

Archival Appraisal: A Status Report¹

CAROL COUTURE

RÉSUMÉ L'évaluation est une des spécificités les plus marquantes de l'archivistique contemporaine : elle en est la *fonction noble* et le *nœud dur*. Après l'avoir défini comme étant « l'acte de juger des valeurs que présentent les documents d'archives (valeur primaire et valeur secondaire) et de décider des périodes de temps pendant lesquelles ces valeurs s'appliquent auxdits documents dans un contexte qui tient compte du lien essentiel existant entre l'organisme (ou la personne) concerné et les documents d'archives qu'il (elle) génère dans le cadre de ses activités », l'auteur présente un état de la question de l'évaluation, en pose la problématique, la situe dans la mission de l'archiviste et propose cinq principes pouvant régir l'acte d'évaluer. Il soutient, en conclusion, qu'il existe une base théorique valable pour fonder l'évaluation en archivistique.

ABSTRACT Appraisal is one of the most significant aspects of contemporary archival science: it is its "noble function," its central core. The author defines appraisal as "the act of judging the primary and secondary value of records and establishing the length of time during which they retain this value, within a context that respects the essential link between a given institution (or person) and the records they created in the course of their activities." He then presents a comprehensive review of appraisal, defines the related issues and the place it occupies within the archival mission, and proposes five principles that govern the appraisal process. The author concludes by affirming that solid theoretical foundations exist to support records appraisal.

We are all aware that in appraisal² archivists exercise the power of life or death over records under their mandate. Numerous authors have emphasized the importance, the essential character, the nobleness, and the high degree of

1 This article is based on a research conducted by the author in 1995 to complete a DESS (Diplôme d'études scientifiques supérieures) in archives at the Université de Haute Alsace, Mulhouse, entitled "L'évaluation des archives. État de la question et aspects théoriques" (Montréal, 1995). It was first published in the journal *Archives* 28, no. 1 (1996–1997), pp. 3–31, under the title: "L'évaluation des archives: état de la question."

2 This article does not deal with the evaluation of archival programs or the monetary appraisal of documents. Rather, it looks at the appraisal of records.

scholarly and professional proficiency required to appraise archives. Simply said, archival appraisal, necessarily based on a thorough knowledge of the creating institution or person, must ultimately offer comprehensive evidence of societal actions and conditions. Appraisal is the act of judging the primary and secondary value of records and establishing the length of time during which they retain this value, within a context that respects the essential link between a given institution (or person) and the records they created in the course of their activities.

There is nothing original in the claim that the appraisal function forms the core of the archival discipline. Many authors have developed this point. We want to reiterate it. Appraisal is one of the most significant and defining functions of contemporary archival practice; its objective is to determine the documents and information with which archivists will work. The creation, accessioning, arrangement, description, accessibility, and preservation of archives are all shaped by the decisions taken at the time of appraisal. These decisions have consequences for the conduct of business activities (those decisions relating to primary value) and the subsequent development and management of personal or institutional and societal heritage (decisions relating to secondary value).

This article offers a status report on archival appraisal. The first part of the study evaluates the challenges faced by archivists during appraisal. We will look at the major trends discussed in four countries³ where considerable attention has been paid to appraisal: Germany, Great Britain, the United States, and Canada. The second part of the article, after examining appraisal as it pertains to the role of the archivist, presents a series of principles that could guide archivists through the archival appraisal process. Bear in mind that we are not trying to *establish* principles; rather, we are proposing them in the hope they will be subjected to discussion and critique so as to deepen and develop them further, perhaps even to reject them altogether.

The Problem of Archival Appraisal

Authors in many countries have written on appraisal. One can discover appraisal principles scattered throughout these studies, as well as work methods, processes, and approaches that are sometimes contradictory, sometimes divergent, and once in a while, complementary. There are also criteria and tools to be used to perform an appraisal. Authors study theoretical and practi-

3 Many other trends and countries could have been discussed. We decided to concentrate on countries where longstanding studies on archival appraisal seem to illustrate its problems best. Readers may also be surprised by the fact that we chose not to study French writings on the subject. Although France does play a critical role in archival science, French authors have published very little on the theoretical aspects of appraisal.

cal aspects of appraisal without distinguishing between them. Missions, aims, objectives, and functions are often mistaken for each other. Some approach appraisal as if it is completely independent of other archival functions; others concentrate on its global character. Some address values inherent in records, but from one writer to the next, it is hard to determine whether the authors are actually describing the same realities. The subject of appraisal is rich in content and full of promise. Yet we still seem to be at the exploratory stage, since writers, who in most instances are pioneers in a broad field of reflection and research, do not feel the need to set precise benchmarks delimiting the functions of an archivist. An unprepared reader can quickly become frustrated, even lost, in a confusing jungle where roots, stumps, branches, and an abundant flora grow unchecked.

Before proceeding further, it is useful to identify a number of questions found in the literature. These do not follow any logical order, given the richness of the theme, the complexity of its parts, and the intriguing issues raised by appraisal. For example, what would be the consequences of appraising records mainly to destroy them, rather than preserve them? When performing an appraisal, must we primarily keep in mind the interests of the creator or those of the user? Must we appraise in order to meet administrative needs or research needs? How do we explain the fact that the majority of studies done on appraisal only look at the research potential of records? How do we preserve the maximum amount of information in the minimum amount of records? What relationship must be established between appraisal and acquisition, and appraisal and needs assessment? Is appraisal a function or a role of an archivist? What are macro-appraisal and its apparent opposite, micro-appraisal? How do we distinguish among principles, methods, processes, and criteria when performing an appraisal? These are some of the questions an archivist will ask when reading about appraisal. One of an archivist's major challenges is simply articulating and organizing what has already been written and said about it.

Germany: Appraising to Preserve⁴

Germany has long been recognized for its tradition of rationalizing its administrative activities (the *registratur* practice is but one clear example). The Germans were among the first to explore archival appraisal. While at least initially Great Britain appraised to destroy records, Germany appraised to pre-

4 This section is inspired by the work of Ole Kolsrud, "The Evolution of Basic Appraisal Principles – Some Comparative Observations," *American Archivist* 55, no. 1 (1992), pp. 26–39; and that of Hans Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage: Issues in the Appraisal of Archival Sources," *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987), pp. 69–107. Although we could not read the many texts written in German on which Kolsrud and Booms based their studies, we refer to them to illustrate the importance and evolution of German archival appraisal literature.

serve them. At first glance, this may seem to be a play on words, but in fact, the words expose a fundamental difference that we will revisit below. For the moment, the distinction is between appraising to identify documents for disposal and appraising to identify documents for preservation. These functions are diametrically opposed and one subscribes to one or the other school of thought. Those who subscribe to the first school are preoccupied with administrative, financial, and short-term (space-saving) interests addressed by the disposal of records, while those who subscribe to the second school are preoccupied with heritage and long-term (archives as evidence) interests of preserving records.

