

Research Article

The Concept of Appraisal and Archival Theory

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Abstract: In the last decade, appraisal has become one of the central topics of archival literature. However, the approach to appraisal issues has been primarily methodological and practical. This article discusses the theoretical implications of appraisal as attribution of value to archives, and it bases its argument on the nature of archival material as defined by traditional archival theory.

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Appraisal is the process of establishing the value of documents made or received in the course of the conduct of affairs, qualifying that value, and determining its duration. The primary objective of appraisal is to identify the documents to be continuously preserved for an unlimited period of time. The identification may target either documents within an archives (i.e., the whole of the documents made or received by one person or organization while carrying out its activities), or archives among archives. In the former case, we have appraisal for selection. In the latter case, we have appraisal for acquisition.

Because the ultimate goal of appraisal is to add to the holdings of an archival institution or program, it might be said that appraisal, whether conducted within an archives or among archives, is one of the means for accomplishing the archival function of acquisition, and the present archival discourse might be directed toward the concept of acquisition in archival theory. However, this would circumvent the fundamental issue that needs to be explored: the theoretical validity of the concept of appraisal within archival science.

It is evident from the archival literature of the last decade that appraisal has gradually grown in the mind of many archival writers from being a means to an end to being the core of all archival endeavors.¹ However, this development has not been

preceded by an exploration of the concept of appraisal in the context of archival theory, but only by a continuous reiteration of its necessary centrality to archival work in modern times, as if the repetition of a statement made it true and the necessity of an activity made it legitimate. And it has to be emphasized that the activity in question is attribution of value to archival material, not selection or acquisition of archival material.

Beginning with Friedrich Meinecke at the turn of the century in Germany, Phillip Brooks in the 1940s in the United States, the Grigg Committee in the 1950s in England, and Terry Cook in the 1990s in Canada, an ever-growing body of archival literature has wrestled with the identification of taxonomies of values and the formulation of methods for attributing them.² This body of literature has also contributed a number of ideas that, in all those countries, have become characteristically associated with the concept of appraisal: that appraisal must be impartial (not partial to any type of user), objective (not influenced by the personal outlook and interests of the individual carrying it out), and professional

¹It would be too long to cite here all the writings of the last decade that have focused on appraisal. For a substantial bibliography and a critical discussion of both European and North American works, see Rick Klumpenhower, "Value Concepts in Archival Science," unpublished Master of Archival Studies thesis, University of British Columbia, 1988; Jane Turner, "A Study of the Theory of Appraisal for Selection," unpublished Master of Archival Studies thesis, University of British Columbia, 1992; Terry Cook, "Mind over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal," in *The Archival Imagination. Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor*, edited by Barbara L. Craig (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1992), 60–69. Also, the issues of *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–92) and 34 (Summer 1992) contain a large number of articles on appraisal.

²See Hans Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage: Issues in the Appraisal of Archival Sources," *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987): 84; Phillip C. Brooks, "The Selection of Records for Preservation," *American Archivist* (1940): 221–34; United Kingdom, Committee on Departmental Records, *Report*, by Sir James Grigg, Chair, Cmnd. 8531 (London: HMSO, 1954); Terry Cook, *The Archival Appraisal of Records Containing Personal Information: A RAMP Study with Guidelines* (Paris: UNESCO, 1991). The reason only four countries are mentioned here is that no other Western country's archival literature has dealt specifically with appraisal, for conceptual reasons that will be discussed later in this article. Australia should be singled out from this silent group however, because its absence from the body of literature on appraisal is based not on theoretical conceptions but on the adoption of the methods articulated in the American literature. The volume *Keeping Data: Papers from a Workshop on Appraising Computer-Based Records*, edited by Barbara Reed and David Roberts (Sydney: Australian Council of Archives, 1991), is a notable exception, also because it represents an attempt to question the American way and to revisit traditional British ideas.

(the ultimate responsibility for it must be the archivist's); it must be based on knowledge derived from analysis; and it must be aimed at providing the complete picture of society.³ However, on the one hand, the proliferation of writings in the countries mentioned above has as a counterpart a quasi-complete silence on the subject in all the other Western countries, and, on the other hand, the feverish discussion that has animated the archival literature in North America, Germany, and England seems to have suddenly reached an impasse. In the latter case, the values have been defined, the methods for attributing them have been articulated in a number of different ways, contrasts between opposite approaches (provenance versus pertinence, top-down versus bottom up⁴) have repeatedly been demonstrated and compromises attempted, and in some places institutional implementations are on their way, while in others life goes on as usual. All that could be said seems to have been said, and the ideas formulated seem unable to produce new ideas or to regenerate themselves. The proverbial dust is starting to settle on the appraisal question, leaving archival science practically unchanged.

When it happened, the rising of appraisal to stardom on the archival scene seemed to

be the real "paradigm shift" in archival science, a development that was going to leave behind for good the old world of archives and all those who remained associated with it. Has this paradigm shift reached a dead end, and showed itself to be just a "historical shunt"?⁵ In other words, should appraisal be made an integral and necessary component of archival science and, as such, determine a revision of all its accepted methods and practices? The answer to this question depends on the answer to another more fundamental question: What is the relationship between the concept of appraisal as attribution of value and archival theory?

The Foundation of Archival Theory

Archival theory is the whole of the ideas about what archival material is, whereas archival methodology is the whole of the ideas about how to treat it. Archival practice is the use that archivists make of both theoretical and methodological ideas in their work.⁶ As mentioned earlier, appraisal has been examined within archival science at the methodological and practical levels. To examine the concept at the theoretical level, it is necessary to confront it with the ideas about the nature of archival material

³From a study of the appraisal literature, it is easy to identify impartiality and objectivity as the English contribution to the general discourse, professionalism and analysis as the American contribution, and the completeness of the outcome as the German contribution. However, it has to be emphasized that all these ideas have come to be commonly accepted by the archival profession, which has questioned them very rarely and never directly.

⁴The provenance approach bases appraisal on the analysis of the administrative and documentary context of the archival material in question, while the pertinence approach bases appraisal on the total social and cultural context of that material. For a brief explanation of the two approaches, see Luciana Duranti, "ACA 1991 Conference Overview," *ACA Bulletin* 15 (July 1991): 24. The top-down approach is discussed in Cook, "Mind over Matter," 52-57; the top-down/bottom-up relationship is discussed in Heather MacNeil, "Weaving Provenancial and Documentary Relations," *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992): 197.

