pp. 68-78; N. Katherine Hayles, *Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science*, and Daniel Benediktsson, "Hermeneutics: Dimensions Toward LIS Thinking," *Library and Information Science Research* 11, no. 3 (July-September, 1989), pp. 201-34.
- 39 This is my own adaptation for information and records analysis purposes of Anthony Giddens' notion of the "hermeneutic moment," most cogently expressed in *The Constitution of Society*, pp. 327-34.
- 40 For some time, I have been searching for a "tag" to identify records that exist in a temporal (not necessarily temporary) and spatial state of para-formation within institutional structures. Terry Cook initially described this phenomenon as "conceptual provenance" in his article, "Mind Over Matter," and has

since followed with a more fullsome explanation of the idea in which conceptual provenance is linked to processive activities operating within structures (similar to Giddens's notion of structuration), essentially moving provenance "from a physical and structure-centred mindset to one that is conceptual and process-centred" in "Electronic Records, Paper Minds: the Revolution in Information Management and Archives in the Post-Custodial and Post-Modernist Era," *Archives and Manuscripts* 22 (November 1994), pp. 300-28. Credit for the notion of "virtual provenance" is due Brien Brothman, who, to my knowledge, first used this phrase to describe the para-formational domain of archival records in his recent commentary on the session, "Alternate Forms and Formats: The Appraisal of Scientific Databases," at the Society of American Archivists Conference in New Orleans, September 1993.

- 41 To my knowledge, no one has ever attempted (save an example discussed below) to assess the archival value of a public records creator or its "recorded" products by following the prescriptions of hermeneutic reading-interpretation. What I can place in evidence, however, is my own practical experience of ten years working with the records of the Canadian federal Department of Transport, as well as the insights and comments of my colleagues in the Government Archives and Records Disposition Divisions of the National Archives of Canada. I think it is fair to say that we have all encountered, at one time or another, an appraisal situation where either the presumed value of the "information" disposed by a records creator is not validated by an examination of its records, or the actual nature/value of the records creator activity does not wholly correspond with the description offered by official creator literature. Further, and I offer this merely as an observation, is there any empirical evidence to suggest that the current approach to records acquisition satisfies the goals and objectives of an archives?
- 42 Aside from consulting their original texts (which is obviously recommended), archivists interested in the seminal thought of these "hermeneutic" philosophers might profit by consulting the introduction by Quentin Skinner, *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences* (Cambridge, 1985).
- 43 Hayden White, "The Context in the Text: Method and Ideology in Intellectual History," in *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, pp. 185-213, especially p. 186.
- 44 The notions of "intentionality," "message," and "message destination," and their potential meaning for archivists, are explored in an important essay by Brien Brothman, "The Limits of Limits: Derridean Deconstruction and the Archival Institution," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), pp. 205-20.
- 45 The whole notion of the "history of the record" was largely conceived by Tom Nesmith and found first expression in his article, "Archives from the Bottom Up: Social History and Archival Scholarship," *Archivaria* 14 (Summer 1982), pp. 5-26. This essay was recently reprinted in a diverse collection of archival essays edited by Nesmith, *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance* (Metuchen, 1993), pp. 159-84, along with several other important and previously published works of administrative history and/or history of the record interest, including Hugh Taylor, "My Very Act and Deed": Some Reflections on the Role of Textual Records in the Conduct of Affairs," (pp. 251-68); Terry Cook, "Paper Trails: A Study in Northern Records and Northern Administration, 1898-1958," (pp. 269-96); and Bill Russell, "White Man's Paper Burden: Aspects of Records Keeping in the Department of Indian Affairs, 1860-1914," (pp. 297-324). Some of Tom Nesmith's more recent thinking on this concept as it relates to archival education can be found in Tom Nesmith, "Hugh Taylor's Contextual Idea for Archives and the Foundation of Graduate Education in Archival Studies," in Barbara L. Craig, *The Archival Imagination*, pp. 13-37.
- 46 My efforts to define a concept of "archival hermeneutics" for records appraisal purposes originally began with the review of a book by Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France* (Stanford, 1987), in the article "The Value of 'Narrativity' in the Appraisal of Historical Documents," pp. 152-56. This was succeeded by a presentation at the Association of Canadian Archivists Conference at Banff, Alberta, May 1991, "Records Acquisition Strategy at the National Archives of Canada," which introduced the potential of its archival macro-appraisal adaptation for the analysis and understanding of government records, and a commentary at a session of the Society of American Archivists Conference in Montreal (September 1992), "Order or Chaos: Archival Theory at the Edge of the Second Millennium," which explored the utility of hermeneutics as a component of archival knowledge. Shortly thereafter, in an attempt to offer a more fullsome explanation of the theory of hermeneutics in its practical application to archival appraisal, I followed with "Records Acquisition Strategy and its Theoretical Foundation: The Case for a Concept of Archival Hermeneutics," and a paper at the Association of Canadian Archivists Conference at St. John's, July 1993, "Macro-Appraisal Theory and the Context of the Public Records Creator," which provides the title for the present offering.
- 47 As announced by Frank Upward, "Institutionalizing the Archival Document - Some Theoretical Perspectives of Terry Eastwood's Challenge," pp. 45-47.