In this context the Prussian government developed after 1833 various means to judge the value of documents it created. As of 1858, for instance, no government document could be destroyed without first informing the archival authorities. The preservation role of the national archivist was explicitly defined in Bavaria in 1897. Although these first initiatives did not always have the desired effects, they do illustrate the country's interest in appraisal.⁵

The Importance of the Creating Organization

As early as the 1920s, German archivists were actively developing the subject of appraisal, articulating concepts still used today as its foundation. Karl Otto Müller was the first to disagree with English archivist Hilary Jenkinson, who refused to recognize the role of the archivist in appraisal.⁶ Müller saw appraisal as central to archival practice. In 1926, he proposed an approach to appraisal based on the importance of the creating body within the institutional hierarchy. He identified three levels of administration: central, intermediate, and local. Institutions at the central and intermediate levels produced records that had greater value than those at the local level.⁷

Less than one year later, on 12 December 1927, the Archives of Prussia decreed that an inventory of all documents produced by the state had to be prepared to facilitate their appraisal. Early estimates concluded that such an inventory would take ten years to create and that it should be updated every decade.⁸ It is important to note here how German archivists established the link between the inventory of documents and their appraisal, the former considered essential to achieve the latter. We will revisit this issue when we discuss the parallel between macro-appraisal and needs analysis.

At the 1937 annual conference of German archivists, Heinrich Otto Meisner

5 Kolsrud, "The Evolution of Basic Appraisal Principles."

6 Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration* (London, 1965), p. 149.

7 Karl Otto Müller, "Fragen der Aktenaussscheidung" [Questions on Appraisal], *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 36, pp. 188–215, in Kolsrud, "The Evolution of Basic Appraisal Principles."

8 Kolsrud, "The Evolution of Basic Appraisal Principles."

argued that the 1927 inventory should be updated every five years. He said that three basic characteristics of records should be assessed in archival appraisal: their age, their contents, and the hierarchical position of their creator.⁹ Although we can see Müller's views reflected in the third characteristic, Meisner adds that the documents found in the *intermediate* category of administration should be judged according to the creator's degree of autonomy.

These appraisal concepts continue to characterize archival discourse: the *age* of documents, their *contents*, and most importantly, the *role played by the creating organization and its position in the hierarchy*.

It was another twenty years before German archivists revisited the question of appraisal in any significant way. At their 1957 annual meeting, George Wilhelm-Sante and Wilhelm Rhor tackled the issue. They built upon the theories of both Müller and Meisner by emphasizing the relationship between the value of documents and the creator's hierarchical position.¹⁰

The Importance of Use

From 1958 to the end of the 1970s, Fritz W. Zimmerman defended another approach to appraisal based on the use rather than the origin of documents. (We will see later how American archivist Philip Bauer had explored the same approach ten years earlier.) Zimmerman believed that the content of a document was the principal determinant of its value and therefore its use had to be considered first: "In the last analysis, it is the pertinence and not the organically-connected provenances that constitute the real value of records...."¹¹

9 Heinrich Otto Meisner, "Schutz und Pflege des Staatlichen Archivgutes mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Kassationsprobleme" [The Protection and Care of Public Records with a Special View to the Problems of Appraisal], *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 45, pp. 34–51, in Kolsrud, "The Evolution of Basic Appraisal Principles."

10 Georg Wilhelm Sante, "Behörden, Atken, Archive. Alte Taktik und neue Strategie" [Authorities, Files, Archives. Old Tactics and New Strategy], *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 54; and Wilhelm Rohr, "Zur Problematik des modernen Aktenwesens" [On the Problems of Modern Records], *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 54, in Kolsrud, "The Evolution of Basic Appraisal Principles." Is there a need to underline the risks of the unqualified application of such a proposition? By virtue of what scale of value would an office (central or intermediate), located at the top of the hierarchy necessarily produce records of interest as opposed to a local office found at the bottom of the hierarchy? For example, if this principle were applied to personal archives, would only the records of a prominent individual, who enjoyed high standing in a social hierarchy, deserve to be preserved? Is there not a serious danger of creating a skewed image of society, one reflective only of its elite? This seems to run counter to Hans Booms, who advocated that appraisal should offer evidence of all components of a society.

11 Fritz W. Zimmerman, "Wesen und Ermittlung des Archivwertes. Zur Theorie einer Archivalischer Wertlehre" [Nature and Appearance of Archival Value. On the Theory of Archival Appraisal], *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 54, in Kolsrud, "The Evolution of Basic Archival Principles," p. 32.

Inspired by the discipline of economics, Zimmerman advanced a new factor which he considered critical in appraisal: *market demand*. He established a relationship between demand and the contents and use of records. We will later see how this idea was further developed by Canadian archivist Terry Eastwood.¹²

In two articles published in 1965, another German archivist, Arthur Zechel, launched a vigorous critique of Zimmerman's approach.¹³ Zechel used this opportunity to raise the issue of the relationship between historians and archivists, and between history and archival science. He defended archival science, an *autonomous discipline*, free of any hierarchical ties with history. Zechel's answer to the question of whether one must be an historian to be an archivist was to state that when performing the function of appraisal, an archivist's sole perspective is archival in nature; however, when making archives accessible, an archivist must approach records like an historian.¹⁴

It is easy to understand how Zechel came to these conclusions. He firmly believed that the archivist must consider historical sources – archives – as the product of the activities of the creator. This led Zechel to claim that he had succeeded in:

- clarifying the relationship between historians and archivists and defining their respective roles;
- determining that the interests of the historian must not influence the work of the archivist in appraisal; and
- providing what he considered to be the final answer to the following question: must the archivist be an historian?

The question is still current – as is the answer!

Hans Booms and the Marxist Scale of Values

In 1969, Joachim Schreckenbach, an East German archivist, wishing to get things straight once and for all, affirmed that neither archival science nor Western archivists have brought any credible or valid solutions to the problem

12 Terry Eastwood, "Towards a Social Theory of Appraisal," in Barbara L. Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor* (Ottawa, 1992), pp. 71–89; Terry Eastwood, "How Goes It With Appraisal?," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), pp. 111–21.

13 Arthur Zechel, "Problem einer Wissenschaftstheorie der Archivistik mit besondere Berücksichtigung des Archiwesen der Wirtschaft" [Problems of a Theory of Knowledge in Archival Science with a Special View to Business Archives], *Zeitschrift für Firmengeschichte und Unternehmenbiographie* 10; and "Wertheorie und Kassation" [Value Theory and Disposal], *Der Archivar*; in Kolsrud, "The Evolution of Basic Archival Principles."

14 Arthur Zechel, "Wertheorie und Kassation," in Kolsrud, "The Evolution of Basic Archival Principles," p. 33.

of archival appraisal.¹⁵ He believed that the only way to tackle the problem was through the use of a Marxist Scale of Values. He thought that only a socialist context could allow a fundamental breakthrough in dealing with archival appraisal. At the end of the 1970s, archivists in both the Soviet Union and Bulgaria also firmly believed that the value of archival documents was found in how well they represented a Marxist vision of society:

... the fulfilling of the manifold task a socialist society sets for carrying through the historic mission of the working class ... the function and the place of an administrative body defines essentially the information potential and relevance of its documents ... and thereby their value.¹⁶

Even though a socialist society is the only context in which sound archival appraisal is possible and the West had not contributed to this approach, Schreckenbach acknowledged the propositions advanced by Müller, Meisner, Sante, and Rohr with respect to the hierarchical position of the creator.

This appraisal theory based on Marxist-Leninist values challenged the ideas of well-known West German archivist Hans Booms. In 1972 he published an influential paper on appraisal entitled *Gesellschaftsformen und Überlieferungsbildung Zur Problematik Archivalischer Quellenbewerteng*. It was translated into English and published in *Archivaria* in 1987.¹⁷ Since that time, Booms's views have had a major impact in Canada and the United States.