⁵The expressions *paradigm shift* and *historical shunt* were used by Hugh Taylor to refer respectively to the transformation of culture, records, users, and archivists in the computer age ("Transformation in the Archives: Technological Adjustment or Paradigm Shift?" *Archivaria* 25 [Winter 1987-88]: 12-28), and to the dedication of old recordkeepers to historical research and the service of historians ("Information Ecology and the Archives of the 1980s," *Archivaria* 18 [Summer 1984]: 27).

⁶For a detailed examination of the components of archival science, see Trevor Livelton, "Public Records: A Study in Archival Theory," Master of Archival Studies thesis, University of British Columbia, 1991 (forthcoming from SAA and Scarecrow Press), 10-19. For a more accessible discussion of the subject, see Luciana Duranti, "The Archival Body of Knowledge: Archival Theory, Method, and Practice, and Graduate and Continuing Education," *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 34 (Winter 1993): 10-11.

and to ascertain whether the idea of attributing value to archives is consistent with the elements and characteristics of such nature.

Most of the archival theorists who have traced the rise and development of archival literature in the Western world believe that archival theory, as a self-contained body of ideas about the nature of archival documents, had its origins in the laws and juridical writings of the eleventh century and was enriched in the texts of medieval glossarists.⁷ However, the fundamental concepts of archival theory are rooted in concepts embedded in Roman law, which have lingered for centuries and are so ingrained in our Western culture that we keep perpetuating them even when we cannot remember the reason for doing so. Two of those concepts have a direct bearing on the ideas that have been associated with appraisal in this century, and they deserve a careful exploration. They are the concepts of *perpetual memory* and *public faith*.

The most ancient archival documents,⁸ either in the original or as transcriptions of lost originals, contain a formula, usually placed at the end of the salutation: *in perpetuum, ad perpetuum, or ad perpetuam rei memoriam*.⁹ This formula established the

function of the document with respect to the fact it was about. Because only the present can be known, a device was necessary to freeze the fact occurring in the present before it slipped into the past, and the document, as embodiment of the fact, had the function of converting the present into the permanent.

However, it is essential to emphasize that the Latin words *permanens* and *perpetuum* meant continuing, enduring, stable, lasting, uninterrupted, unbroken, without a foreseeable end, and that the concept of perpetual memory, which was an integral part of Roman law, was never linked to the ideas of eternity or infinity. Rather, the link was with ideas of continuity (or absence of interruptions), stability (or absence of change), and endurance (or absence of known term). Consequently, when the concept of perpetual memory was expressly linked first to archival documents and later to archives, it was meant to carry with itself no obligation of eternal preservation, but only an implication of trustworthiness. For example, the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* contained prescriptions that the acts (*gesta*)—that is, the documents attesting actions—be kept in archives in order to preserve continuing, and therefore uncorrupted, memory of the actions, and to guarantee the public faith (*ut fidem faciant*) or truthfulness of the documents themselves.¹⁰

The Roman legal concept of public faith has more relevance in archival theory than does that of perpetual memory. It might be said that, while the idea of perpetual memory expresses the relationship between archival documents and the facts they attest to, that of public faith expresses the relationship between archives and the society

⁷See, for example, Eugenio Casanova, *Archivistica* (Siena: Lazzari, 1928), 333; Leopoldo Sandri, "La storia degli archivi," *Rassegna degli Archivi di Stato* 18 (gennaio-aprile 1958): 109–34; and Giorgio Centetti, *Lo Studio di Bologna. Aspetti, momenti e problemi (1935–1970)*, edited by R. Ferrara, G. Orlandelli and A. Vasina (Bologna: Editrice Clueb, 1989), 17–27.

⁸Throughout this article the term *archival document* will be used to refer to any document made and received in the course of affairs, regardless of its form, of the nature of its creator (public or private, organization or individual), of its place of preservation (office of creation or legitimate administrative successor, or archival institution), of its degree of currency, and of its use. Therefore, the term comprises the meanings of *record, manuscript, and paper(s)*.

⁹Cf. Alain de Boüard, *Manuel de Diplomatie Française et Pontificale*, vol. 1 (Paris: Editions Auguste Picard, 1929), 265; and Georges Tessier, *La Diplomatie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966), 43.

¹⁰Justinian, *Corpus Iuris Civilis, Novella 15, 5 and 2; C.I.4, "De episcopali audientia," 30; D. 48,19, "De poenis," 9*. An action is a movement of the will aimed at a purpose, manifested in a perceivable way. See Luciana Duranti, "Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science. Part II," *Archivaria* 29 (Winter 1989–90): 6–7.

they serve. In the ancient and medieval Western world, archival documents were conferred trustworthiness by their preservation in an archives, and it is essential to remember that the term *archives* in this context refers to the place where archival documents were kept by their creator. As a consequence, not every entity could have an archives; only the persons or corporations invested with sovereign power had the right to establish one in their own jurisdiction (*jus archivi* or *archivale*).¹¹

The fact that, according to Roman law, only public authorities could have an archives implied that only archival documents created by public authorities in carrying out public affairs were endowed with public faith. This did not mean, however, that only those documents could be trustworthy. As a consequence of the probative capacity of archives, documents created by private persons in carrying out private affairs could be attributed public faith by being deposited by their authors or legitimate successors in an archives.¹² The idea was that unbroken custody in reliable hands (being a public authority by definition meant being considered reliable) would protect the documents from corruption, would guarantee their trustworthiness, and would ensure the truth of their content. However, the practice was open to abuse. Private persons began to deposit false documents in public archives to lend them public faith. It appeared clear to the legislators that if unbroken public custody was a sufficient guarantee of the reliability of the documents created by sovereign bodies, it did not perform this function for all other documents. Thus, public faith came to depend on another element identified as essential by the legislators: form. In the *Corpus Juris Civilis*, *Novella 73* describes

the characteristics documents must have in order to be accepted in a public archives.

In time, the form of the documents became so essential to their trustworthiness that public custody began to lose relevance and, as long as custody could be proved uninterrupted and secure, the authenticity of documents was sufficient guarantee of genuineness.¹³

The emphasis on prescribed forms determined the development of a different concept of archives. One might say that, until the third century, legislators and jurists considered archives to be the place where the documents produced in carrying out administrative activity were maintained, retrieved, and generally serviced. In a very real sense, public faith derived to those documents from their being created, maintained, used, and selected in the ordinary and usual course of business. In fact, selection was part of the effective management of those archives, a selection embedded in routine and procedure, by which summary documents gradually superseded the detailed ones, and complete documents superseded notes and sketches. No evaluation was involved, and therefore no appraisal. Rather, the traces of all facts were preserved, their intensity as profound as the effects of those facts had been at the time of their occurrence. Thus, perpetual memory was served as well as public faith, but, more importantly, public faith was linked to a legal concept that has survived until our times. This concept, with which we are very familiar, is that of "circumstantial guarantee of trustworthiness," according to which the circumstances of a document's creation and maintenance are an adequate indication of its reliability.¹⁴

¹³"Authenticity" referred to the presence in a document of all prescribed forms which enabled it to bear witness on its own; whereas "genuineness" meant that the document was what it purported to be. See Duranti, "Diplomatics," 17-18.

