

## International Scene

# Free Trade in Archival Ideas: The Canadian Perspective on North American Archival Development

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**Abstract:** This article examines similarities and differences between Canadian and American archival practices, in particular in matters relating to appraisal. It provides an overview of the National Archives of Canada's top-down "provenance-based structural-functional" approach to appraisal of the federal government's records in all forms and on all supports. It describes the Multi-Year Disposition Plan in its third year of implementation and raises a certain number of issues that concern archivists on both sides of the border.

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CANADIANS HAVE ALWAYS EVINCED a keen interest in things American. Like them, I welcome the opportunity to share ideas with you, our neighbors south of the border, for our destinies as nations, as individuals and even as archivists, are closely linked. While this article was originally presented as an address to the staff of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), and retains that general tone, these observations about North American archives from outside the United States may appeal to a broader audience.<sup>1</sup>

With you, we Canadians share a continent, a major language, and a large cultural "bouillon." E. L. Doctorow and Danielle Steele fill our bookstores while Mordecai Richler and Alice Munro write regularly for the *New Yorker* and Yousuf Karsh exhibits his photographs in New York, Boston, and Washington. Wayne Gretsky and Mario Lemieux raise your blood pressure as much as Doug Flutie and Paul Molitor rivet our attention. Bryan Adams "rocks" in Atlanta while Bruce Springsteen "rolls" in Toronto. John Kenneth Galbraith and Saul Bellow are transplanted Canadians, as is most of the staff of "Saturday Night Live," to say nothing of Mark Rypien, leader of your (then) Super Bowl champion Washington Redskins, or of numerous actors of Canadian origin. In return, American movies and sitcoms, from the defunct "Cheers" to the lively "Murphy Brown," dominate Canadian screens. There is even

a significant number of Canadians who also believe Elvis is alive!

In the archival "beat," Canadian archivists study T. R. Schellenberg, David Bearman, and Margaret Hedstrom with as much interest and profit as you have displayed toward the work of Hugh Taylor, Harold Naugler, and Terry Cook. Three Canadians have been president of the Society of American Archivists,<sup>2</sup> and the SAA has met in Toronto and, in September 1992, in Montreal. As president of the International Council on Archives, I can proudly note that both Canadians and Americans share an active leadership role with ICA committees, working groups, and RAMP publications, and, more particularly, in providing direction concerning electronic records in the Information Age, computerization, and imaging in archives.

Of course, the closest link between us—and the source of this paper's title—is economic, as symbolized by the free trade agreements. Canada, the United States, and Mexico have concluded a trade pact that will create the largest common market in the world. In 1988, Canada and the United States signed a free trade treaty that formalized the long and close economic relationships between our two countries. I wonder how many of you realize that Canada regularly purchases as much from the United States as your next *four* largest trade partners combined—that is, as much as Japan, Germany, Great Britain, and France lumped together!<sup>3</sup> Not many of you would believe that the Canadian economy impacts more on your lives than does that of Japan or Germany. From Canada's perspective, the United States is by far our greatest external trading partner (more than 80 to 85% of our exports).

<sup>1</sup>This address was originally offered to the staff of the National Archives and Records Administration on 1 October 1992, during an extended official visit to that institution. It was largely inspired from notes prepared by Terry Cook, of the National Archives of Canada, from his published work (although he is not responsible for the later placing of several references I make to him throughout this new version) and that of others. I thank him for his comments on this revised version. Any error of commission or omission remains, of course, mine alone.

<sup>2</sup>Kaye Lamb, Hugh Taylor, and Wilfred I. Smith.

<sup>3</sup>This well-documented reality was already evident in the early 1970s. See Peter C. Newman, "I Love Canada," *New York Times*, 28 January 1972, p. 50.

This close relationship illustrated by free trade can, however, make Canadians nervous. The 1988 free trade deal triggered a very bitter national election campaign fought principally over it. That time, free trade won. Not so in the elections of 1891 and of 1911, when it was soundly crushed and it sealed the fate of the governments of the day.<sup>4</sup> In the first case, John A. Macdonald succeeded in hanging on to power by raising the anti-American bogey. In 1911, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, even though riding a wave of great national prosperity based on western settlement and railway building, was defeated for advocating reciprocity with the United States. In both cases, Canadian desire for the economic benefits of free trade was derailed when several indiscreet American politicians stated that economic integration would (or should) lead to political annexation. Canadians, then and now, appreciate the benefits of North American cooperation, but they also know how to define and protect their own traditions and interests.

Despite the close intermingling of our lives and cultures, we in Canada are usually more conscious of those interconnections than you are in the United States. It is, of course, a matter of demography and might. Our country ranges over a slightly bigger physical surface than yours, but it comprises only one-tenth of the population of the United States. Thus, Canadians *never* overlook their North American partner. In fact, the close, some say looming, presence of the United States is a national obsession in Canada. One ambassador remarked that "when Washington sneezes,

London, Tokyo, . . . and Paris catch cold, and Ottawa . . . comes down with the flu."<sup>5</sup>

Because of this sensitivity, for the two hundred years since the American Revolution, attempts in Canada to define the ever-elusive Canadian identity—what it means to be Canadian—have tended to be laden with assertions of ways in which Canadians are not Americans.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in archival matters, we admire you and learn from you, but we also trek our distinctive path, particularly in matters of appraisal and disposition. With comparison, there must also come contrast.

Pierre Elliot Trudeau, prime minister of Canada from 1968 to 1984, expressed this Canadian national ambivalence well, when he told a gathering in Washington:

We're a different people from you  
and we're a different people partly  
because of you. . . . Living next to  
you is in some ways like sleeping

<sup>5</sup>Hugh L. Keenleyside, "Letter to an American Friend," in *The Star-Spangled Beaver*, edited by John H. Redekop (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1971), p. 7.

<sup>6</sup>This has ranged from the rancorous rhetoric of the United Empire Loyalists on through to the allegedly scholarly discourse of historians and political theorists. For a good and short example, see W. L. Morton's *The Canadian Identity* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press; and Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961) and, in longer form, many of D. G. Creighton's and A.R.M. Lower's works. An excellent historical analysis of the powerful role the mythology of the American presence has had in shaping "Canadianness" is Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), especially chapter 6. See also S. F. Wise and R. Craig Brown, *Canada Views the United States: Nineteenth-Century Political Attitudes* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967). Two volumes that inspired a generation were George Grant's *Lament for a Nation* (Toronto: McClelland, 1965) and *Technology and Empire* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969). For examples of more scabrous accounts, reflecting the anger of the Vietnam era, see Al Purdy, ed., *The New Romans: Candid Canadian Opinions of the U.S.* (Edmonton: M. G. Hurtig, 1968) or Ian Lumsden, ed., *Close the 49th Parallel etc.: The Americanization of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970).

<sup>4</sup>See an excellent short summary of the issues and a sound bibliography in D. C. Masters, *Reciprocity, 1846-1911* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, Historical Booklet No. 12, 1961; revised edition, 1983).

with an elephant. No matter how friendly and even-tempered is the beast, if I can call it that, one is affected by every twitch and grunt.<sup>7</sup>

A few years later, while visiting Canada, President Richard Nixon trod the same ground, but from a different perspective: "Canada is bounded 'on the north by gold, on the west by the East, on the east by history, and on the south by friends.'"<sup>8</sup>

### Some Differences and Similarities

It is as a friend among friends that I want to share with you my views of some differences as well as similarities, to suggest that the evolution of archives in Canada may have some contrasting points of interest to you. I hope to engage in a "free trade in archival ideas" discussion—or as President Richard Nixon put it, "to discuss our differences in a friendly way."