Booms argued in 1972 that neither East nor West German archivists had yet developed a satisfactory response to the challenges presented by appraisal. He did not endorse the propositions of Müller, Meisner, Sante, or Rohr with respect to the creator's hierarchical position, and he rejected both Zimmerman's emphasis on use and market demand and the Marxist Scale of Values of socialist countries. Booms questioned the propositions of others more than he offered his own blueprint for appraisal. He encouraged archivists to attempt to reflect the interests of all of society in appraisal. This position is clear in the title of his text, which was translated for *Archivaria* as "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage: Issues in the Appraisal of Archival Sources." Archives must undertake to document all of society. Booms's theory differed considerably from the elitist approach that focuses on the position within the hierarchy of the records creator. Booms was convinced that appraisal was the archivist's highest function. To perform this function, the

15 Hans-Joachim Schreckenbach, "Stand der Informationsbewertung in kapitalistischen Ländern," *Archivmitteilungen* 19, in Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage"; and Kolsrud, "The Evolution of Basic Archival Principles."

16 *Lexicon Archivwesen der DDR* (1979), in Kolsrud, "The Evolution of Basic Archival Principles," p. 33.

17 See note 4.

archivist must always strive to provide adequate evidence of the creating institution's or person's activities. This comprehensive vision of the appraisal process – which will later stimulate considerable discussion among American and Canadian archivists – led Booms to develop the following principles:

- the archivist must have a thorough knowledge of the institution and/or person who created the records;
- the contemporary nature of the appraisal – archives should appraise records by using a scale of values contemporary to the time of creation of the records; and
- the appraisal must allow the retention of the maximum of information in the minimum of documents.

Booms believed that archivists must be armed with a global approach to appraisal. He urged them never to let an appraisal be done haphazardly; appraisal must be marked by a judicious, planned, organized, and efficient choice of documents that provide evidence of all components of society. When it comes to appraisal, an archivist can no longer be that *intuitive* professional, the one that is “something of an artist ... equipped with ... passion and an intuitive confidence.”¹⁸

Booms also elaborated on the work of the historian, whom he believed should refuse to be satisfied by the resources that chance has to offer.¹⁹ Booms clearly re-situated the debate, framing appraisal issues around society as a whole, the development of societal heritage,²⁰ and the role of the archivist in the development and management of that heritage. The archivist must never

18 Meinert, “Die Aktenwertung. Versuch einer methodologischen Zusammenfassung,” *Mitteilungsblatt des Generaldirektors des (preußischen) Staatsarchivs*, in Booms, “Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage,” p. 93.

19 This very interesting reflection on the work of historians led Booms to suggest why many archivists are averse to theoretical research: “historians become good historians only as they get older; that is to say, when they attain the greatest possible variety of human experiences which may serve as the basis for their judgements.” (Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Zum Verhältnis von Geschichtswissenschaft und Psychoanalyse,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 208, in Booms, “Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage,” p. 85). Booms goes on to state that “The epistemology of hermeneutics and *verstehen* required recourse to the phenomenon of experience. Out of this grew, in general terms, an admiration at that time for ‘practical experience’, and, in particular, the view that the ‘archivist who possesses practical experience in disposal’ is best qualified to undertake appraisal. As a result, archivists and historians alike shared a timidity towards analytical activities, and, indeed, a disdain for all that was scientifically theoretical” (Ibid., p. 85). This view challenges that of many archivists who consider archival practice a technical field, rather than a discipline requiring theoretical research and the development of scholarship.

20 On the question of societal heritage, Booms's ideas can be linked to the concept of *collective memory* developed by Québec historians Jacques Mathieu and Jacques Lacoursière in *Les mémoires québécoises* (Québec, 1991).

forget the evidentiary value of archives; like Meiner, Booms set the bar very high: nothing less than the People, the State, and the Culture.²¹

Today, a few German archivists continue to explore the black box that is appraisal. Botho Brachman is revisiting the theories that emanated from the former East Germany.²² Angelika Menne-Haritz, director of the Marburg Archival School, is studying appraisal from the more theoretical perspective of research and education and tying the concept of appraisal to the application of the principle of respect des fonds.²³

The importance of the creator, the use of archives, archival science as an autonomous discipline, the use of a Marxist Scale of Values, and archives as evidence of all of society are themes that German archivists have explored while studying the question of appraisal.

Great Britain: Appraising to Destroy

The contribution of British archivists to the discussion of appraisal is unique. As stated earlier, if one was trying to sum up German and British approaches to appraisal, one could say that German archivists appraise to preserve, while, for the longest time, British archivists appraised to dispose. These countries espoused very different approaches to appraisal. And many argue that – compared to their German counterparts – British archivists failed to confront their appraisal responsibilities.²⁴

In Great Britain, the preoccupation with disposal can be seen as early as 1875, when the Deputy Keeper of the Public Record Office was given the authority to dispose of records that he believed were no longer useful. In 1877, the *Public Record Office Act* confirmed this power. It is interesting to note that the legislation excluded all records created prior to 1715; and in 1898, this date was pushed back to 1660.²⁵

21 Meinert, “Die Aktenwertung,” in Booms, “Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage,” p. 93.

22 Botho Brachman, “Theorien, Instrumentarien und Praxis der Bewertung in der ehemaligen DDR und deren kritischen Bedenken” [Theories, Methods and Practices of Appraisal in the Former DDR and Their Critical Consideration], *Archivmitteilungen*, pp. 109–13, in Kolsrud, “The Evolution of Basic Archival Principles,” p. 34.

23 Angelika Menne-Haritz, “Anforderungen der Bewertungspraxis an die archivische Theorie” [Demands of Practical Appraisal as to Archival Theories and Methods], *Archivmitteilungen* (1991), pp. 101–108, in Kolsrud, “The Evolution of Basic Archival Principles,” p. 34; Angelika Menne-Haritz, “Appraisal or Selection. Can a Content Oriented Appraisal be Harmonized with the Principle of Provenance?,” in Swedish National Archives, *The Principle of Provenance. First Stockholm Conference on Archival Theory and the Principle of Provenance 2–3 September 1993* (Stockholm, 1994), pp. 103–32.

24 Kolsrud, “The Evolution of Basic Archival Principles,” p. 35.

25 Committee on Departmental Records Report (Grigg Report) (London, 1954), in Kolsrud, “The Evolution of Basic Archival Principles,” p. 27.