¹⁴A document offered as evidence to establish the truth of the facts it contains is considered "hearsay" by both civil and common law because its content is

¹¹Francesco Calasso, *Lezioni di storia del diritto italiano* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1948), 258.

¹²Justinian, *Novella 15*.

However, after the third century, the creators of archival documents began to pay special attention to documents endowed with legally prescribed forms, to the point of preserving them separately from all the others, in the most secure place. Consequently, a dichotomy developed between the “archives-sediment,” made of the documents routinely accumulated on the benches of the offices in the course of business, and the “archives-treasure,” made of the authentic documents embodying complete transactions, which were extracted from the archives-sediment to be maintained in a safer place. The absence of proper care eventually made the documents in the archives-sediment disappear, victims of natural events or human vicissitudes, while those in the archives-treasure remained as continuing proof of events past.

Thus, public faith came to be associated by legislators and jurists with two other familiar legal concepts that have survived until our times: *best evidence* and *ancient document*. The best evidence concept attributes probative capacity only to original documents or authenticated duplicates of them, and the ancient document concept attributes probative capacity to documents kept in secure and reliable custody for a long time.¹⁵

The Roman legal concepts of perpetual memory and public faith as they related to

archival documents and archives constituted the core of the legal writings of Medieval jurists, such as Accursius (1184–1263), Cynus Pistoiensis (1270–1336), and Baldus (1327–1400). They also entered the statutes of most Medieval city states and, on this basis, norms were issued prescribing methods of arrangement and description of archival documents to protect their probative nature. But, most importantly, as Roman law became the common civil law of Europe and the basis for its spiritual and cultural unity, those concepts became the foundation of all European thinking about archives. They also became the nucleus of European archival theory as it developed in the writings of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century jurists,¹⁶ and as it was received,

¹⁶For a detailed discussion of this subject, see Elio Lodolini, *Lineamenti di storia dell'archivistica italiana* (Rome: La Nuova Italia Scientifica, 1991), 27–65. It should be pointed out that Roman law is the foundation of both the civil law and the common law systems, because its principles and concepts are embedded in the principles and concepts at the core of both legal systems. However, it has to be emphasized that the religious frays of the sixteenth century determined a divergence in the development of the legal concepts linked to archives between the European countries which remained Roman Catholic and those which stopped to recognize the binding power of the pronouncements of the Roman Church. A significant example of such divergence relates to the probatory nature of private archival documents preserved in private archives (i.e., archives of families, banks, hospitals, etc.). In the course of the seventeenth century, a series of decisions of the Sacra Rota endowed with public faith private archives or individual archival documents which either had been preserved for a long time within the same recordkeeping system (an elaboration of the concepts of “ancient document” and of “circumstantial guarantee of trustworthiness,” both related to the “perpetual memory” idea), or presented all the appropriate characteristics of form (an elaboration of the “best evidence concept”), or had been maintained and inventoried by a notary or by an “archivist”—that is, by a professional purposely employed who could vouch for the reliability of the records system and the trustworthiness of the archives (Elio Lodolini, “Giurisprudenza della Sacra Rota Romana in materia di archivi [secoli XVI–XVIII],” *Rassegna degli Archivi di Stato* a. XLII [gennaio–aprile 1982]: 7–33). Therefore, while in Roman Catholic countries like Italy and Spain private archives have been treated just like public archives and regularly acquired in public archival repositories or, if pre-

not stated under oath, and it cannot be tested by cross-examination. However, a document can be accepted as evidence if it falls within an exception to the hearsay rule. One exception is the existence of circumstantial guarantees of trustworthiness: the circumstances of a document's creation are accepted as an adequate substitute for cross-examination.

¹⁵An *original document* is the first to be issued in a complete and effective form—that is, the first capable of reaching the consequences for which it was created. An *authenticated duplicate* is an imitative copy declared conform to the original that it reproduces by an official authorized to do so by the legal system. (Duranti, “Diplomatics,” 19–20). For more information on the probative capacity of archival documents, see Heather Heywood, “Appraising Legal Value: Concepts and Issues,” unpublished Master of Archival Studies thesis, University of British Columbia, 1990.

through the elaborations of the nineteenth-century archival theorists, by Jenkinson, Cencetti, Brenneke, Bautier, and the many others who have enriched the European archival literature of our times.

If some of the archival methodological ideas derived from that body of theory, such as the principles of provenance and original order, reached the other side of the Atlantic quite easily, through the writings of Leland, Buck, Posner, and Schellenberg, the ideas about the nature of archival material never really entered the North American archival discourse. Instead, they remained typically anchored to the European tradition.¹⁷ However, they constitute the body of theory on which methods accepted also in North America rest and every new archival methodology has to be based, and against which the concept of appraisal should be examined. As there is no variation in the articulation of those ideas among the various archival theorists, for practical reasons linked to language and availability to North American readers, the text of Jenkinson is chosen here as the framework for discussion.

served by their creators or by private archival repositories, closely watched by the governments through regulations and controls, in the other countries like England and Germany private archives are considered different from public archives mainly because deprived of probatory capacity. (Even from a purely historical research point of view, public archives are considered privileged sources with respect to private archives.) This might be the origin of the dichotomy between public and private archives in England, even if not in the United States (See note 49). In Canada, the French influence on the juridical concepts related to archives must not be undervalued; certainly the "total archives" concept has no roots in Anglo-Saxon culture.

¹⁷The only exception in North American literature is Margaret Cross Norton, who understood and believed in those theoretical ideas. See *Norton on Archives: The Writings of Margaret Cross Norton on Archival and Records Management*, edited by Thornton W. Mitchell (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975), for example pp. 13, 25–38, 56, 240.