A quick glimpse at the field highlights more similarities than differences. Like NARA, the National Archives of Canada (NAC) has the legislative mandate to preserve the corporate memory of the federal government through sound information management, destruction of records without enduring value (more than 95% of the whole); archiving and making available, after proper appraisal, the best records that

document the "acts and deeds" of the government, its transactions within and without, and its relationships with the citizens. Hence the primary importance of appraisal, into which I will delve at more length later. We must make records *available*, *usable*, and *understandable*, regardless of physical form. This is no easy task in this age of multimedia records and of leaping technologies that make it harder to determine the creators of records and how decisions are arrived at, as well as ensuring that the information survives over time.

Because of the pervasiveness of those conditions, American and Canadian archivists, particularly those at NARA and NAC, were world pioneers in the realm of electronic records, as coupling the names of Charles Dollar and Harold Naugler makes clear, and we are both moving into the 1990s with new initiatives in the field of electronic records, including grappling with "virtual" records,<sup>9</sup> which most other national archives at this stage can only hope to follow. Our archivists, of course,

<sup>7</sup>P. E. Trudeau, address to the National Press Club, Washington, D.C., 26 March 1969. A year later, Trudeau returned to the metaphor: "When you're contending with an elephant you can't hope to be stronger and better and bigger than the elephant. What you can do is select those areas in which perhaps you can perform better" (television interview, Wellington, New Zealand, 14 May 1970).

<sup>8</sup>Richard M. Nixon's address to a joint sitting of the Senate and House of Commons, 14 April 1972. On his arrival in Ottawa the day before, he had declared that "while we do not have a wall between us, . . . while we have this great unguarded boundary, this does not mean that we are the same, it does not mean that we do not have differences, but it does mean that we have found a way to discuss our differences in a friendly way, without war, and this is the great lesson for all the world to see."

<sup>9</sup>On the subject of electronic records and "virtual records," the literature is flourishing. See, for instance, Margaret Hedstrom, "Understanding Electronic Incunabula: A Framework for Research on Electronic Records," *American Archivist* 54 (Summer 1991): 334–54; David Bearman, "Multisensory Data and Its Management," in *Management of Recorded Information. Converging Disciplines*, edited by Cynthia Durance (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1989), 111–20; R.E.F. Weissman, "Virtual Documents on an Electronic Desktop: Hypermedia, Emerging Computer Environments and the Future of Information Management," *ibid.*, 37–57; C. Grandstrom, "The Evolution of Tools and Techniques for the Management of Machine-Readable Data," *ibid.*, 92–101; *Taking a Byte out of History: The Archival Preservation of Federal Computer Records* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1990); Sue Gavrel, *Conceptual Problems Posed by Electronic Records: A RAMP Study* (Paris: Unesco, April 1990); many chapters in David Bearman, ed., *Archival Management of Electronic Records* (Pittsburgh: Archives and Museum Informatics, 1991); John McDonald, "Records Management and Data Management: Closing the Gap," *Records Management Journal* 1 (1989): 4–11; and John McDonald and Dorothy Alhgren, "The Archival Management of a Geographic Information System," *Archivaria* 13 (Winter 1981–82): 59–66.



have been pushing to get more and more upstream in the records-creation process to preserve a lasting memory. But one must admit that massive automation of governmental programs has propelled them in that direction for fear of losing the records and the context of their production.

We are both also proceeding toward the adoption of formal descriptive standards for archival records and creating large automated systems to control and intellectually describe our holdings. We borrowed from you the concept of the record group to organize vast collections of government records and, like you and the Australians,<sup>10</sup> we are now questioning its efficacy as an arrangement and descriptive entity in archives. Like you, although considerably behind your rate of progress, we have now instituted a regional archives program, when the first regional archives opened in Vancouver in the summer of 1992. And, with you, we are toiling on the development of standards for a whole range of technical, conservation, and imaging issues.

Finally, we are both engaged in erecting large and functional new buildings to

house the majority of our collections in all media. Yet, this is occurring at a time when new public capital investments are eschewed by our governments. The new facilities thus mark a tangible demonstration of the contemporary relevance of archives, shedding the image of dusty basements stacked with molding documents. The buildings are both contemporary in design and offer a distinct image for the institutions. Of course, there is an important difference in the size and purpose of the two facilities. The NARA one is close to six times the size of our Gatineau building, which means more complexity and difficulties. NARA's Archives II will operate independently of the existing downtown facility and will provide for archival storage for all media, with offices, researcher facilities, conservation labs, and so on. The National Archives of Canada had to accept a "split facility," leaving the public face of the institution downtown, and the storage and conservation labs in a building located at the periphery of the national capital region. The construction of Archives II has preceded our Gatineau facility, and this has enabled our staff to learn valuable lessons from your experience. The concept of creating a hall of records in our projected downtown headquarters, in which the National Archives could offer visitors to our capital the opportunity to view documents of exceptional national and historical significance, and through which an understanding of the constituent elements of our nation can be gained, is inspired by experiencing the impact of the NARA exhibitions and the Declaration of Independence display in Washington.

In almost all the mentioned areas, staff members from both institutions have in recent years exchanged visits, to our mutual benefit and certainly to the improvement of various programs at the NAC. In fact, without being facetious, I wonder if we should not have a permanent NARA office in Ottawa, and a NAC office in Washington!

<sup>10</sup>Peter Scott is the world pioneer in this regard. Among his many works on the subject, see especially "The Record Group Concept: A Case for Abandonment," *American Archivist* 29 (October 1966): 493-504. That Australians hold firm to his views may be readily gleaned from the new (second) edition of their famous collaborative textbook, *Keeping Archives*, edited by Judith Ellis (Port Melbourne, 1993). See also Cheryl Simes, "The Record Group Is Dead—Long Live the Record Group!" *Archives and Manuscripts* 20 (May 1992): 19-24. Leading American proponents in following Scott are Max J. Evans, "Authority Control: An Alternative to the Record Groups Concept," *American Archivist* 49 (Summer 1986): 249-61; and David Bearman, *Archival Methods* (Pittsburgh: Archives and Museum Informatics, 1989). The fullest Canadian critique of the record group is Terry Cook, "The Concept of the Archival Fonds: Theory, Description, and Provenance in the Post-Custodial Era," in *The Archival Fonds: From Theory to Practice*, edited by Terry Eastwood (Ottawa: Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards, Bureau of Canadian Archivists, 1992), 31-86, especially 47-52.

This “free trade in archival ideas,” in comparing and contrasting strategies, approaches, and procedures between our institutions and, in the frameworks of SAA, the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA), the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA), and the Association des archivistes du Québec (AAQ), between our professional bodies, has been essential. Despite the growing limitations imposed by drastic budget cuts and the recession, I hope it can continue. As one of you remarked to one of my staff members, “when the Canadians come to town, we feel we are talking to our brothers and sisters in archives, whereas most folks from other countries seem like very distant relations.” We in Canada feel the same way!