Hilary Jenkinson's seminal 1922 *Manual of Archival Administration* has inspired many generations of archivists throughout the world. Jenkinson defended a surprising position on archival appraisal. German archivists dealt with it head-on, while the British seemed to leave responsibility for appraisal in the hands of the creating department. (The 1981 British government's *Wilson Report* censured this position).²⁶ Jenkinson believed that:

... for an administrative body to destroy what it no longer needs is a matter entirely within its competence and an action which future ages (even though they may find reasons to deplore it) cannot criticize as illegitimate or as affecting the status of the remaining Archives; provided always that the Administration proceeds only upon those grounds which alone it is competent to make a decision – the need of its own practical business; provided, that is, that it can refrain from thinking of itself as a body producing historical evidence.²⁷

Jenkinson was at least consistent in his view of the role of the archivist: a good *servant*, more a servant than a decision-maker, a servant of the archives he/she is entrusted to preserve, a servant of the researcher.²⁸

The 1952 Grigg Committee was given the mandate to develop a new archival appraisal method, with the ultimate goal of destroying masses of documents.²⁹ A two-step evaluation process was proposed whereby both the administrative and historical research uses of records were to be considered. During the first step – to be taken five years after the creation of a record – only the administrative value of a document was appraised. It was hoped that fifty to seventy per cent of documents could be destroyed at that point. Could these documents include records of a permanent interest? Probably. However, the objective was to destroy large quantities of documents rapidly. During the second step – to be taken twenty-five years after the first one – the historical value of the remaining records was appraised. One can see the enormous risks involved in the Grigg Committee's proposal; one can even consider this type of archival appraisal to be the birth of a counter-archival science. The archivist is asked to yield to the administrator and, as a good servant, take an interest only in the records that the administrator entrusts to him or her. By 1981, both the Wilson Report and the Keeper of Public Records recognized that the Grigg System (largely inspired by Jenkinson's appraisal ideas) was a complete failure.³⁰ British archival practice has since tackled appraisal with preservation as

26 *The Wilson Report: Modern Public Records Selection and Access* (London, 1981).

27 Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archival Administration*, p. 149.

28 *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 123.

29 The Committee on Departmental Records was created in 1952 (better known under the name of its president, Sir James Grigg). The Grigg Committee tabled its *Committee on Departmental Records Report* in 1954.

30 Kolsrud, "The Evolution of Basic Archival Principles," p. 29.

a goal, and allowing a greater role for the archivist. Unfortunately, the Wilson Report did not have as much impact on the government as the Grigg Report had enjoyed in the 1950s. This may explain the lack of British contributions to discussions of appraisal, an exception being Felix Hull's seminal 1981 RAMP study on sampling methodology.³¹

In contrast with Germany, Great Britain opted on the whole to appraise to destroy. British archivists have made very little actual contribution to the process of appraisal; this was endorsed by Jenkinson, who believed that appraisal was the responsibility of the administrator, not the archivist.

The United States: Developing Appraisal Criteria

In the 1930s, the early American government records archivists followed the lead of British appraisal practice; they considered appraisal a means to destroy documents. However in 1940, Philip C. Brooks rejected this approach in an article entitled "The Selection of Records for Preservation."³² He advanced two key ideas: the need to destroy duplicates and the importance of defining permanent value. He proposed three criteria to determine permanent value:

- the value given to records by the creating institution;
- the use that these records have for the administrative history of the institution in question; and
- the historical value of the documents.

In 1946 G. Philip Bauer proposed that the uses of records and the costs associated with their archival acquisition and preservation also be considered among appraisal criteria.³³ He defined four types of use:

- use by government institutions
- use for the protection of citizens' rights;
- use for *serious* research³⁴; and
- use to satisfy the curiosity of genealogists or scholars.

Bauer also proposed three criteria for determining usefulness:

31 Felix Hull, *The Use of Sampling Techniques in the Retention of Records: A RAMP Study with Guidelines* (Paris, 1981).

32 Philip C. Brooks, "The Selection of Records for Preservation," *American Archivist* 3, no. 4 (1940), pp. 221–34.

33 G. Philip Bauer, *The Appraisal of Current and Recent Records* (Washington, DC, 1946).

34 We recognize that this is a somewhat elitist categorization of archival researchers. This type of value judgement can often be found in the archival writings of European and North American writers on the subject of accessibility.

- the characteristics and quantitative importance of the information found in the documents³⁵;
- the relevance of their arrangement³⁶; and
- the density and the qualitative importance of the contents.

By the 1960s, Theodore R. Schellenberg was developing his reputation as an authority on archival appraisal through studies such as *Modern Archives. Principles and Techniques* and *Management of Archives*. Schellenberg made a pivotal contribution to the development of contemporary archival science, including appraisal.³⁷ He contributed two universally-accepted core appraisal concepts: primary value and secondary value.³⁸ Schellenberg saw primary value as the legal, financial, and administrative value of documents; as for secondary value, he said it had two components: value as proof in the historical sense of the term “evidential value” and research value (informational value). Documents that have evidential value are records that contain information about:

- the hierarchical position of the unit in question;
- the unit’s function within the institution;
- and the activities inherent in the function.

We must conclude from Schellenberg’s work that documents exhibiting evidential value are essential for the administrative history of an institution – a concept advanced earlier by Brook.

35 German writer Fritz Zimmerman advanced the same concept in 1958. See Fritz W. Zimmerman, “Wesen und Ermittlung des Archivwertes,” in Kolsrud, “The Evolution of Basic Archival Principles.”

36 This point recognizes the essential relationship between the physical organization of archives and their ability to offer evidence. (It is the link between arrangement and respect des fonds.)

37 Theodore R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives. Principles and Techniques* (Chicago, 1964) and *Management of Archives* (New York, 1965). It is important to note that Brooks, Bauer, and Schellenberg share a governmental perspective on archival science. Their works strongly reflect the fact that all three were employed by the American federal government.

38 The concepts of primary and secondary value are used by archivists in many countries. They are defined in this way:

- Primary value: quality inherent in each document produced or received by a person or corporate body in the exercise of their function for administrative, legal, financial, or probational use in order to decide, act upon, and monitor decisions and actions taken. The primary value of documents is closely linked to the reasons that justify their creation, their existence, and their use.
- Secondary value: quality inherent to certain documents based on their secondary or scholarly use as well as on their inherent privileged, authentic, and objective evidential or informational characteristics.

See Jean-Yves Rousseau and Carol Couture, *Les fondements de la discipline archivistique* (Québec, 1994), pp. 293–94.

On the other hand, records exhibiting research value are those documents that convey understanding of persons, things, and important events. This importance is linked to the uniqueness and richness of the information they contain as well as to the number and diversity of their users.

The Society of American Archivists (SAA) made a noteworthy contribution to appraisal thinking in the 1970s. It sponsored the publication of a series of manuals on the various archival functions, including one on appraisal written by Maynard J. Brichford. It advanced four fundamental considerations to guide archival appraisal:

- document characteristics (age, volume, form, characteristics linked to function, to proof, and to information);
- administrative values (Schellenberg's primary value: legal, financial, and administrative);
- research values (uniqueness, credibility, readability, age, material accessibility, and frequency, type and quality of use); and
- archival values (links among documents, and preservation and storage costs as introduced by Bauer in 1946).³⁹

Brichford highlighted the particularities of the principles advanced by Brooks, Bauer, and Schellenberg: all three authors reflected a federal government point of view. On the other hand, Brichford discussed other ways to tackle appraisal issues reflecting the diversity of the American archival community.

In 1975, Gerald Ham provoked an outcry when he asked: "... But why must we do it [appraisal] so badly?"⁴⁰ Ham stressed the relationship between appraisal and acquisition and emphasized the importance of developing institutional, regional, and national acquisition policies, which he considered as critical elements in appraisal. As we shall see, by the 1990s Helen Samuels had developed this vision of co-operative, inter-institutional appraisal further through her concept of documentation strategy.

By the mid-1980s, a number of American archivists (Jutta Reed-Scott and Faye Phillips⁴¹ among them) were applying library science criteria for collection development to appraisal problems, with varying degrees of success.