The Characteristics of Archival Documents and the Attribution of Value

Jenkinson wrote that a "document which may be said to belong to the class of Archives is one which was drawn up or used in the course of an administrative or executive transaction (whether public or private) of which itself formed a part; and subsequently preserved in their own custody for their own information by the person or persons responsible for that transaction and their legitimate successors."¹⁸ Because they are created as a means for, and a by-product of, action, not "in the interest or for the information of Posterity," and because they are "free from the suspicion of prejudice in regard to the interests in which we now use them," archival documents are impartial and "cannot tell . . . anything but the truth."¹⁹

This characteristic of impartiality, according to which archives are inherently truthful, makes them the most reliable source for both law and history, whose purposes are to rule and explain the conduct of society by establishing the truth.²⁰ Ar-

¹⁸Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922), 11 (Jenkinson's emphasis). In his manual, Jenkinson defines the archival document, rather than archives as complexes of documents. Later, he defines *archives* as "the Documents accumulated by a natural process in the course of the Conduct of Affairs of any kind, Public or Private, at any date; and preserved thereafter for Reference, in their own Custody, by the persons responsible for the Affairs in question or their successors." ("The English Archivist: A New Profession," *Selected Writings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson*, edited by Roger H. Ellis and Peter Walne [Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1980], 237). Both definitions contain implicitly or explicitly all the elements that characterize archival material as such. It has to be pointed out that archival institutions or programs are among the "legitimate successors" mentioned by Jenkinson.

¹⁹Jenkinson, *Manual of Archive Administration*, 11–12.

²⁰Impartiality is a characteristic of archival documents, not of their creators, who are naturally partial to their own interests. To protect the impartiality of

chival documents provide “first-hand evidence because they form an actual part of the *corpus*, of the facts of the case.”²¹

The second characteristic of archives is authenticity, which Jenkinson links to the *continuum* of creation, maintenance, and custody. Archival documents are procedurally authentic for three reasons. They are created credible and reliable by those who need to act through them. They are maintained with proper guarantees for further action and for information. And “they are definitely set aside for preservation, tacitly adjudged worthy of being kept” by their creator or legitimate successor as “written memorials of . . . activities in the past.”²²

The third characteristic of archives is naturalness. “Archives are not documents collected artificially, like the objects in a museum . . . , but accumulating naturally in offices for the practical purposes of Administration.”²³ The fact that archival documents are not contrived outside the direct requirements of the conduct of affairs—that is, that they accumulate naturally, progressively, and continuously, like the sediments of geological stratifications²⁴—provides them with an element of spontaneous yet structured cohesiveness.

archives is to protect their capacity to reveal the biases and idiosyncracies of their creators. This is why it is so difficult to guarantee the appropriate maintenance of current and semicurrent documents by their creators, be they organizations or individuals: it cannot be done without alerting them to their documents inherent value but, if creators are made too vividly aware of the power of their documents, they may begin to draw or alter them for the benefit of posterity, and the documents would not be the un-self-conscious residue of action but a conscious reflection on it.

²¹Jenkinson, *Manual of Archive Administration*, 4 (Jenkinson’s emphasis).

²²Jenkinson, *Manual of Archive Administration*, 8–9, 39.

²³Public Record Office, *Guide to the Public Records, Part I: Introductory* (London: Public Record Office, 1949), 2.

²⁴“Les documents se déposent au contraire dans les archives exactement comme se forment les sédiments des couches géologiques, progressivement, constamment.” Robert-Henri Bautier, “Les Archives,” *L’histoire et ses méthodes* (Paris: 1961), 1120.

This cohesiveness is the presupposition of their fourth characteristic, interrelationship. Jenkinson explains it by saying that every archival document is closely related “to others both inside and outside the group in which it is preserved and . . . its significance depends on these relations.”²⁵ In other words, archival documents are linked among themselves by a relationship that arises at the moment in which they are created, is determined by the reason for which they are created, and is necessary to their very existence, to their ability to accomplish their purpose, to their meaning for the activity in which they participate, and to their capacity of being evidence.²⁶ Therefore, in a very real sense, an archives is a whole of relationships as well as a whole of documents.²⁷

A corollary of the characteristic of interrelationship is the characteristic of uniqueness, which derives to each archival document by the fact of its having a unique place in the structure of the group in which it belongs and in the documentary universe. Even when a document is an identical copy of another, the complex of its relationships with the other documents within and outside the group of which it is part is always unique.²⁸

²⁵Public Record Office, *Guide*, 2.

²⁶Giorgio Cencetti defined this originary, necessary, and determined relationship as “the archival bond,” in “Il fondamento teorico della dottrina archivistica,” *Archivi* II, VI (1939): 8, reprinted in Giorgio Cencetti, *Scritti archivistici* (Rome: Il Centro di Ricerca editore, 1970), 39.

²⁷Elio Lodolini writes: “l’archivio, a nostro avviso, è costituito da due elementi: il complesso dei documenti ed il complesso delle relazioni che intercorrono fra i documenti.” Elio Lodolini, *Archivistica. Principi e problemi*, 6a edizione ampliata (Milan: Franco Angeli editore, 1992), 143.

²⁸The characteristic of uniqueness is not among those explicitly identified by Jenkinson, but it is clearly implied in Jenkinson’s discussion and is often mentioned in archival literature. See, for example, Vicenta Cortés Alonso, *Manual de archivos municipales* (Madrid: Asociación española de archiveros, bibliotecarios, museólogos y documentalistas, 1982): 44, where archives are attributed four characteristics: “unicidad” (uniqueness), “integridad” (integrity),

Examined in relation to the characteristics of archives, the idea of attributing value to archival documents is in clear conflict with each and all of them. In fact, on the one hand, the characteristics of naturalness and interrelationship point to the fact that all archival documents in an archive are equally functional to the existence of the whole and, therefore, equally important. On the other hand, the characteristics of impartiality and authenticity point to the evidentiary quality of form and procedure, and therefore to their primacy for the conveyance of truth. Moreover, the characteristic of uniqueness-in-context of each document makes its meaning unique and its existence necessary to the meaning of the archives in which it belongs.