Our archival histories converge and differ in important ways. As government records archivists, we in Canada are both older and younger than you, and like you, were much influenced by the longer historical manuscripts tradition. The Public Archives of Canada (renamed the National Archives of Canada in our 1987 act) was created in 1872, whereas the National Archives and Records Service was established only in 1934. Yet while government records were NARA’s central focus from the start—historical manuscripts already being well cared for in the Library of Congress and in numerous university libraries and historical societies—government records became our central focus only by the mid-1970s. Our historical manuscripts were not left to other institutions, however, but were integrated within the National Archives of Canada right from the start. Indeed, they remained the central focus of the institution for its first century. From this historical accident of evolution came the Canadian “total archives” concept, where public and private records in all media are housed in one archival institution, in each appropriate jurisdiction. This total archives approach was pioneered at the

NAC, but it is being followed by virtually every provincial, municipal, university, and church archives in the country and, increasingly, by most non-European countries around the world. The American pattern at NARA (and elsewhere in the United States) follows the classic European model, where (until recently) the State archives exist almost exclusively for the records of the State. By contrast, and ironically so in Canada, with a much older national archives and much closer political and cultural ties to the mother countries of Britain and France, the European model was discarded in favor of the more comprehensive or global approach of “total archives.”<sup>11</sup>

This global or comprehensive approach is also reflected in the national archival system or network in Canada (the “Canadian Council of Archives”),<sup>12</sup> and in the role of the National Archives in it. Historically, Canada has not followed the American nation-building experience. The story of the individualist on the western frontier creating a new society is your national myth, not really ours.<sup>13</sup> In Canada, the institutions of fur-trading companies, trade permits, commercial and military posts, canals, railways, and mounted police largely preceded settlement, imposing a sense of structure, “peace, order and good government.” Given its small population strewn over an immense territory, Canada has regularly capitalized on such national networks, often combined with public ownership or participation. In this century,

<sup>11</sup>Wilfred I. Smith, “‘Total Archives’: The Canadian Experience,” *Archives et bibliothèques de Belgique* 57, no. 1–2 (1986): 323–46. See also Terry Cook’s analysis in “The Tyranny of the Medium: A Comment on ‘Total Archives,’” *Archivaria* 9 (Winter 1979–80): 141–50.

<sup>12</sup>For an overview, see Marcel Caya, ed., *Canadian Archives in 1992* (Ottawa: CCA, 1992).

<sup>13</sup>An overview of the theme of Canada and the frontier can be found in Michael Cross, *The Frontier Thesis and the Canadas: The Debate on the Impact of the Canadian Environment* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1970).

public broadcasting networks, sophisticated transportation arteries, and national social programs have replaced the nineteenth-century equivalents of fur trade empires, canals and railways, but the idea remains the same. So is it in archives, where a national network reflects these broader Canadian historical patterns. While the National Archives certainly does not impose (nor wish to impose) its will on its network partners, it does fully participate in and fund the Canadian Council of Archives, and provides secretariat services linking professional associations, provincial councils, and bureaus into one national archival network (with a large number of explicit and implicit linkages). Through this route and over a relatively short period, significant advances have been made in developing national descriptive standards, funding for a national archival conservation program, a grants-dispensing mechanism (and funding on a cost-shared basis) for a myriad of backlog reduction projects, some support for graduate education programs, and so on.

Another contrasting element in our two national archival traditions relates to our relationships with academic historians. While national archival institutions and national professional associations for archivists in both countries were much influenced by historians and the two national historians' associations, the Society of American Archivists was founded at the same time as your national institution. By contrast, the Association of Canadian Archivists left the fold of the Canadian Historical Association only in 1975, over one hundred years after the founding of our national institution. The Association des Archivistes du Québec appeared only in 1967. And yet again, curiously and ironically given its recent departure, the Canadian profession seems perhaps less tied (as I indicate below) to historians and historical research imperatives than does yours.

It is Canadians' perception that, despite the evident European influences decades ago on the work of Theodore Schellenberg and Ernst Posner in the United States, American archival practice is still largely based on serving the needs of researchers, particularly historians. This is evident to Canadians in the central arguments of Elsie Freeman's several landmark articles and the general approach to reference services and user surveys in the United States,<sup>14</sup> in the whole rationale for the appraisal study

<sup>14</sup>Elsie T. Freeman, "In the Eye of the Beholder: Archives Administration from the User's Point of View," *American Archivist* 47 (Spring 1984): 111-23; "Buying Quarter Inch Holes: Public Support Through Results," *Midwestern Archivist* 10 (1985): 89-97. See also Lawrence Dowler, "The Role of Use in Defining Archival Practice and Principles: A Research Agenda for the Availability and Use of Records," *American Archivist* 51 (Winter-Spring 1988): 74-86; Randall C. Jimerson, "Redefining Archival Identity: Meeting User Needs in the Information Society," *American Archivist* 52 (Summer 1989): 332-40. For a parallel perspective in Canada, see Gabrielle Blais and David Enns, "From Paper Archives to People Archives: Public Programming in the Management of Archives," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990-91): 101-13. Terry Eastwood's notion of "use," particularly in its most recent explication, bolsters in the final analysis the theoretical discourse of most Canadian archivists: "The more literate a society, the more transactions it is capable of; the more transactions it is capable of, the more documents it creates; the more documents it creates, the more it will have needs and find ways to keep them to induce memory of past actions and events." Archives, by definition ("transactions carried out in the performance of functions and activities," products of actions and transactions), are "utilitarian": "The very purpose served by an archival document is forever after a part of its being and meaning, no matter the other purposes to which it might at one time or another be put. Thus an archival document can only be understood in the context of its initial purpose." ("Toward a Social Theory of Appraisal," in *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor*, edited by Barbara L. Craig [Ottawa: ACA, 1992], 77, 74, 71-89). This model of following the organic character of archives as contrasted with an user-driven approach, in the field of reference and outreach services explicitly, is addressed in Terry Cook, "Viewing the World Upside Down: Reflections on the Theoretical Underpinnings of Archival Public Programming," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990-91): 123-34.

of electronic records conducted for NARA in the past year or two by the National Academy of Public Administration,<sup>15</sup> and in the recurring articles in the *American Archivist* of how new trends in some particular subfield of American history are changing, or should shift, appraisal and selection practices.<sup>16</sup> This was also exemplified by the controversy between John Roberts (against) and Terry Eastwood (for) over the need for archival theory, at the ACA meeting in July 1993.<sup>17</sup>

In Canada, by contrast, even though many Canadian archivists are still trained in history and some even operate as respected historians, Canadian archival practice is now more rooted in European archival theory and indigenous explorations into the "contextual history" or provenance of the record in a wide sense. Hugh Taylor responded to modern archival problems with a *contextual approach*, that

is, one that "is concerned in the first instance with acquiring knowledge of the context in which information is recorded rather than knowledge of the information contents of the records."<sup>18</sup> Tom Nesmith drew inspiration from Taylor and researched the implications of this concept as the foundations for the second graduate-level program in archival education in Canada.<sup>19</sup> This transpires also in the recent work by Luciana Duranti of explaining the European auxiliary historical science of diplomatics,<sup>20</sup> and by Terry Cook of developing, based on a German model, a new theoretical underpinning for archival appraisal, which he calls a "provenance-

<sup>15</sup>*The Archives of the Future: Archival Strategies for the Treatment of Electronic Databases* (Washington, D.C.: Report to NARA, 1991). For a critique of this approach in comparison with the Canadian one, see Terry Cook, "Easy to Byte, Harder to Chew: The Second Generation of Electronic Records Archives," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92): 210-11.

<sup>16</sup>As an example, see Elizabeth Lockwood, "Imponderable Matters: The Influence of New Trends in History on Appraisal at the National Archives," *American Archivist* 53 (Summer 1990): 394-405.