Joan K. Hass, Helen Samuels, and Barbara Simmons took archival science one step further. In a 1985 survey on archival appraisal in the science and

39 Maynard J. Brichford et al., *Archives and Manuscripts: Appraisal and Accessioning* (Chicago, 1977), pp. 221–34.

40 Gerald F. Ham, "The Archival Edge," *American Archivist* 38, no. 1 (1975), p. 5.

41 Jutta Reed-Scott, "Collection Management Strategies for Archivists," *American Archivist* 47, no. 1 (1984), pp. 23–29; Faye Phillips, "Developing Collecting Policies for Manuscript Collections," *American Archivist* 47, no. 1 (1984), pp. 39–42.

technology field,⁴² the authors determined that archivists must widen their scope when performing appraisal: "... archivists need to understand that the nature of scientific and technological process [other sectors of technology could be considered here] and the complex patterns of communication and funding affect the existence and location of records."⁴³ This is the concept of *documentation strategy*. In 1986, Helen Samuels expanded on this concept by establishing a clear relationship between archival acquisition and archival appraisal.⁴⁴

David Bearman shook the profession next. His ideas have always been provocative: in 1989 he sought to trigger debate by proposing an approach to appraisal that called for use of *risk management* techniques.⁴⁵

Like other Americans discussed above, Frank Boles and Julia Marks Young drew upon European and North American experience⁴⁶ to publish an important contribution to archival appraisal in 1991.⁴⁷ They reviewed previous appraisal criteria⁴⁸ and developed a possibly definitive appraisal theory, which was tested in work performed by archivists in fifteen different archival repositories.⁴⁹ According to Boles and Young a great deal has been said (possibly too much) on appraisal without sufficient empirical study. Once they identify existing appraisal criteria, Boles and Young structure them into three modules:

- those criteria linked to informational value (nineteen criteria)⁵⁰;
- those criteria linked to the costs of preservation (five criteria)⁵¹; and

42 The study was conducted in the science and technology fields because the authors were examining the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The ideas proposed, however, are relevant beyond MIT and can be applied to the majority of archival repositories.

43 Joan K. Hass, Helen Willa Samuels, and Barbara T. Simmons, *Appraising the Records of Modern Science and Technology: A Guide* (Cambridge, MA, 1985), p. 23.

44 Helen Willa Samuels, "Selecting from the Past for the Future: Towards a Strategy for Historical Documentation," in *Proceedings of the Society of Southwest Archivists Meeting* (San Antonio, 1986), pp. 8–13; "Who Controls the Past?," *American Archivist* 49, no. 2, pp. 109–24.

45 David Bearman, "Archival Methods," *Archives and Museum Informatics Technical Reports* 3 (1989), pp. 6–16.

46 Frank Boles and Julia Marks Young, "Exploring the Black Box: The Appraisal of University Administrative Records," *American Archivist* 48, no. 1, pp. 121–40; Frank Boles, "Mix Two Parts Interest and One Part Information and Appraise Until Done: Understanding Contemporary Record Selection," *American Archivist* 50, no. 3, pp. 356–68.

47 Frank Boles and Julia Marks Young, *Archival Appraisal* (New York, 1991).

48 The text presents all of the criteria and observations on archival appraisal presented by American archivists up to 1991.

49 Five types of archival institutions are represented in the study: university and college archives, government archives, religious archives, business archives, and private archives. Archivists with appraisal experience were asked to use the model proposed by Boles and Young in appraisal activities.

50 Boles and Young, *Archival Appraisal*, pp. 29–53.

51 *Ibid.*, pp. 54–67.

- those criteria linked to the consequences of an appraisal decision (six criteria).⁵²

The article proposes an appraisal model based on these thirty criteria. Although such a large number of criteria can be difficult to implement and manage, Boles and Young met their objective of developing a set of appraisal criteria and testing the proposed model.

The United States has played an important role in the field of archival appraisal. American archivists have explored the reflections of European archivists, elaborated new criteria and innovative ways to look at appraisal, and, in the work of Boles and Young, have synthesized this thinking.

Canada: Considering the Context of Creation as Essential to Appraisal

The (then) National Archives of Canada (NA) was one of the first institutions to turn its attention to appraisal.⁵³ Until the mid-1980s, the NA practised a wait-and-see policy on appraisal questions, content to react to disposal requests submitted by government departments and agencies. The National Archivist was entitled to review all records disposition, a right conferred by Cabinet in 1966. The 1987 *National Archives of Canada Act*⁵⁴ propelled the NA to the forefront in matters of appraisal by giving it a more pro-active role in this function. The NA thereupon devised a ranking of federal government institutions to use in appraising their records – *from the top down*.⁵⁵

Since the 1980s, the archival literature in Canada illustrates the great inter-

52 Ibid., pp. 67–74.

53 The chronology in Canada on matters of appraisal (for the records of the federal government) is the following:

- 1914: no destruction of documents may occur without Treasury Board approval;
- 1945: creation of an interdepartmental committee responsible for approving, along with Treasury Board, the disposal of government records;
- 1961: the interdepartmental committee assumes sole responsibility for the mandate of approving disposal; each government department is required to establish a retention schedule;
- 1966: under a Cabinet directive, the federal archivist assumes responsibility for the co-ordination and management of the disposal and preservation of public documents;
- 1987: adoption of a new law on archives whereby the appraisal of documents becomes the purview of the NA.

See Marcel Caya et al., *Les archives canadiennes en 1992* (Ottawa, 1992).

54 The reader should consult André Frenière, “La législation relative à la gestion des documents administratifs et des archives au Québec,” *Archives* 24, nos. 1–2, pp. 65–88. The article describes archival legislation and regulations governing archives in Canada and Québec.

55 National Archives of Canada, *Government Plan for the Disposal of Records 1991–1996* (Ottawa, 1991); Jean-Pierre Wallot, “Building a Living Memory for the History of our Present: New Perspectives on Archival Appraisal,” paper delivered at the Canadian Historical Association Annual Meeting, Kingston, 5 June 1991.

est Canadian archivists have developed in archival appraisal.⁵⁶ The NA's Terry Cook, in particular, promoted a revolutionary approach to appraisal; the phrase "mind over matter" in the title of his first major article on appraisal reflects this new approach.⁵⁷ Cook advances "macro-appraisal": appraising creator institutions before appraising their documents. Both then National Archivist Jean-Pierre Wallot⁵⁸ and Cook⁵⁹ explained this approach on numerous occasions. Macro-appraisal has roots in German archival thinking at the turn of the twentieth century. This strategy, however, was not accepted by all Canadian archivists. An analysis of other major Canadian writings on appraisal reveals alternate methods of addressing it.