To attribute different values to archival documents and to destroy those of less value would not change the relationship of interdependence among them, the bond that determines the intellectual structure of the archival body, because the preserved documents would remain in the same reciprocal relationship that they acquired when they were first consigned to the files and entered into the recordkeeping system. However, such attribution of value would arbitrarily affect the integrity of the archival body and would influence the meaning of the whole and of its parts. In fact, selection per se does not alter that meaning. If selection is one of the mechanisms embedded in the routines and procedures accompanying the creation, maintenance, and use of the documents, and/or it is based on the functionality of the documents and their aggregations (volumes, files, series) with respect to one another, the meaning of the whole is not reduced or changed but is concentrated and enhanced by its reduction in size, because such reduction would be

"autenticidad" (authenticity), and "ingenuidad" (un-self-consciousness). For a North American exegesis of the characteristics of archival documents and of the concept of uniqueness, see Terry Eastwood, "Towards a Social Theory of Appraisal," in Craig, *Archival Imagination*, 72–74.

based on contextual factors. Any attribution of value instead is inescapably directed to content, even when it is carried out on the basis of provenance (be it creatorship, function, or procedure) because the assumption on which it is based is that good provenance equals good content. Therefore, the attribution of value uses as the primary basis of judgment an element, content, that is in contrast with the procedural and formal neutrality of the archival whole, and in so doing it undermines the impartiality and authenticity of its meaning.²⁹

Throughout the centuries, the primary duty of the professionals entrusted with the care of archives has been to preserve them uncorrupted, that is, endowed with the integrity they had when their creators or legitimate successors set them aside for continuing preservation. The protection of the integrity of archives entails the protection of their natural characteristics so that they will remain reliable evidence of action and decision. Therefore, although it has always been considered perfectly appropriate that archival documents be selected in the procedural course of affairs, archival theorists have found it very difficult to accept selection after the conclusion of those affairs, other than on the part of the documents' creator or legitimate successor. Jenkinson believed that

for the Archivist to destroy a document because he thinks it useless is to import into the collection under his charge what we have been throughout most anxious to keep out

²⁹Paola Carucci, "Lo scarto come elemento qualificante delle fonti per la storiografia," *Rassegna degli Archivi di Stato* a. XXXV, nos. 1–3 (1975): 254–55. Carucci writes that selection is an expression of the eternal law of economy, according to which we only protect and maintain that which is necessary to our continuing existence and development. About this concept, see also Luciana Duranti, "So? What Else Is New?: The Ideology of Appraisal Yesterday and Today," in *Archival Appraisal: Theory and Practice*, edited by Christopher Hives (Vancouver, British Columbia: Archives Association of British Columbia, 1990), 1–14.

of it, an element of his personal judgement; . . . but for an Administrative body to destroy what it no longer needs is a matter entirely within its competence and an action which future ages . . . cannot possibly criticize as illegitimate or as affecting the status of the remaining archives; provided always that the Administration proceeds only upon those grounds upon which alone it is competent to make a decision—the needs of its own practical business; provided, that is, that it can refrain from thinking of itself as a body producing historical evidence.³⁰

Quite important provisos, those emphasized by Jenkinson. Nonetheless, his solution to the need for an objective selection could ensure the protection of archival documents as impartial evidence of the biases and idiosyncracies of their creators rather than those of their custodians.

Almost thirty years after declaring it, Jenkinson had not changed his position. At the first International Congress of Archives meeting, in Paris, he said that the archivist “must impartially preserve all documents without taking into account their presumed interest. In fact, the task of the archivist is to be the servant of truth, of the simple truth, not of that truth which can please certain persons or serve the views of the one or the other school of thought.”³¹ This point of high principle, that selection should be impartial, constituted the foundation of the entire system set up by the Grigg Committee and ultimately by the English public records acts. The English appraisal methodology, in perfect harmony with archival theory, relied on the assumption

that there is a close relationship between continuing administrative relevance and continuing research significance, and therefore there is affinity between the purposes of creators (or their legitimate successors) and of archivists. The entire issue is one of degree of responsibility in the selection process: To what extent does the archivist influence procedure and action?³²

Jenkinson’s position was shared by the dominant school of archival thought for at least another twenty years. In fact, what was called the “nonevaluational” nature of archival work was deeply rooted in the characteristics of the archival material and was impossible to overturn using purely empirical arguments.³³ The primary duty of the archivist was to the evidentiary nature of archival material, and the activities supporting this duty, which came to be known as the “moral defense of archives,” were seen as central to the professional ethic of archivists.³⁴ After all, as Ernst Posner pointed out, the two fundamental methodological principles of archival science stress the primacy of origin, structure, and function over content, use, or importance, and those principles were widely accepted in the entire Western hemisphere and beyond.³⁵

³⁰Grigg Report.

³¹The expression *nonevaluational nature* of archival work (*avalutatività archivistica*) was coined by Leopoldo Cassese in 1959. See Leopoldo Cassese, *Teoria e metodologia. Scritti editi e inediti di paleografia, diplomatica, archivistica e biblioteconomia*, edited by Attilio Mauro Caproni (Salerno: Pietro Lavaglia, 1980), 54. In 1967, Leopoldo Sandri wrote that the nonevaluational nature of archival work is a principle universally valid, in Leopoldo Sandri, “L’Archivistica,” *Rassegna degli Archivi di Stato* a. XXVII (1967): 416.

³²Jenkinson, *Manual of Archive Administration*, 66ff.

³³Ernst Posner, “Some Aspects of Archival Development from the French Revolution,” in *Archives and the Public Interest*, edited by Ken Munden (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1967), 32.

³⁰Jenkinson, *Manual of Archives Administration*, 128–29.

³¹Hilary Jenkinson, speech given at the first International Congress of Archives, Paris, 23 August 1950, published in *Archivum* I (1951): 47. Translated from French by this author.

Moral Defense of Archives and the United States

In the United States, the centrality of the moral defense of archives was explicitly upheld by Margaret Cross Norton. She wrote that archivists are bound "to protect the integrity of . . . records," and even if "historical" archives may appear to have no value for current affairs, this "does not release the custodian from his legal and moral responsibilities."³⁶ Norton's ideas were readily taken up by archivists within the National Archives, who dominated American archival thinking until the 1960s.³⁷ They were certainly encouraged toward that direction by the general political atmosphere of the times, as demonstrated by the interplay of administration and archival theory in archival publications: "A complete record is the most objective reporter, and hence the most effective means of exacting responsibility. . . . To put it differently, one of the essentials of responsible administration is transparency of the administrative process in terms of both what is going on today and what has gone on before."³⁸ But the notion that archives serve public accountability became a typical aspect of archival thinking at the National Archives. This can easily be recognized in the writings of Solon

J. Buck, Phillip Brooks, Wayne C. Grover, in addition to those of Schellenberg.³⁹

However, the role of the concept of accountability in archival theory, as adopted in the United States, was undermined by Schellenberg's desire to promote the cultural identity of archival repositories and the role of archivists as appraisers of records. He defined *records* in a way even more limited than that in which Jenkinson had defined *archives*, and he redefined *archives* as a species of records, the main difference being in the fact that archives "must be preserved for reasons other than those for which they were created or accumulated."⁴⁰ Then he presented the concept of *evidential value* as an exclusive concern of secondary users. By so doing, he prepared the path for the complete divergence of American archival practice from that of the rest of the Western world.