<sup>17</sup>Roberts's positions are well known. See his "Archival Theory: Much Ado About Shelving," *American Archivist* 50 (Winter 1987): 66-70; and "Archival Theory: Myth or Banality?" *American Archivist* 53 (Winter 1990): 110-20. Eastwood disagrees: "That professions take action in the world disguises that they build knowledge on which to base action in the same manner as the pure disciplines build knowledge. Every applied discipline operates on the basis of some abstract body of knowledge . . . for applied disciplines, theory and its method to determine the nature of the thing to be treated come before and to a great extent condition practice and its method" ("What Is Archival Theory and Why Is It Important?" unpublished paper delivered at the ACA meeting, July 1993). I am not implying that all American archivists embrace Roberts's stance, but it has more audience in the United States than similar views have in Canada.

<sup>18</sup>Tom Nesmith, "Hugh Taylor's Contextual Idea for Archives and the Foundation of Graduate Education in Archival Studies," in Craig, *Archival Imagination*, 13-37, 16. This approach "begins with a study of the creators of records, their contemporary activities, and their histories—administrative or personal. . . . The contextual analysis moves on to acquire information about records: the characteristics of their media and of types of records within each medium, the immediate circumstances of their creation, their uses prior to entering archives, organization in records-keeping systems, and relationships with other records and systems. The analysis turns then to the archival theory, functions, and institutional structures required to appraise, arrange, describe, make available for use, and preserve these records." This explains why Taylor wrote that "we need a new form of 'social history' to make clear how and why records were created; this should be the archival task" ("Transformation in the Archives: Technological Adjustment or Paradigm Shift," *Archivaria* 25 [Winter 1987-88]: 17). For a comprehensive bibliography of Taylor's work, see Craig, *Archival Imagination*, 255-59.

<sup>19</sup>See his early explorations in "Archives from the Bottom Up: Social History and Archival Scholarship," *Archivaria* 14 (Summer 1982): 5-26, and his more elaborate views in his recent "Archival Studies in English-Speaking Canada and the North American Rediscovery of Provenance," introduction to *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance*, edited by Tom Nesmith (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1993).

<sup>20</sup>Her six-part series started in *Archivaria* 28 and culminated with her "Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science (Part VI)," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92): 6-24.

based structural-functional model."<sup>21</sup> Contextual approaches of Canadian archivists often advocate and use the research methodology of the historian, but they resort to it to uncover the contextual richness of archival provenance. They do not adopt it to discern the research needs and interests of historians, nor do they countenance use, or even anticipated use, by historians or anyone else, influencing in a significant way archival appraisal or description or the fundamental character of archives as records.<sup>22</sup> For his part, Terry Eastwood reinforces this perspective by insisting that archives are "the whole of the documents produced by either organizations or persons in the course of their affairs," that documents are interdependent for their meaning and their capacity "to serve as evidence of the activity that generated them," and that the archivist must understand both "the function giving rise to the documents and their structure."

Archives are social creations for social purpose because, as part of transactions, they serve as evidence of them and therefore expose the atomistic acts which make up the molecules of past occurrences, which human beings try to perceive and

weave into the fabric of their understanding of the past.<sup>23</sup>

### Appraisal at the National Archives of Canada

This second section focuses on this contextual or "provenance-based structural-functional" (T. Cook) approach. One could delve at length into any of the many important areas mentioned earlier in which NARA and the National Archives of Canada staff cooperate and pursue mutual interests. Appraisal, however, is emerging as perhaps the most challenging and exciting, certainly the most pervasive, of these. Perhaps the following outline of recent developments at the National Archives will contribute to the "free trade in archival ideas" between our two institutions and countries.<sup>24</sup>

In appraisal, both Americans and Canadians are searching for more macro-level, top-down approaches to cope with the overwhelming and sometimes unmanageable exponential growth of government (and private) records being generated on more and more fragile and fugitive supports. The information overload; the numerous formats and support carriers; the greater expectations of accessibility by all kinds of clients for decision making, transparency, accountability, and research; the closer interdependence of all professions involved in information management (for instance, archivists, records managers, librarians, documentalists, systems analysts); the

<sup>21</sup>"Mind over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal," in Craig, *Archival Imagination*, 58, 38–70; also by Cook, *The Archival Appraisal of Records Containing Personal Information: A RAMP Study with Guidelines* (Paris: ICA, 1991), especially chapter 3.

<sup>22</sup>See, for example, Cook's rejection of the "Freeman School" of researcher-driven archival paradigms in his "Viewing the World Upside Down," 123–24. As Cook acknowledges, F. Gerald Ham eloquently made this point in the United States years ago, in complaining that archivists were like mere weather-vanes swayed by the latest historiographical trends and thus leading to poor appraisal approaches and decisions. Ham does not seem to have been universally listened to. See his "The Archival Edge," in *A Modern Archives Reader*, edited by Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walch (Washington, D.C.: National Archives, 1984), 328–29 (first published in 1975).

<sup>23</sup>Eastwood, "What Is Archival Theory," and "Towards a Social Theory of Appraisal," 78.

<sup>24</sup>For an early overview of these new trends in appraisal, see my "Building a Living Memory for the History of Our Present: New Perspectives on Archival Appraisal," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 2 (1991): 263–82. Several of the articles published in *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–92), based on papers given at the 1991 ACA Conference in Banff, also reflect these new paths in appraisal through the tangles of modern records.



growing massaging, integration, and combination of data that are taking place in the creation of records, often in a virtual form and by the operation of many creators; the proliferation of the personal computer and of sophisticated software tools; the coupling of computers and telecommunications—all these phenomena challenge the traditional methods and sometimes the theoretical underpinnings of archival science.

Not a single day goes by without the media, databases, personal computers, fax machines, and electronic mail generating “torrents” of images and new “facts.” Technological progress has made it possible to swamp societies under a mass of raw, instantaneous, simultaneous information that is shared planetwide and that sometimes impedes the process of understanding and decision making by overloading our knowledge and judgment, not to mention the impossibility of identifying a single record creator or of capturing a stable “record.” One of the nightmares that haunt archivists and records managers on occasion is the extent to which the application of modern computer-based technologies can affect organizations’ ability to preserve their corporate memory.<sup>25</sup> As John McDonald, among others, has argued for years, the massive amount of information to be grasped in electronic records, the fragility of the records themselves, and their constant need for upgrading because of

changing technology are forcing archivists to work more and more “upstream,” for instance in developing archival rules that would be embedded in systems at the time of their development, before any record has been created and certainly before their specific content is known. This is why archivists must focus on general content as defined by functional intent, organizational context, and data system models.<sup>26</sup>

The “information explosion” generates in archivists what one American commentator has called “information anxiety.” Thus the need for more contextual or holistic perspectives in order to survive.<sup>27</sup> On the one hand, archivists have to cooperate more and more with other disciplines. But their concern with such issues as context, evidence, and the survival of information through time means that they, more than any other discipline, are best equipped to help modern organizations deal with the growing corporate memory challenges they are facing. But for this to happen, archivists must address many difficult questions. What is a record—that is, the evidence of an action or a transaction—or how do we define it when a given electronic workflow is so dynamic and fluid, and when organizations have become mutants?<sup>28</sup> How do we identify it when it exists in so many different forms, including in compound or virtual state? What should we keep and why?<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Records in machine-readable form can be rendered inaccessible if they are stored on poor-quality media that may deteriorate over relatively short periods of time or if they are subject to extremes of heat and humidity. The lack of documentation that provides both physical and intellectual access to such records and their dependence on hardware and software that could change over time constitute further impediments to an organization’s ability to preserve and effectively use its electronic corporate memory. It is unfortunate that the revolution in information technology has not resulted in a similar revolution in the development of a comprehensive set of policies, tools, and techniques that permit organizations to preserve effectively the physical and intellectual attributes of the valuable electronic information.