For example, Terry Eastwood, professor of archival science at the University of British Columbia (UBC), insisted on the need to base an appraisal on the use of archives. This approach was shared by numerous European and American authors.⁶⁰

Hugh Taylor also participated in the development of appraisal *à la canadienne* in revisiting Booms's proposal of expanding the context of appraisal to ensure the inclusion of all the components of society and its evolution. Taylor

56 This growing concern has framed and prompted seminal discussions of appraisal at annual meetings, seminars, and workshops. The Association of British Columbia Archivists (AABC) and the Northwest Archivists Association (NAA) held a joint annual meeting in 1990 where for three days archivists discussed appraisal. (See AABC and NAA, "Archival Appraisal: Theory and Practice: Proceedings of the Joint Meeting of the Association of British Columbia Archivists and the Northwest Archivists Association," Vancouver, 26–28 April, 1990.) The Archives nationales du Québec undertook an important study of the appraisal of legal archives which culminated in the publication of a voluminous report: Ministère des Affaires culturelles/Ministère de la Justice, *Rapport du Comité interministériel sur les archives judiciaires* (Québec, 1989), 2 vols. Elsewhere, the Association des Archivistes du Québec's journal *Archives* dedicated a 1991 special issue to the subject of appraisal, including a retrospective bibliography on legal archives dating from 1931 to 1990 (vol. 22, no. 4 [Summer 1991]). In addition, Université Laval held a seminar on archival values in 1993 (published in 1994 under the title *Les valeurs archivistiques*). And the Groupe interdisciplinaire de recherche en archivistique (GIRA) tackled the question of appraisal during a symposium in 1994. See GIRA, *La mission de l'archiviste dans la société*, 2^{ième} Symposium, Université de Montréal, 8–9 April 1994.

57 For example, see 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.

58 Wallot, "Building a Living Memory for the History of our Present."

59 Terry Cook, "Conserver ou détruire: comment évaluer les milliards de documents du gouvernement fédéral [canadien]," *L'Archiviste* 13, no. 2, pp. 1–4; "Appraisal in the Information Age: A Canadian Commentary," in David Bearman, ed., *Archival Management of Electronic Records, Archives and Museum Informatics Technical Report #13* (Pittsburgh, 1991), pp. 50–56; "Many are Called but Few are Chosen," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991), pp. 25–50; *The Archival Appraisal of Records Containing Personal Information: A RAMP Study with Guidelines* (Paris, 1991); "Mind over Matter."

60 Eastwood, "Towards a Social Theory of Appraisal," and "How Goes It with Appraisal?."

reminded Canadian archivists that one must consider that the objectives of appraisal range from the disposal of records of short-term value (Great Britain) to the preservation of records of permanent value (Germany).⁶¹

Must we reject one in favour of the other? Should we not attempt to make these objectives complementary?

For their part, archivists in Québec explored their own avenues. The province⁶² adopted archives legislation in 1983; the law decreed that retention schedules were a priority function.⁶³ Henceforth, all public institutions were to appraise all the records they create in the exercise of their functions; the archivist's role with public institutions focuses essentially on appraisal.⁶⁴ Consequently, archival education programs in Québec universities⁶⁵ emphasize retention schedules and analysis of the issues surrounding archival appraisal. They prepare future professionals to perform appraisal effectively.⁶⁶ Archival science in Québec integrates administrative and heritage concerns, which means that in appraisal a firm relationship between the primary and secondary value of archives exists. A series of administrative policies and regulations followed the 1983 law, providing a framework for archival appraisal in the

61 Hugh A. Taylor, "The Totemic Universe: Appraising the Documentary Future," in AABC and NAA, *Archival Appraisal*, pp. 15–29.

62 In keeping with our Canadian focus, we have chosen to concentrate on Québec as it is the province with which the author is most familiar. The author was involved in a worldwide study (1989–1991) of legislation and national archives policies (see Carol Couture and Marcel Lajeunesse, *Législations et politiques archivistiques dans le monde* [Québec, 1992]). We were able to ascertain that Québec has a comprehensive archival policy within which appraisal plays a primary role. For a synopsis of the evolution of archival science in Québec, we recommend Louise Gagnon-Arguin, *L'archivistique. Son histoire, ses acteurs depuis 1960* (Québec, 1992).

63 Frenière, "La législation relative à la gestion des documents administratifs," and Victoria Lemieux, "Archival Solitudes: The Impact on Appraisal and Acquisition of Legislative Concepts of Records and Archives," *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993), pp. 153–61.

64 Carol Couture and Jean-Yves Rousseau, *Les archives au XX^e siècle: une réponse aux besoins de l'administration et de la recherche* (Montréal, 1982), pp. 80–96; Michel Roberge, *La gestion des documents administratifs* (Québec, 1983), pp. 31–34, 109–116, 185–95 (in 1992 this work was re-published under the title: *La gestion de l'information administrative. Application globale, systémique et systématique*); Archives nationales du Québec, *Guide d'élaboration et de présentation d'un calendrier de conservation des documents* (Québec, 1992).

65 Three comprehensive archival programs have been created since 1983 in universities in Québec: Université de Montréal, Université du Québec à Montréal, and Université Laval in Quebec City.

66 The 1993 seminar organized by the Université Laval is a good example of the importance given to the question in the province. Seminar topics examined the various theoretical and practical aspects of values that archives reflect. The quality of presentations is responsible for the strides made in the province in archival appraisal discourse. See *Les valeurs archivistiques. Théorie et pratique*, Actes du colloque organisé conjointement par la Division des archives et les Programmes d'archivistique de l'Université Laval, 11 November 1993 (Québec, 1994).

public sector.⁶⁷ In addition, to avoid overly theoretical or disconnected appraisals, and ones marginal to the administrative needs of an organization, archivists in Québec have established a relationship between appraisal and needs assessment.⁶⁸ A needs assessment helps enhance an archivist's knowledge of an institution and its records prior to performing an appraisal. The relationship between needs assessment and appraisal seems essential, insofar as it reconciles macro-appraisal and micro-appraisal. These two concepts would normally be considered contradictory, yet they are two parts of the whole: appraisal. Macro-appraisal is found in the needs assessment – appraisal of the institution and knowledge of the context of creation – that an archivist must perform prior to proceeding to other functions. Micro-appraisal – the appraisal of documents – consists of the subsequent completion of a retention schedule.

The most notable trends in Canada can be summarized as:

- those proper to the National Archives of Canada: macro-appraisal, based on the appraisal of the institution (the context of creation) that precedes the appraisal of its documents (from the top down);
- those that support the use of archives as a primary consideration for appraising documents;
- those that support the importance of providing evidence of the whole of society; and
- those proper to Québec that insist on the essential role of a retention schedule, closely and necessarily tied to a needs assessment.

The originality and value of Canadian thinking lies in its ability to synthesize a range of methods (European and American), to nuance apparently contradictory positions, and to put into practice and experiment with proposed models.

Terry Cook,⁶⁹ for example, emphasizes assessing the creator first – to establish an order of priority in the appraisal process. This sheds light on an impor-

67 The following regulations and policies were established in Québec:

- 1985: regulation on retention schedules, transfers, deposit, and disposal of public archives;
- 1985: policy on the management of current records;
- 1988: policy on the management of semi-active records; and
- 1991: policy on the management of dormant records.

68 “Needs assessment” as applied to archives is defined as: “A management tool that enables the following: a focus on the activities and archival documents generated by an organization; an analysis of a situation; a diagnosis of the problems; the creation of an archival processing program (or an element of it); and the quick design of certain elements such as a retention schedule, the basic arrangements of documents ... as well as the official or uniform arrangement summary of documents.” See Rousseau and Couture, *Les fondements de la discipline archivistique*, p. 279.