Jenkinson defended the traditional theory of archives, which treats records as a species of archival documents, and therefore of archives, by insisting that the theory of archives must be based on the analysis of the nature of the documents: "Value for Research is no doubt the reason why we continue to spend time and money on preserving Archives and making them available: but the fact that a thing may be used for purposes for which it was not intended—a hat, for instance, for the production of a rabbit—is not part of its nature and should not, I submit, be made an element of its definition, though it may rea-

³⁶Norton on *Archives*, 26.

³⁷This is particularly evident from the annual reports of those years. See for example National Archives of the United States, *Annual Report* 3 (1936): 5; *Annual Report* 7 (1940): 1; *Annual Report* 11 (1944): 6. See also Donald McCoy, *The National Archives: America's Ministry of Documents, 1934-1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978).

³⁸Morstein Marx, "The Role of Records in Administration," *American Archivist* 10 (April 1947): 241. According to Stillman, Marx introduced "broader European attitudes and perspectives into American political science": Richard J. Stillman, "Changing Patterns of Public Administration Theory in America," in *Public Administration: History and Theory in Contemporary Perspective*, edited by Joseph A. Uveges, Jr. (New York: Marcel Dekker Inc., 1982), 25.

³⁹See, for example, Solon J. Buck, "The Archivists 'One World,'" *American Archivist* 10 (January 1947): 10; Phillip Brooks, *Public Records Management* (Chicago: Public Administration Service, 1949), 1; Wayne C. Grover, "The National Archives and the Scholar," *Military Affairs* 15 (1951): 10; Theodore R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 9, 17, 38, 140-41, 187-88, 206-07, 246-47, etc.; and Theodore R. Schellenberg, *The Appraisal of Modern Public Records*, National Archives Bulletin 8 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1956), 249ff.

⁴⁰Schellenberg, *Modern Archives*, 13-16.

sonably affect its treatment."⁴¹ Certainly, Schellenberg's definition of archives was theoretically flawed, not because he built into it the elements of value and use for research purposes, but because he arrived at it on purely pragmatic grounds. He wrote, "It is quite obvious that modern archives are kept for the use of others than those that created them, and that conscious decisions must be made as to their value for such use . . . obviously for research use."⁴² Schellenberg failed to explore the properties of archival documents, and wished only "to devise methods of treatment which work for particular records which one is aiming to turn into archives in order to be used for research purposes." He was "quite willing to accept that archivists need rules of procedure," but not "to base those rules on ideas about the universal properties of archives or to examine his own basic ideas about archives, which he presents as self-evident truths."⁴³

It is quite clear that, if what qualifies documents as archival is their nature—as Jenkinson believed—the idea of attributing values to them is in profound conflict with archival theory; while it is in complete harmony with it if the qualifying element is use—as Schellenberg pragmatically claimed. However, there is no doubt that all those who wish to use archives, be they primary or secondary users, have the same need for accurate and authentic evidence, one that, as Felix Hull puts it, shows the "whole picture." "The whole picture, not a partial or biased one, is the ideal and the archivist's motto should be 'always objective' so

that he endeavours to achieve the ideal." But he also notes, "We are, in a sense, too near the record itself in time to be as objective as we ought to be." And, by using "perfectly correct methods we may so easily . . . in the interests of proper objectivity emasculate the record."⁴⁴ One might add that by preserving random samples, we may only provide random evidence and random accountability.

This users' need for accurate and complete evidence has been exacerbated in the last two decades by the freedom of information movement. "Preoccupied as they were with their role as servants of history and with a view of archives as records which no longer had value to those who had created them," American archivists were caught by surprise by this movement, which not only "had access and ownership implications, but raised expectations that the records would not be destroyed."⁴⁵ The most sensitive archival writers felt the pressure and began questioning the distinction between records and archives created by Schellenberg. For instance, Andrew Raymond and James O'Toole reexamined the differences between Jenkinson and Schellenberg and argued for the middle ground established by Norton.⁴⁶ It appeared clear

⁴¹Felix Hull, "The Appraisal of Documents-- Problems and Pitfalls," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 6 (April 1980): 289, 291. Hull also points out the conundrum in which modern archivists operate: "You and I by our involvement are either destroying or agreeing to the destruction of that very evidence which, in an almost Hippocratic oath sense, we are professionally bound to defend and preserve. That, without any question, is our first pitfall—a schizophrenic dilemma which we feel would not face us in an ideal world" (p. 287).

⁴²Jane Parkinson, "Accountability in Archival Theory," unpublished Master of Archival Studies thesis, University of British Columbia, 1993, pp. 70, 74.

⁴³Andrew Raymond and James O'Toole, "Up from the Basement: Archives, History, and Public Administration," *Georgia Archive* 6 (Fall 1978): 26–27. See also David Gracy, "Is There a Future in the Use of Archives?" *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987): 8; Howard P. Lowell, "Thoughts on a State Records Program," *American Archivist* 50 (Summer 1987): 398; Bruce W. Dearstyne, "Principles for Local Govern-

⁴¹Hilary Jenkinson, "Modern Archives: Some Reflections on T. R. Schellenberg," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 1 (April 1957): 148–49. An analytical theoretical discussion of the positions of Schellenberg and Jenkinson on this issue can be found in Livelton, "Public Records," 39–59.

⁴²Schellenberg, *Modern Archives*, 14.

⁴³Terry Eastwood, "Nailing a Little Jelly to the Wall of Archival Studies," *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993): 246, endnote 4. Eastwood concludes that this is why Jenkinson is a theorist and Schellenberg a methodologist.

to most archivists that they could not consider themselves creators of archival value and collectors of historical information, and at the same time view themselves as protectors of evidence who "ensure that records . . . are faithfully preserved and disposed of according to due process . . . mediating the interests of the persons associated with their creation and use." The two functions are in conceptual conflict. The former presupposes that records and archives are different entities, while the latter posits that they are one entity. They also are in practical conflict, because it is impossible to be at the same time the "engineer of the documentary record of the past," and "the agent of continuity" who ensures "the continuing legitimacy of archives as faithful witnesses to the social system in which they were created." Archivists had "to decide on which side of the fence to sit," and the users were not leaving them much choice.⁴⁷

American literature of the last decade shows that archivists responsible for organizational archives (public or private) have made their choice, pragmatically as ever but nonetheless clearly. The codification of such choice is in the definitions contained in the most recent Society of American Archivists' glossary.⁴⁸ The consequence of

ment Records: A Statement of the National Association of State Archives and Records Administration," *American Archivist* 46 (Fall 1983): 454; Roy Turnbaugh, "Plowing the Sea: Appraising Public Records in an Ahistorical Culture," *American Archivist* 53 (Fall 1990): 563 ("we exist to make sure that the records of the significant actions of government are preserved. . . . The resulting holdings comprise a sort of giant ledger, in which the accounts of the public trust are entered.").