<sup>26</sup>See note 9; also a summary of his large output in “Organiser l’amont” d’un programme d’archivage d’archives ordinolingués,” *Janus* 2 (1990): 37–42.

<sup>27</sup>Richard Saul Wurman, *Information Anxiety* (New York: Doubleday, 1989). For an extended analysis of Wurman, see Terry Cook, “Rites of Passage: The Archivist and the Information Age,” *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990–91): 171–76.

<sup>28</sup>For example, there have been more changes in the structure of the Canadian Government in the past year than in the previous 25 years.

<sup>29</sup>On these issues, see Weissman, “Virtual Documents on an Electronic Desktop,” 37–60. David Bearman adds: “The important point of these challenges to the traditional document is that the boundaries of the document have given way to a creative

Today, the archivists' main challenge is to structure a future for the historical experience of our time. For that purpose, they must establish a documentary base sufficiently luxurious and wide to nurture future generations of historians and their grasp of the second half of the twentieth century. Working for tomorrow, to ensure the continuity of our memory, is to insert ourselves in a trajectory toward the future. In this sense, as we shall see, archivists—and this was one of the conclusions of the ICA Congress in Montreal in September 1992—must absolutely take the perspective of the historian, that is, put the creators of records and the products of their activities and processes in a historical context, concentrating on *provenance*.<sup>30</sup> Thus, in appraisal, a global holistic perspective is gradually replacing the traditional approach, wherein, as American Gerald Ham stated almost twenty years ago, appraisal was done in a random, fragmented, uncoordinated, even accidental manner, producing a biased and distorted archival record.<sup>31</sup>

To correct this, archivists have been devising and articulating elements of new ap-

praisal theories and strategies. One such promising approach is the American "documentation strategy" pioneered by Helen Samuels, which focuses on a kind of macro-appraisal, that is, first understanding societal functions or themes or subjects before appraising particular groups of records.<sup>32</sup> Another, as mentioned earlier, is NARA's recent study done in conjunction with the National Academy of Public Administration.

European archivists have been advocating for a much longer period the need for the archivist to understand how society functions and how it creates records before appraising the actual records per se. Hans Booms of Germany has pioneered this approach, and the new PIVOT appraisal project in The Netherlands is based on the same premise.<sup>33</sup> From this perspective, it is argued that the accurate reflection of soci-

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authoring event in which user and system participate. Only the context in which these virtual documents are created can give us an understanding of their content. While this requires a fundamental cultural adjustment, from viewing humans as the authors of information to accepting systems authorship, I would argue that it corresponds closely to a professional perspective of the archivist, which has long focused on provenance and the context of records creation rather than on the physical record or its contents" ("Multisensory Data and Its Management," in Durand, *Management of Recorded Information*, 111).

<sup>30</sup>For some interesting insights on this theme, see Lyv Mykland's paper at the Montreal Congress, "Protection and Integrity: The Archivist's Identity and Professionalism," *Archivum* 39 (1993): 99–109; Helen Willa Samuels, "L'identité de l'archiviste nord-américain," in *Actes de la 21ème Conférence européenne des archives* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: 1990), 86–90.

<sup>31</sup>Ham used the weathervane metaphor to characterize past appraisal practices (see note 22 earlier in this article).

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<sup>32</sup>"Who Controls the Past," *American Archivist* 49 (Spring 1986): 109–24. This classic statement was updated in Richard J. Cox and H. W. Samuels, "The Archivist's First Responsibility: A Research Agenda to Improve the Identification and Retention of Records of Enduring Value," *American Archivist* 51 (Winter–Spring 1988): 28–42, and in the commentaries which follow by Frank Boles and Frank J. Burke. Recently, Samuels's documentation strategy has been enriched by the new but complementary concept of an institutional functional analysis, in her *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1992) and in her "Improving Our Disposition: Documentation Strategy," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–92): 125–40. Terry Cook has commented on her latter paper in "Documentation Strategy," *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992): 181–91.

<sup>33</sup>Booms, however, casts a wider net than do the Dutch, who focus more narrowly on the functions of the State. The most important statement (from 1972 originally, and reflecting in its text and notes the debate in Europe at that time) is Hans Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage: Issues in the Appraisal of Archival Sources," *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987): 69–107; also "Überlieferungsbildung: Keeping Archives as a Social and Political Activity," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–92): 25–33. For an English-language statement on the interesting Dutch approach, see Rijkarchiefdienst, *PIVOT: A Turning Point in Appraisal Policy* (The Hague: Public Records Service, 1991); also J. Peter Sigmond, "Form, Function and Archival Value," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–92): 141–47.

etal (or, for the Dutch, governmental) functions and dynamics in archival records should be the central concern of appraisal. Europeans thus posit that archivists should speculate less about possible uses for records tomorrow and concentrate more on developing objective criteria to ensure that the records acquired mirror the values, patterns, and functions of society today, or, for older records, of the society contemporary to the records' creators. In this approach, records are not appraised and acquired to support use (except in a very general way, for without any use, records are worthless); rather, they are reaped (as far as the archival institution's mandate and resources permit) to reflect the functions, ideas, programs, and activities of records creators and those with whom they interact.<sup>34</sup> Intellectually, *use follows, not precedes, appraisal*. Appraisal based on this macro-functional or societal model should develop an archival heritage in which scholars and researchers in all disciplines and all interests can trace rich sources to support their work. Appraisal based on use (and thus researcher-driven) warps the societal record in favor of those research groups who can lobby the loudest or those disciplines (usually academic history) with which archivists themselves feel most comfortable. And in the end, the records trove limps behind the researchers' new greeds.

The National Archives of Canada, and some others in the Canadian archival community, are developing and experimenting with a new approach to appraisal. If the archivist is no longer to sit back and wait for government agencies to send records schedules to the Archives for approval on an ad hoc basis (usually, voluminous case

files without contextual links which the departments want to get rid of or the records of program areas of less significance than the important policy and related records), and only then to proceed to assess the records covered by such schedules for their evidential value and mostly (as was the case) for their informational value of possible use to researchers, what is the archivist to do?<sup>35</sup>

Over the past two years, and in response to these issues as well as to the evolution that was taking place in archival theory and in information management across government, the National Archives of Canada developed a planned approach to what is now called *disposition*. Rather than the passive role it played in the past, the NAC has developed an active approach based on research into the functions and activities of government—and in so doing actually anticipated the active role that Liv Mykland and Sue Gavrel both recommended at the ICA Congress in Montreal.<sup>36</sup> This research led to the identification of nationally significant programs that were expected to yield records of high archival value. The process, which is currently under way, has led to meetings with senior officials of these programs to develop multiyear disposition plans that will result in the identification of records that are not only of high archival value but also of high corporate value. The analysis involved is based on a top-down and holistic approach in which a team of archivists and appropriate staff from the institutions navigate through the information holdings of those functions and activities that both the Archives and the institutions conclude are of

<sup>34</sup>The fullest Canadian statement at the theoretical and conceptual level may be found in Cook's two works mentioned in note 21; see also Richard Brown, "Records Acquisition Strategy and Its Theoretical Foundation: The Case for a Concept of Archival Hermeneutics," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–92): 34–46.

<sup>35</sup>The practical reasons for changing approach are well explained in Eldon Frost, "A Weak Link in the Chain: Records Scheduling as a Source of Archival Acquisition," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–92): 78–86.