- 48 Quotations variously drawn from Frank Upward, "The Significance of Bearman's 'Simple Shared Goal' for Australian Records Managers," pp. 229-44.
- 49 The influence of "structured systems theory" upon the "Pittsburgh" approach to archival information systems and record-keeping analysis is profound. My own understanding of structured systems theory is largely drawn from Chris Gane and Trish Sarson, *Structured Systems Analysis: Tools and Techniques* (Surrey, 1981).
- 50 David Bearman, "Documenting Documentation," and more expressly, in his proposed course of archival academic study on "Electronic Evidence and Record-Keeping Systems," which I was privileged to attend in an abbreviated form at the National Archives of Canada, 10-15 September 1994. This course is now offered at Edith Cowan University in Australia.
- 51 Booms, "Überlieferungsbildung: Keeping Archives as a Social and Political Activity," pp. 6-24.
- 52 See especially Daniel Benediktsson, "Hermeneutics: Dimensions Towards LIS Thinking"; Hayden White, "The Metaphysics of Narrativity: Time and Symbol in Ricoeur's Philosophy of History," pp. 169-84.
- 53 In this regard, I wish to acknowledge the work of Ann Martin of the Records Disposition Division of the National Archives, whose *Records Appraisal Report*, *Records Selection Criteria*, and *Terms and Conditions of Archival Transfer* covering the disposition of the records created by this administrative "entity" recently approved by the National Archivist, partially provide the foundation for the argument that ensues below. See also here the recent article by Jean-Stéphane Piché, "Macro-Appraisal and Duplication of Information: Federal Real Property Management Records," *Archivaria* 39 (Spring 1995), pp. 39-50. My analysis is also supported by my own archival experience of approximately ten years working with the records of this department.
- 54 Terry Cook, "Electronic Records, Paper Minds," pp. 300-328.
- 55 The term "stovepipe" is a new "buzz-word" in information management and electronic technology circles coined to describe the capacities designed into and "user views" formerly obtained by considering information from a local-structural *in situ* perspective only, without awareness of cross-structural or functional perspectives. With the Canadian Government moving rapidly towards software "enabling technology" operatively to facilitate global inter-institutional functionality and information exchange, the creator by creator archival approach to records production seems increasingly inappropriate.
- 56 Throughout the preceding, I have variously used and abused the notion of discourse to suit a potential archival utility. Here I am drawing upon the definition offered by Michel Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, "The Description of Statements," p. 107 and *passim*, modified somewhat by the meaning of "narrativity" proposed by Hayden White in *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, especially "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," pp. 1-25; "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," pp. 26-57; and "The Context in the Text: Method and Ideology in Intellectual History," pp. 185-213.
- 57 Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 108.
- 58 Andrezej Warminski, "Monstrous History: Heidegger Reading Holderlin," in E.S. Burt and Janie Vanpée, eds., *Reading the Archive: On Texts and Infections*, *Yale French Studies* 77 (New Haven, 1990), p. 193.