⁴⁷All the expressions in quotation marks are extracted from Eastwood, "Nailing a Little Jelly to the Wall," 251, endnote 16, and 252, endnote 19.

⁴⁸Lewis J. Bellardo and Lynn Lady Bellardo, *A Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators, and Records Managers* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1992). The term *archives* is defined as "the documents created or received and accumulated by a person or organization in the course of the conduct of affairs, and preserved because of their continuing value. Historically, the term referred more narrowly to the noncurrent records of an organization

this development for appraisal has been a diffuse, slow, but secure and steady detachment of the idea of attributing value from the selection activity. Public records archivists, in particular, have been crudely reminded by their clientele that, if American governments are accountable *through* records, American archivists are accountable *for* those records. These expectations include the idea that records' integrity and probatory nature have to be protected so that the people can exercise their fundamental rights to obtain and provide reliable and complete information, to research and study, and to participate creatively in the social and cultural development of their country.⁴⁹

However, the most serious consequence of these developments is that the reintegration of records and archives has corresponded to the deepening of the historical dichotomy between manuscripts and records/archives, and between manuscript curators and archivists.⁵⁰ As archivists be-

or institution preserved because of their continuing value." This definition closes the gap between records and archives and between records and manuscripts, and it embraces within the concept of archives the entire universe of documents generated as by-product of purposeful action. Unfortunately, while most organizational archivists stand behind the reintegration of the concepts of records and archives, most archivists responsible for the papers of individuals or voluntary groups—those identified in the glossary title as manuscript curators—are not yet ready to accept the reintegration of the concepts of manuscripts and archives, even less so that of manuscripts and records—as will be discussed below.

⁴⁹See for example United Nations Advisory Committee for the Co-ordination of Information Systems (ACCIS), *Management of Electronic Records: Issues and Guidelines* (New York: United Nations, 1990). As to the controlling proactive stance of archival clientele see "Chronology of Recent NARA Events and SAA's Response," *Archival Outlook* (March 1993): 3, 5, which contains reference to a number of articles resulting from the deluded expectations of archival users.

⁵⁰The primary responsibility for the elevation to theory of such purely pragmatic dichotomy should be given to Schellenberg's exclusion from the definition of records, and consequently of archives ("archives are those records," *Modern Archives*, 16) of the documents created by individuals, families, and voluntary and informal groups. For a history of the tradition of

gan to pay attention to the administrative-legal character of organizational archives, manuscript curators began feeling they were the last trustees of the cultural value of primary sources. After all, the material they are responsible for did not result from the exercise of delegated functions, nor has it any enduring administrative or legal use. And they are not accountable for its preservation, other than being accountable to the archival institution for which they work.

Of course the facts above are true, but a case might be made for “historical accountability,” defined as “a need to provide and receive explanation and understanding from one generation to another,” which is “rooted in a belief in an obligation to account to the future members of the group, either by describing, explaining or justifying what one has said or done.” Individuals and groups who hold this belief and act upon it in their lives donate their papers to an archival repository out of a sense of responsibility for their actions and a willingness “to explain their intentions to the future, which they affect.”⁵¹ This implies that archivists entrusted with the care of those papers are accountable for their preservation not only to their institution and, through it, to the donors, but also to the future. They must account for preservation of meaning as well as of objects, and for a preservation that maintains and protects the capacity of the documents to provide reliable evidence of the activities of their creator.

Here is the main commonality—from which all the others derive—between manuscripts and records/archives, and therefore between manuscript curators and archivists: Manuscripts are the natural, unself-conscious, impartial, interrelated, and

authentic residue of the performance of purposeful activity, and they have the same evidentiary nature as records/archives, if their properties are maintained intact.⁵² Thus, selection among “manuscripts,” just like selection among “records,” cannot be based on an attribution of value. It can be based only on the internal functionality of the documents, and the documents’ aggregations, with respect to one another, so that compact, meaningful, economical, and impartial societal evidence can be preserved for the next generations.

If those who are responsible for “manuscripts” are accountable for the material they have acquired, are they also accountable for what they have not acquired? In other words, does their cultural mission as social memory keepers make them responsible for actively facilitating public memory making, and therefore historically accountable for their acquisition activity? In the view of this author, it certainly does, and on this accountability strongly impinges the accountability linked to the responsibility of maintaining the integrity and impartiality of archives. But this time it is the integrity and impartiality of societal archives as a whole that we are talking about, rather than the archives of one specific creator. It is very important to emphasize the coexistence of both archivists’ accountabilities (as protectors of archives and facilitators of archives making) in a balanced relationship, because the one responsibility too easily outweighs the other, and the outcome of such imbalance is a biased societal archives.

Appraisal and the Archivist’s Mission

There are two fundamental approaches to the accomplishment of archivists’ (i.e.,

separation, see Richard C. Berner, *Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Analysis* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1983).

⁵¹Parkinson, “Accountability in Archival Theory,” 85.

⁵²For the capacity of private individuals’ archives to constitute reliable evidence, see note 16. If the nature of the material is determined by the purposes of its creation, there is no difference between what is called “manuscripts” or “papers” and what is called “records.”

manuscript curators and archivists) cultural mission. These approaches are rooted in two different interpretations of culture. The one views culture as the sum of the ideas and actions embedded in societal products and considers the accumulation of the greatest variety of those products as the best way of documenting society and its culture. The other views culture as the "contextual interaction of meaning with action, . . . the integration of purpose with practical circumstances"; it believes that "the products of a given endeavour may be comprehensible only through their relationship to the products of other endeavours, may be significant by their absence, may have a meaning quite different from that which they were meant to convey, or may exist among the products of other endeavours."⁵³

If we consider archival documents (manuscripts and records) as societal products, the former approach "circumscribes *a priori* the total social and cultural context" and "encourages targeted institutions, groups and individuals to create and/or preserve the records of their activities." The latter approach lets the social and cultural context "be revealed by the natural interrelationship of its documentary residue" and "believes that the absence of records is an indication of absence of the cultural need to translate thoughts and actions into a material product, or to preserve that material product." Moreover, the former approach "is founded on the belief that, if institutions, organizations, and individuals are encouraged to create and/or maintain records, a total, adequate documentation of our society will be preserved," and it considers the intervention of the archivist to "determine the existence, quality, extent

and placement of the records as necessary to the total documentation of society." The latter approach "is founded on the belief that such an encouragement will make the social and cultural context of the records disappear together with their value as evidence, because the circumstances of their creation would be governed by external informational demands rather than by internal socio-cultural values." It considers the archivist's intervention "as an action compromising the integrity of the creator, and the spontaneous, natural, impartial character of archives."⁵⁴