<sup>36</sup>Mykland, "Protection and Integrity"; Sue Gavrel, "Information Technology Standards: Tools for the Archivist," *Archivum* 39 (1993): 241–50.

high archival and corporate importance. The result is a disposition agreement containing a description of those records that have been identified as archival and an authority from the National Archivist for the institution to dispose of all other records.

This approach has resulted in archivists having to understand how modern government institutions function, how (on a global level) information technologies are used to manage information, how information supports decision making and the delivery of programs, and how to apply analytical abilities and negotiating skills to accomplish their goals within an administrative process that is still fairly new.

This quick summary requires explication, both about the theoretical underpinnings of this venture and about the practical steps taken to implement the "disposition" stream. First, the theoretical premises.<sup>37</sup> The approach being implemented by the National Archives of Canada shifts the initial and major focus of appraisal from the record, as a physical artifact and discrete item, to the societal and governmental context in which the record is created and acquires meaning. Of course, social theorists have yet to agree on the nature of society and on social dynamics. The most well-known dichotomy is the Marx-Weber often caricatured opposition in which the former asserts that in the final analysis, the material condition of social groups determines historical development, whereas the latter puts the emphasis on ideas as the primary engine. Some have underlined the primary role of structures in the evolution of societies, while others have stressed the intervention of human actors (individuals or groups).<sup>38</sup>

Neo-institutional approaches, linked to more explicit *problématiques* and evolutionary research programs, have revived theorization in social sciences, including history.<sup>39</sup> Following Popperian concepts and simplifying J. Akerman's analysis of the main processes at work *simultaneously* in society, we have proposed to define a socioeconomy as an overall game with subgames, each with its own rules and dynamics, its own players, and its own pace and organizational fabric. A concrete image of a socioeconomy would then be recreated by a combination of the subprocesses. This reconstruction is not without analogy to the combination of scores of different musical instruments into a complex musical piece or the reconstruction of the dynamics of the human body from a simultaneous account of the different subsystems: blood, nerves, muscles, bones, etc.<sup>40</sup> As for the Dutch and

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the twin poles of function and structure in an interactive model called "structuration," see Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984). Also D. A. Schon, *Beyond the Stable State* (New York: Random House, 1971); E. A. Tiryakian, "A Model of Societal Change and Its Lead Indicators," in *The Study of Total Societies*, edited by S. Z. Klausner (New York: Praeger, 1967), 69-97.

<sup>39</sup>Karl Polanyi envisions a socioeconomy (a society) as an "instituted process" ("The Economy as Instituted Process," in *Trade and Markets in the Early Empires*, edited by K. Polanyi et al. (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1957), 243-70. Many neo-institutional theorists are well known: Harold Demsetz, Douglas North, John Hicks, A. A. Alchian, Andrew Schotter, and others.

<sup>40</sup>Gilles Paquet and Jean-Pierre Wallot, *Lower Canada at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century: Restructuring and Modernization* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1988). Karl Popper evokes the world of material things (world 1), the subjective world of the mind, knowledge, and conscience (world 2); and the world of objective structures created, intentionally or not, by humans—the world of organizations, customs, laws, institutions (world 3) (*Objective Knowledge* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972]). J. Akerman has identified eight "moving forces," which we have reduced to six (demography, production and exchange, finance, the ecology of social groups, the state, the distribution of income and wealth). See his *Ekonomisk Teori II* (Paris: Lund, 1944; French translation, 1955).

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<sup>37</sup>Many of the paragraphs on the National Archives approach follow closely the detailed account given by Cook in his "Mind over Matter," particularly pp. 46ff.

<sup>38</sup>The literature on Marx and Weber is too voluminous to be detailed here. For an attempt to integrate

Canadian appraisal models, they differ on an important point: the former views first the functions, then moves to the structures; the latter tries to encompass both structures and functions simultaneously. Of course, other factors, such as time, space, change, and ideologies, intervene.

These questions will absorb the energies of social scientists for quite a while. And as I will assert later, there is no totally satisfying answer. Our own approach will need some refinements. Meanwhile, archivists must operate in the real world. And for them, "the interaction of function and structure together articulates the corporate mind (or program) of the records creator. The creator in turn articulates many sub-functions and establishes numerous sub-structures to carry out these broad programmes" and dependent activities.<sup>41</sup> These in turn are fed by information systems and documentation leading to the production of records that the archivists eventually appraise. And the citizen completes the loop two ways: by interacting with the programs at the bottom or case-file level and, through political and other pressures, by deciding in a democratic society which types of functions or broad programs, such as health care, should exist in the first place in public institutions.<sup>42</sup>

In this schema, then, once the program is created and operative, the primacy of archival analysis focuses on the creator, not on the records. By implication, provenance is rooted in "the conceptual act of creation rather than in the physical artifact of the record eventually created."<sup>43</sup> Perhaps appropriately for our electronic world, "virtual" records emerge from a virtual or conceptual provenance, rather than from a

fixed, structured, hierarchical one. In this milieu, archivists appraise by assessing more globally the functions of the records creators rather than the records themselves, and the records-creating processes rather than the possible research uses. The processes imply, of course, the relationships between creators (in our example, a government department) and the citizens. This is well explained in concrete terms by Terry Cook:

In this "macro-appraisal" phase, archivists would seek to understand why records were created rather than what they contain, how they were created and used by their original users rather than how they might be used in the future, and what formal functions and mandates of the creator they supported rather than what internal structure of physical characteristics they may or may not have. Archivists would look at the reasons for and the nature of the communication between the citizen and the state . . . rather than at what was communicated. This intellectual link to the creator thus shifts the central importance of provenance from the physical origin of the records in their creator's office to their original conceptual purpose in that same office.<sup>[44]</sup> In the first instance, therefore, the main appraisal questions are not what has been written (or photographed, filmed, automated, etc.), where it is, and what research value it has. Rather, *the key appraisal question is, Who—in articulating and implementing the key functions of the institution (as assigned it by the broader society)—would have had cause to create a record, what type*

<sup>41</sup>Cook, "Mind over Matter," 46.

<sup>42</sup>For simplification purposes, I mention here the citizen and the state. But similar arguments could be made for different institutions and their constituents: church-faithful, school-student, etc.

<sup>43</sup>Cook, "Mind over Matter," 47.

<sup>44</sup>This is true for records on all media, but for electronic records, there often is no other alternative.



*of record would it be, and with whom would that corporate person cooperate in either its creation or its later use?*<sup>45</sup> Phrased differently, the central appraisal question becomes What should be documented? rather than What documentation should be kept?<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup>The essence of this note is in Cook's text. See David Klaassen's emphasis on the need for conceptualization and his distinction between the archivist's task and the librarian's task ("Achieving Balanced Documentation: Social Services from a Consumer Perspective," *Midwestern Archivist* 11 [1986]: 116). This echoes Gerald Ham's advice: "Conceptualization must precede collection" ("The Archival Edge," in Daniels and Walch, *A Modern Archives Reader*, 326). It is also the method followed by those responsible for creating complicated computer records structures: unlike the methodology of diplomatics, functional analysis always precedes form and is articulated first. See Richard C. Perkinson, *Data Analysis: The Key to Data Base Design* (Wellesley, Mass.: QED Information Sciences, 1984), especially part one.

