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.

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. 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. 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.

See Hans Bockus, "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, Cmd. 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.

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The Concept of Appraisal and 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. 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 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. 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, 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 perpetuum rei memoriam. 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 factant) or truthfulness of the documents themselves.

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.

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*From 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.*

*The 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 1987]: 7).*


However, after the third century, the creators of archival documents began to pay special attention to documents endowed with legally prescribed forms. This was in order to preserve them separately from 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.

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), Christopherus (1170–1336), and Baldus (1227–1400). 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-seventeenth-century jurists, and as it was received.

11For a detailed discussion of this subject, see Elia 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 preserved for a long time within the same recordkeeping system (an elaboration of the concept 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") had been maintained and inventoried by a notary or by an "archivist"—that is, by a professionally purposefully employed who could vouch for the reliability of the record system and the trustworthiness of the archives (Elia Lodolini, "Giurisprudenza della Sacra Rota Romana in materia di archivi," in Atti della Settimana di Studi di Storia dell’archivistica, 8, 1982: 61–66).
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." 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." 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.

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 . . . its significance depends on these relations. 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. Therefore, in a very real sense, an archive is a whole of relationships as well as a whole of documents.

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 other archives and within the group of which it is part is always unique.
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 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 professional 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 of it, an element of his personal judgment; . . . 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 Administrative process 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 idiosyncrasies 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 "non-evaluational" 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

29Paola Carucci, "L'o scarto come elemento qualificante delle fonti per la storia," 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.

30Jenkinson, Manual of Archives Administration, 128-29.


32Grigg Report.


34Jenkinson, Manual of Archival Administration, 66ff.

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.” Norton’s ideas were readily taken up by archivists within the National Archives, who dominated American archival thinking until the 1960s. 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.” 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.

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 Jenkins 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.” Then he presented the concept of evidential value as an exclusive concern of secondary users. So, he prepared the path for the complete divergence of American archival practice from that of the rest of the Western world.

Jenkins 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 reasonably affect its treatment.” Certainly, Schellenberg’s definition of archives was theoretically flawed, not because he built into 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.” 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 examine his own basic ideas about archives, which he presents as self-evident truths.”

It is quite clear that, if what qualifies documents as archival is their nature—as Jenkins 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.” 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.” 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 Jenkins and Schellenberg and argued for the middle ground established by Norton. It appeared clear...

—Norton on Archives, 26.


—Felix 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 schizophrenia dilemma which we feel would not face us in an ideal world” (p. 287).


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 posit 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.  

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. The consequence of 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.  

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. As archivists became or institution preserved because of their continuing value. This definition closes the gap between records and between records and manuscripts, and it embraces within the concept of archives the entire universe of documents generated as byproduct 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.  


The 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 the authentic residue of the performance of purposeful activity, and they have the same evidentiary nature as records/archives, if their properties are maintained intact. 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.,

For 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.’’

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.’’ It and it considers the intervention of the archivist to ‘‘determine the existence, quality, extent

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 probity 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 interconnected, at the point that Russian archivists can even talk of the ‘‘unitary archival funds of the state,’’ we can view our societal archives as one large archive, 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, idiosyncrasies, 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 encouraged 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.\textsuperscript{20} 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.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{20}All 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 inquiries as well. Turner, “A Study of the Theory of Appraisal,” 19.

\textsuperscript{19}Most 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.