Thus, according to the former approach, the cultural function of the archivist consists in engineering a comprehensive record of the past; while, according to the latter approach, such function is best accomplished by respecting the past rather than trying to control it, and by protecting the properties of the archival bodies that naturally flow into archival repositories.⁵⁵ As Terry Eastwood notices, the difference between the two is a little like the difference between Ptolemaic and Copernican astronomy, the one having research uses at its center, and the other the original purpose and structure of the societal archives.⁵⁶

It is the contention of this author that both approaches betray archival accountability, be it the accountability descending from the cultural purpose of archival endeavors, or that linked to the protection of the integrity and impartiality of the archival record. By doing so, both approaches conflict with archival theory.

Archival theory posits that an archives is the whole of the documents made or received in the course of purposeful activity,

⁵⁴Duranti, "ACA 1991," 24.

⁵⁵For a contrast between respecting and controlling the past, see Barbara L. Craig, "The Acts of the Appraisers: The Context, the Plan and the Record," *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992): 175-80.

⁵⁶Eastwood, "Nailing a Little Jelly to the Wall," 251, endnote 16.

⁵³Luciana Duranti, "ACA 1991 Conference Overview," *ACA Bulletin* 15 (July 1991): 24. The first interpretation of culture is expressed by Franz Boas in *Race, Language and Culture* (New York: MacMillan, 1940), and *Kwakiutl Ethnography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

and of the relationships among those documents. The circumstances of creation endow archives with certain innate characteristics, which must be maintained intact for the archives to preserve their probatory capacity. Finally, archival theory posits that it is the primary function of the archivist to maintain unbroken, continuing custody of societal archives, and to protect their integrity by keeping them physically and intellectually uncorrupted. The ultimate purpose of archival endeavors is to hand down to the next generations a reliable, trustworthy, and complete testimony of societal actions so that they can constitute sources of, and foundations for, future decision making.

Considering that all archival bodies are interrelated, at the point that Russian archivists can even talk of the “unitary archival fonds of the state,” we can view our societal archives as one large archives, and the entire archival profession as its archivist. The definition of archives, its characteristics, the archival function, and its ultimate purpose all remaining the same as described above, wouldn’t the archival profession betray its primary responsibility if it did not attempt to preserve the societal archives in its integrity, with its characteristics intact, and to do so impartially (i.e., without favoring any users’ group or category) and as objectively as humanly possible (i.e., without being consciously guided by its own interests, biases, idiosyncracies, and culture)? This author believes that it would, and that it is the duty of the archival profession to act as a mediator between those who produce archives and those who use them, as a facilitator of public memory making and keeping. All those who are active in society (be they individuals or groups, organizations or institutions, public or private) should be advised that to document their actions and transactions in “perpetual memory” of them is *the most appropriate way of carrying them out*. They should also be en-

couraged to maintain systematically and efficiently their documentary memory in order to account to themselves and to society for their activities, and to entrust archival repositories or programs with the “permanent,” that is, continuing care of the compact, meaningful, and reliable residue of that memory.

However, the effort to ensure the preservation of a societal archives that is integral and complete as to meaning must be accompanied by the effort to ensure its reliability and trustworthiness, its procedural authenticity and formal genuineness. The essential archival characteristics all derive from the circumstances of creation, and such circumstances must remain “transparent” and uncorrupted. This means that documents purposely created to provide evidence of oral actions must not be included in the societal archives: They do not constitute evidence but interpretation, and their inclusion among archival material would be an infringement of our historical accountability.

With all the above said, the question remains: if the archival profession has a responsibility to preserve an integral and complete societal archives, how can it reduce such archives to a manageable size without wounding its integrity and completeness of meaning? Of course, discussing the *how* means moving from the realm of theory to that of methodology. Thus, it is sufficient to answer: not by attributing externally imposed values, but by carefully defining archival jurisdictions and acquisition policies and plans, and by remembering that archivists are mediators and facilitators, custodians and preservers of societal evidence, not documenters and interpreters, or even judges, of societal deeds. Why not?—one might ask. Because the archival profession has a vital responsibility to future generations, that of letting them understand and judge our society on the basis of the documents it produced. To be documenters of society is in conflict

with such responsibility. All archivists, whatever the archives in their care, accomplish the cultural function of protecting the existing evidence of past cultures for future cultures to interpret, absorb, and creatively renew.⁵⁷ Attributing value to that evidence would mean to renounce impartiality, endorse ideology, and consciously and arbitrarily alter the societal record.

The question that spurred the writing of this piece was whether appraisal should be made an integral and necessary component of archival science. In so far as appraisal equals attribution of value, the answer is no, because the idea of value is in conflict with the nature of archives. If instead appraisal is considered just a modern term for selection (either within an archives or

among a number of archives) and acquisition, then it has to be acknowledged that appraisal has belonged to archival science since its first formulations and applications. Archival methods need to be developed that allow for selection and acquisition to maintain intact the characteristics of archival documents, and this will require much study and research. But no task is impossible if its purpose is known and clear and if a reunited profession recognizes it as its original, common, and primary responsibility. What must be done is to remove that proverbial dust that has begun accumulating on the appraisal question, and to start the collective quest for a methodology driven by archival theory rather than vice versa.⁵⁸

⁵⁷All kinds of research rely on the reconstruction of the past for purposes of judgment and interpretation. "Because past events cannot be repeatedly experienced and observed, the past is essentially unverifiable and can be discovered only inferentially." Thus, researchers have developed means of evaluating their sources and ensuring their reliability. Because the judiciary has a complex system of common and positive law to guide this process, the standards set by the legal profession are usually applied to other types of enquiries as well. Turner, "A Study of the Theory of Appraisal," 19.

⁵⁸Most appraisal literature has resulted from pragmatic determination of the most convenient and/or politically correct practice, its systematization in a methodology, and the elevation of its assumptions to theory. This kind of process was at the origin of both Schellenberg's dichotomy of records and archives and its revision by contemporary archival writers, leading to the reintegration of the two concepts. The process needs to be completely reversed: The theory must determine the methods, and the methods must guide the practice.