<sup>46</sup>Emphasis is in the original text. Cook adds: "Through research on the processes and functions of records creators, the archivist can determine where the best documentary evidence of that reality will most likely be found, and the central factors or participants that shape that evidence. Unlike the documentation strategy, this is an approach which assigns a greater primacy to structure (the records creators) than to function as the first focus of archival appraisal, but it also asserts that such structures are the manifestation (or reflection) of societal functions. It is thus an approach that also attempts to integrate the uneasy tension between evidential value (based on archivists' analyses of structure and process) and informational value (based on users' articulation of important functions, usually cited . . . as subjects and themes). . . . This approach [focuses] . . . on the mechanisms or loci in society where the citizen interacts with the state to produce the sharpest and clearest insights into societal dynamics and issues. It is essential to remember that the formal corporate records creator (structure) interacts for some purpose (function) with citizens, clients, or customers, and *together* as a result of this *interaction* (which is often only implicit) they co-create through various recording processes the actual records which the archivist will eventually appraise. It is at these points of sharpest *interaction* of the structure, function, and client that the best documentary evidence will be found." (Cook, "Mind over Matter," 49–50). See also Bearman, *Archival Methods*, 14–15.

This theoretical high ground is embodied, at the National Archives of Canada, in a concrete strategy. Given limited resources and the ongoing, often pressing needs of our client departments for disposition authorities, it would have been impossible to grasp the whole federal government in a single movement. Thus the need to identify the most salient departments or agencies that should be addressed in priority and, in each one, which records creators (rather than which records) take precedence. Once this task is done, then archivists can hone in on the records most likely to yield the greatest archival value through "micro-appraisal." The records remaining as evidence of the actions and transactions of their creators implementing specific functions and programs are thereby appraised at the end of the process, after the archivists have "captured" the functions and the structures that gave rise organically to those records and have identified which intersection in information flows is most promising in terms of evidential (and often informational) ore.

In the implementation of the Acquisition Strategy model, archivists at the National Archives of Canada face a task that would be titanic should they act in isolation, no matter what advances have been made in theory and practices. Thus they must rely also on new partners in Canadian government organizations. The recent governmentwide information technology and management of government information policies require that institutions develop information plans based on the involvement and support of senior management. They are to be based on an integrated analysis of the business functions of the organization as well as its strategic priorities and goals. Such plans typically describe the accountability framework within which information and information technology is to be managed in the organization. They also delineate (or point to) a model of the functions of the organization, an associated cor-

poratewide information model and a long-range information technology architecture that, in combination, are designed to support directly, as well as to streamline and enhance, the delivery of the programs and services of the organization.

Few departments have attained such goals, but the evolution is occurring and is being formally promoted within the context of government policy. Moreover, those responsible for information management in departments are becoming facilitators, rather than simply controllers, in the delivery of the overall programs of their client organizations. *The organization as a whole* rather than individual programs has become the 'new' client, thus the accent on corporatewide information and data models, and information technology architectures and standards. Indeed, that corporate "organization" can be the government as a whole, analyzed in terms of its broad functions (such as social benefits, regional development, or public security) that cross several departments, thus diminishing the significance of "structure" and enhancing that of "functions" in government organization, planning, and program delivery, and, as a corollary, in information systems and records creation. Much attention is turning to the development of corporatewide inventories, thesauri, and authority controls—tools and techniques that will have a profound impact on the nature of the finding aids that organizations use and that archives inherit to manage their own holdings. Again, archives need to cooperate with these groups not only to exert influence at the design stage but to add value through the contributions they bring through their perspectives on context and evidence. As Liv Mykland stated in the paper she delivered to the ICA Congress,

Accurate description gives users a tool to help them to understand the material that they are using. It creates a consciousness about the coherence

of fragmented bits of information. It creates the potential to understand the value of facts and data as evidence, not as the disembodied stuff of confusion and alienation.<sup>47</sup>

The main challenge in the strategy was to identify the more important departments, agencies, and programs as well as the numerous links between them; to rank them in priority order, as corporate bodies with internal programs and linkages; then to assess these programs comprehensively; and finally to appraise the information holdings resulting from all these processes on all media.

Evidently, this type of macro-appraisal emphasizes, in the first instance anyway, the archival value of the location or site or circumstances of records creation rather than the value of the records themselves. It assesses the capacity of institutions to create records of value in a global way rather than dealing directly, one by one, with the tens of thousands of records series, databases, and media collections which any large jurisdiction will contain, let alone with individual records.<sup>48</sup>

This exercise of ranking led to the creation of a governmentwide plan dividing the then-156 records-creating departments and agencies of the Canadian federal government into priority categories, which in turn have dictated (except for a few emergencies) the sequence of the negotiations and signatures of formal agreements with each of them to proceed with appraisal or records scheduling. These agreements (called Multi-Year Disposition Plans) with each agency or department control the size,

<sup>47</sup>Mykland, "Protection and Integrity," 102.

<sup>48</sup>Cook, "Mind over Matter," 53.

number, order, and sequencing of records schedules, as well as the resource expenditure and completion time frame for each. Schedules will be accepted only if they relate to entire, large programs within agencies, and encompass all records, in all media, for all functions, at all hierarchical levels, of the program involved. A formal appraisal methodology guides archivists in making such comprehensive, multimedia appraisals in logical order.

We use four categories to rank agencies and departments, depending on such factors as the amount of research and appraisal time needed (in relation to the complexity of the different institutions); the detail, number, and sequencing of disposal actions (again in relation to the complexity factor); and the desired timing (for us and the targeted entities) for the adoption and implementation of formal disposition plans. While the criteria to rank institutions into the various categories of importance may well vary in different archival jurisdiction, ours include such factors as

the character of the institution within the government as a whole (central policy agency, "line" operations, or "staff" administration); the breadth and diversity of its functions, now and over time; its formal leadership within a functional umbrella and thus its importance for a cluster of interagency activities; the number and complexity of formal acts of Parliament for which it is responsible; the seniority of (or even existence of) cabinet and ministerial rank for its titular head; the overall size of its budget, discretionary spending power, number of employees, and the number of clients; the complexity of its internal administrative organization, including the degree of regionalization and number of field offices; the existence of ma-

jor gaps in the archival holdings of the institution; and known or anticipated threats to the records through abandonment, privatization, or devolution of the sponsoring function.<sup>49</sup>

This ranking of institutions pursues two objectives. One, to reach first the most central, senior, complex, and powerful institutions nurturing and implementing the major policies and programs of the Canadian federal government. Second, to hack away at duplication of appraisal and acquisition by ferreting out functional overlaps between institutions (and sometimes within institutions, as some of our schedules have done, providing a serendipitous advantage to them). Often, the records of one organization can best be understood by the examination, in priority, of those of another one. From the largest and most complex departments or agencies, we are proceeding gradually toward the smaller agencies, which we intend to appraise more collectively and through central information institutions collecting their data.<sup>50</sup>

With appropriate adaptations and greater details, the same functional-structural analysis has to be applied to the internal branches and divisions of each major agency or department to assess their relative importance and, thus, to identify the priority targets for the multiyear disposition plans. As we and the Dutch archivists have found, this process requires a firm commitment to allow the archivists to do the sustained and intensive research necessary to make these macro-appraisal decisions and to develop the resulting

<sup>49</sup>Cook, "Mind over Matter," 53-54.

<sup>50</sup>Cook has detailed this approach as well as the part of the model that deals with the citizen-state interaction reflecting a convergence of three factors: the programme (function), the agency (structure), and the citizen. See his "Mind over Matter," 54-57 and note 46 in this article.

strategic targets for records disposition and, more importantly, archival appraisal.