69 Cook, “Mind Over Matter.”

tant point: a better understanding of an institution does not mean that the value of documents is necessarily related to the status of the institution that created them in the administrative hierarchy. Rather, this institutional knowledge helps the archivist prioritize institutions as the basis of appraisal planning. If the various ministries and agencies of government have been well analyzed, one can proceed to establish an order of priority. One can then appraise the documents of the first department or agency, then those of the one second on the list, etc. There is an important difference between this approach – characterized by prioritization – and the German approach popular at the turn of the twentieth century, which prejudged the value of documents based on the hierarchical position of the institution.

Terry Eastwood brings another interesting perspective to the “use” approach. Zimmerman saw the possible future use of documents as the determining factor in appraisal. Americans Brooks and Bauer also included future use in the factors to consider. Eastwood’s approach to use is important: why try to predict the future use of archives? Time is better spent on understanding immediate use – at the moment of creation, as archives provide evidence of that moment.⁷⁰ This approach is similar to the one advanced by Eastwood’s UBC colleague, Luciana Duranti, who believes that it is important to appraise using a scale of values contemporary to the period when the documents were created.

Best appraisal decisions are not those based on an educated guess of research interests or potential legal value. Over time, they have been those guided by knowledge of the intellectual, juridical and ideological essence of the society creating the records, by careful analysis, and by professional competence; that is, those based on the standards of the society which created the records for whose sake and permanence records are preserved.⁷¹

The Canadian contribution to archival appraisal is one of synthesis and nuance. It is mostly inspired by established European and American positions. It is marked by assessment of the institution creating the documents, the uses of archives, the value inherent in archives, and of how evidence of all of society may be protected. The Canadian contribution is also characterized by the implementation of the ideas proposed. Canadian archivists are not content simply to discuss the subject of appraisal. They put into practice and test their ideas.

Archival appraisal is a complex topic. Archivists in several countries have tackled many of its aspects. Can we identify a few principles in their work?

70 Eastwood, “Towards a Social Theory of Appraisal” and “How Goes It with Appraisal?”

71 Luciana Duranti, “So? What Else is New? The Ideology of Appraising Yesterday and Today,” in AABC and NAA, *Archival Appraisal*, p. 13.

The second part of this article will attempt to do so. To reiterate: the article's objective is not to offer definitive principles to guide appraisal, but to launch discussion and debate on the ideas presented in the appraisal literature.

Principles Governing Archival Appraisal

Appraisal as Part of an Archivist's Role

The Groupe interdisciplinaire de recherche en archivistique (GIRA) held its second symposium in 1994, where the subject was the archivist's role in society. Speakers and participants were invited to reflect upon the archivist's role in relation to the theoretical, practical, and managerial aspects of archival functions. Appraisal was one of the topics discussed. Archivists emphasized the highly significant nature of appraisal as a component of an archivist's role. Jacques Grimard offered the following summary of the discussion of appraisal: "we are builders, guardians and communicators of organic and recorded information and ... in this way we participate in the management of the world's memory."⁷² Grimard proposed that there are three aspects of the contemporary role of an archivist: developing, preserving, and communicating memory.⁷³ We understand how appraisal is a part of collection development (choosing what will constitute memory) and of preservation (choosing what will be preserved). The evolution of the discipline of archival science has led to the inclusion of appraisal as an integral part of the role of an archivist. But what exactly is that role?

Archival science has traditionally focussed on the preservation of material entrusted to archivists. The archivist was content to guarantee the preservation of archival documents – no more, no less. An archivist essentially performed *practical archiving* as defined by Angelika Menne-Haritz: we preserved documents solely on the basis of their legal usefulness. Decisions to preserve or dispose of documents were not influenced by relevant archival principles or methods.⁷⁴ The archivist's role was limited to passive, *instrumental*, and physical preservation – and the meaning given to the word "preservation" was much narrower than today. Essentially, the archivist was expected to be the guardian (keeper), a *conservator*; in fact, an archivist's title often reflected these notions.

By the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, archival science

72 Jacques Grimard, "Synthèse et commentaires sur les séances IV et V," in GIRA, *La mission de l'archiviste dans la société*, p. 235.

73 Ibid., pp. 236–40.

74 Angelika Menne-Haritz, "Formation en archivistique: pour répondre aux besoins de la société du XXI^e siècle," p. 7. Third Plenary Session, Main Speaker, at the XII^e Congrès international des archives, Montréal, 1992, "La profession d'archiviste à l'ère de l'information." This article originally appeared in German.

was an auxiliary branch of history. The situation changed as society became more demanding of the profession: archival science widened the concept of preservation to encompass appraisal, expanding the range of decision-making in which the archivist was required to participate. The archivist came to be acknowledged as an expert in developing retention schedules and instructions for preservation. Archival science took on a new pro-active role in appraising for long-term preservation, rather than a passive, wait-and-see role in the preservation of records confided to the archivist's care. Society continued to give the archivist responsibility for preservation decisions and the scope of this role grew considerably over the years. Today, preservation includes appraisal and all that is associated with it. Appraisal is recognized as an essential step in well-planned preservation. It has become a specialization within our discipline. It involves irreversible decisions, indispensable to the smooth operation of society and the proper management of its collective heritage. Some even believe that the most challenging decisions for an archivist are those related to appraisal.⁷⁵ No doubt, the theoretical and practical aspects of appraisal will be the nerve centre of the archival mission in the twenty-first century. It is therefore appropriate to consider appraisal to be essential to the archivist's role. An archivist's proper appraisal of archives ensures that society does not leave the protection of an important part of its documentary heritage to chance.⁷⁶ Appraisal ensures the "perpetuation of our documentary heritage."⁷⁷ The archivist occupies as a consequence the role that society expects: to participate in the establishment of the world's memory.⁷⁸

Archival Appraisal Principles

We can now see five basic appraisal principles emerging. These can be applied whenever an archivist is called upon to conduct an appraisal. They call on the archivist to ensure that:

- the records provide evidence of the activities of society as a whole;
- the judgement is objective, and reflects values contemporary to the records;
- the links between appraisal and other archival functions are respected;
- there is a balance between administrative and heritage objectives; and
- there is a balance between considerations relative to the context of creation and considerations linked to the use of records.

75 Ibid., pp. 12–13.

76 Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage."

77 Denis Gagnon, "L'archiviste et la préservation du patrimoine audiovisuel," in GIRA, *La mission de l'archiviste dans la société*, p. 219.

78 Jean-Louis Roy, "Gérer la mémoire du monde," *Archivum* XXXIX (1992), Conférence inaugurale du XII^e Congrès international des archives, *Actes du XII^e Congrès international des archives*, pp. 83–95.

Archives: Privileged Proof of the Activities of Society as a Whole

We agree with the appraisal reflections and objectives as set out by Hans Booms, Hugh Taylor, and many others: archivists must ensure that regardless of the context, period, persons, corporate body, or regions concerned, appraisal must always preserve evidence – in the juridical and/or archival sense of the word – that the person or corporate body in question did in fact undertake such an act, activity, transaction, etc.⁷⁹ One can quickly recognize the implications of applying this first principle. Whether appraising the archives of a person or a corporate body, the archivist's judgement must incorporate a social dimension. The principal questions can be expressed in the following way: do the records to be appraised provide evidence of the administrative, legal, financial, or heritage activities of the person or corporate body and for how long? Do these same records allow an understanding of the role played by this person or corporate body in society? The decision to preserve (for primary and/or secondary value) or to destroy depends on the answers to these questions. Lastly, the archives preserved to constitute the documentary heritage of the person or corporate body in question, as well as offering evidence of their activities, must present a fair picture of the entire society to which they belong. This is one of the basic objectives of appraisal.

Respecting Objectivity and Contemporary Values in the Decision

Luciana Duranti maintains that appraisal acts are always significantly affected by subjectivity; each appraisal occurs within a particular social context which imposes its values. Thus judgements are never objective.⁸⁰ It is virtually impossible to achieve even a semblance of objectivity. This limitation affects all professions or disciplines; all are influenced by the context in which they live and their vision of the world. Even so, we believe that we can still aim for a relative objectivity, while remaining fully aware that complete objectivity can never be obtained.

In addition to being *as objective as possible*, an archivist's judgements must rely on a scale of values reflective of those contemporary with the records in question.

In constructing the conceptual grid of history which will serve as a model for the documentary heritage, archivists must not follow the value concepts of their own time period, but rather, those of the time from which the material originated.⁸¹

79 Hans Booms, "Gesellschaftsordnung und Überlieferungsbildung: Zur Problematik Archivarischer Quellenbewertung," *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 68, pp. 3–40; "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage"; Taylor, "The Totemic Universe."

80 Duranti, "So? What Else is New?"

81 Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage," p. 104.

Best appraisal decisions are not those based on an educated guess of research interests or potential legal value. Over time, they have been those guided by knowledge of the intellectual, juridical, and ideological essence of the society creating the records, by careful analysis, and by professional competence, that is, those based on the standards of the society which created the records and for whose sake and permanence records are preserved.⁸²

The appraisal of the documents of a person or corporate body from the beginning of the twentieth century should be done in accordance with the values in place at that time in the fields of interest of this person or corporate body; after all, it is their society that we are trying to document. Many authors agree on this point. If we are to offer the best evidence possible of the activities of a person or corporate body, we must appraise their records by using the values that were in place at the time of their creation. This principle – along with objectivity – would appear to ensure an unmistakable guarantee of the validity and the value of evidence.

Respecting the Relationship between Appraisal and Other Archival Functions

We agree with Wallot⁸³ and Taylor, who advocate a global approach to appraisal: “This kind of approach would seem to be more appropriate to an age which is moving away from fragmentation and reductionism through personal decision to a more holistic ... involvement in the preservation of vital sources of information.”⁸⁴

It is important that a close relationship exist between appraisal and other archival activities. American archivists, for example, have already established one between appraisal and acquisition.⁸⁵ Appraisal and needs assessment should also be linked so that appraisal better reflects the objectives, activities, and records of an organization. Many authors think that an appraisal should consider the context of the creation of the records and that an archivist should have a comprehensive knowledge of the person or organization in question, including precise knowledge of the creator’s functional characteristics and

82 Duranti, “So? What Else is New?,” p. 13.

83 Wallot, “Building a Living Memory for the History of our Present,” p. 276.

84 Taylor, “The Totemic Universe,” p. 25.

85 Ham, “The Archival Edge”; “Archival Choices: Managing the Historical Record in an Age of Abundance,” *American Archivist* 47, no. 1, pp. 11–22; Hass, Samuels, and Simmons, *Appraising the Records of Modern Science and Technology*; Samuels, “Selecting from the Past for the Future”; “Who Controls the Past?”; *Varsity Letters. Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (Metuchen, NJ and London, 1992); Boles, “Mix Two Parts Interest to One Part Information and Appraise Until Done.”

modes of communication.⁸⁶ It should be a guiding principle of appraisal that this contextual knowledge should be employed; this can be achieved through the close links that should unite appraisal and other archival activities.

Respecting the Balance between the Administrative and Heritage Objectives of Appraisal

The basis for archival appraisal theory is the clear distinction between primary purposes, which cause the records to be created, and secondary purposes, which help determine whether they will be preserved – in an archival repository or by the creating institution itself. Records are not created for posterity.⁸⁷

It is important to distinguish between the primary and secondary objectives of archival documents in order to balance them later. In this light, appraising institutional records means judging the essential value of records for the administration of institutions and for the development of the collective heritage.⁸⁸ An appraisal has a two-pronged impact on a corporate body: administrative impacts, which result from the retention of business records (current documents) and of intermediate records (semi-current documents), and cultural impacts, which result from the decision to permanently preserve records or destroy them. Archival appraisal discourse has focussed on cultural priorities which concern what constitutes cultural heritage and, thus, what should be preserved. We have not sufficiently emphasized the impact of appraisal on administrative concerns. What must be preserved as administrative, legal, or financial evidence? And how long should these particular documents be preserved? This aspect of appraisal must be considered and balanced with the heritage dimension. By addressing both aspects, the archivist will achieve two important objectives. First, he or she will travel towards the beginning of the life cycle of a document and will be in a position to exercise their judgement at an early point; the archivist can benefit from the possibilities offered by actively participating in the creation of institutional heritage rather than doing so after the fact. Second, the archivist actively serves the institution by helping it evaluate, for business purposes, the information it generates. Make no mistake – if the archivist does not do it, no one else will. Respecting the balance between management and heritage removes the limits placed upon archival practice by Jenkinson, who opposed this form of archival intervention; he did not believe that archivists had the necessary skills and objectivity to judge the primary value of documents.

86 Hass, Samuels, and Simmons, *Appraising the Records of Modern Science and Technology*, p. 23.

87 Menne-Haritz, "Appraisal or Selection."

88 It is important to qualify this statement with respect to personal archives. The appraisal may not necessarily relate to administrative matters, but to the details of the individual's life and personal or family background.

Respecting the Balance in Appraisal Between Consideration of the Context of Creation of Records and Their Uses

Appraisal principles should also emphasize another balance: between consideration of the origin or the context of creation of the records, as the sole factor in archival appraisal, and the use of archives, which is the appraisal panacea for others. There must be a middle ground where archivists can employ both these tools. We are convinced that such a compromise is possible and that it can result in a successful appraisal, or one that considers the two essential ingredients in archival planning: the context of creation of documents and their business and research use. This balance can only be realized when the privileged relationship between context of creation and the principle of respect des fonds is honoured, a relationship that has been expertly outlined by Menne-Haritz.⁸⁹

Conclusion

Appraisal is the noblest function, the central core of contemporary archival practice. It requires highly scholarly preparation and demands a rare judgement from specialists. Appraisal has engaged archivists from many countries and continues to draw considerable attention. In short, the act of judging the value of archival documents is a great challenge for professionals in the archival discipline:

... we must keep the capacity and the competence of appraisal in our profession. If we consider appraisal much too difficult a job, if we let the administrations themselves choose what should be preserved, as Sir Hilary Jenkinson proposed full of fear of archivists' incapacity to make impartial decisions, we will be reduced to mere record-keepers, who are told by others what they have to do.⁹⁰

We support strengthening the theory and practice of archival appraisal. This will ensure that the archivist is a key player in the constitution and management of the *world's memory*. We must avoid overly pessimistic judgements on our appraisal skills. Instead, let us recognize the established groundwork, and make use of the studies undertaken to date, to establish guiding principles in appraisal and pursue innovative research. This is the new scholarly challenge faced by the archival discipline.

89 Menne-Haritz, "Appraisal or Selection."

90 Ibid., p. 125.