Of course, this provenance-based structural-functional model at the center of appraisal does not embrace all the dimensions of human experience. In particular, it must be complemented and supplemented along the lines of the documentation strategy in the case of private, noninstitutional sources. Some records are rich in important historical information without providing much evidence of corporate or government functions and programs. Moreover, Hans Booms's postulate (to document a period according to its values) is not entirely convincing. True, historians in particular, but also others, including archivists, often apply to the past present values and approaches that distort the records and their significance. However, knowing how many important issues (at least, in our eyes) have been so poorly documented by the contemporaries of the records (because of their own biases), we would be foolish, for pockets of older records, not to retain the precious and few records that shed light on issues of magnitude not seen as such at the time of the creation of the records. Examples include, for instance, women's role and place, First Nations' plight, and educational and health issues. We do not destroy important evidence and information simply because it was not deemed, at the time of creation, to be of great significance. This is not a contradiction about my earlier admonitions that research interest should not drive appraisal decisions. Rather, it is a realistic recognition that archivists are always subjective, always reflecting on their decisions (as postmodernists remind us), the *mentalité* of their own times. There is a tension here between two principles, but the truth cannot reside in only one. The "contemporary eyes" used by today's archivists and historians may be mostly a view of the mind as well as a fundamental principle for macro-appraisal. This, and the complexity as well as the abundance of

modern records, led Hugh Taylor to speak of "mega-browsing" for archivists!<sup>51</sup>

Even the principle of respect des fonds creates difficulties (although not insurmountable) in modern, and especially electronic, records.<sup>52</sup>

It would seem that few of our archival sacred cows remain untouched! And so it should be, in an age where the archival enterprise is being fundamentally reshaped and reconceived. One thing is sure: whatever solution is retained, archivists will have to document closely their theoretical premises, their methodology and the context of their appraisal decisions.<sup>53</sup>

This has been a brief, whirlwind tour of the changes being implemented at the National Archives of Canada with our Acquisition Strategy, based on new appraisal concepts. This approach has been operational for more than two years, and we are pleased with the results to date. In fact, we are very excited by them for, taken as a whole, they remove the archivist and his or her records manager ally from the traditional, reactive, ad hoc, servant relationship with records creators—and with researchers—and substitute an active, planned, strategic, functions-oriented, research-based,

<sup>51</sup>Hugh Taylor, personal communication, 29 September 1991.

<sup>52</sup>See Terry Cook, "The Concept of Archival Fonds in the Post-Custodial Era: Theory, Problems and Solutions," *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993): 24–37; Cynthia J. Durance et al., "Interpretation of the Concepts of Fonds, Collection, and Item in the Description of Archival Holdings: A Position Paper," unpublished paper, National Archives of Canada, November 1993.

<sup>53</sup>"The method provided by logic to overcome biases and making research 'objective' in the only sense this term can be understood in the field of the social sciences, is to select and make explicit value premises, tested for their feasibility and logical consistency, and for relevance and significance in the society under study. Bringing the valuations . . . out in the open, dissolves the indeterminateness that makes biases possible." C. Myrdal, "How Scientific Are the Social Sciences," *Économies et Sociétés* (Cahiers de l'I.S.E.A. 6 (August 1972): 1473–96.

and archival approach to appraisal.<sup>54</sup> The result promises to be, and is already, a better, more comprehensive, hopefully even less voluminous archival record. Most important, we shall leave a more accurate national memory for posterity.

Without such an approach, archivists in the Information Age are doomed to an antiquarian, curatorial irrelevancy. The most difficult problems facing information professionals, as many Canadian and American archival commentators have repeatedly stated, can be resolved only by adopting a more holistic, global, planned, and active perspective. In archival terms, this means we must maintain provenance, order, interrelationships, and context at the forefront over facts, figures, and media fragmentation. And in this very competitive professional world of information management, we must take the fight out into the arena on our terms, our research, our ideas, rather than sitting back and taking punishment from all quarters that would like to "make their day" out of our hide.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>54</sup>On this important new vision of the archivist, see Mykland, "Protection and Integrity"; also Terry Cook, "Appraisal in the Information Age: A Canadian Commentary," in *Archival Management of Electronic Records*, edited by David Bearman (Pittsburgh: Archives and Museum Informatics, 1991), 53–55.

<sup>55</sup>Early Canadian calls for this approach are Terry Cook, "From Information to Knowledge: An Intellectual Paradigm for Archivists," *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984–85): 40–42; Tom Nesmith, "The Archival Perspective," *Archivaria* 22 (Summer 1986): 8–11; Barbara L. Craig, "Meeting the Future by Returning to the Past: A Commentary on Hugh Taylor's Transformations," *Archivaria* 25 (Winter 1987–88): 7–11; Hugh Taylor's encouragement to archivists to use communications theory and technology as part of their work, "'My Very Act and Deed': Some Reflections on the Role of Textual Records in the Conduct of Affairs," *American Archivist* 51 (Fall 1988): 456–69. For an American perspective along similar lines, see the entire Winter–Spring 1988 double issue of the *American Archivist* (Vol. 51) which dealt with establishing a research agenda for archivists across all archival functions; Cox and Samuels, "The Archivist's First Responsibility," 28–42. As already noted, David Bearman and Helen Samuels have been world leaders in this theoretical reorientation of the archival profession.

In his concluding overview of the Montreal ICA Congress, Charles Dollar underlined that the concept of the nature of records and the principles deriving from that nature "remain both valid and relevant" for the new media and complexities of the Information Age. Noting the centrality of the concept of provenance, as Liv Mykland and Angelika Menne-Haritz had also done earlier,<sup>56</sup> he invited archivists to proceed to a "functional analysis of the context of records creation and use." After observing the blurring distinctions between disciplines, as well as the need for standards for more rigorous archival education and for cooperation, Dollar concluded:

Archival science provides the conceptual basis for understanding the fundamental issues that information technologies pose. . . . archivists are asking the right questions and are developing the knowledge and tools to deal with information technologies. . . . The information technology revolution is so fundamental that the technologies themselves will recede into the background . . . and the focus will be on the products and their purposes, not information technology itself. We will be concentrating on archival fundamentals about the context and meaning of documents as the light and knowledge of archival science is understood and appreciated by all users of electronic information.<sup>57</sup>

In this broad context, the solution advanced to information overload makes

<sup>56</sup>Mykland, "Protection and Integrity"; Angelika Menne-Haritz, "Formation en archivistique: Répondre aux besoins de la Société du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Archivum* 39 (1993): 261–83. (The text is in German.)

<sup>57</sup>Charles Dollar, "Seizing the Opportunity: Archivists in the Information Age," *Archivum* 39 (1993): 454–55.



good sense: "If we are able to retain," one commentator stated, "any kind of perspective on the role of humankind in the future, we must sometimes stand back and view the landscape, not merely a tree."<sup>58</sup> In Canada, we are trying accordingly to become rather good landscape painters, not mere foresters.

## Conclusion

In concluding my remarks to a NARA audience (and now to the readership of the *American Archivist*), I express my pleasure at being able to tell American archivists a bit about their northern neighbors. I hope this "free trade in archival ideas" will continue to the mutual benefit of not only the two national archival institutions but also of the two archival professions north and south of the 49th parallel. We have much to learn from you, in automation and descriptive networks, in electronic records, in

effectively publicizing archives and archival holdings to the public. Perhaps we have something to offer in return about cooperative national networks, graduate-level archival education, and appraisal theory and practice.

I will conclude by quoting and then paraphrasing President John F. Kennedy. In a wonderful piece of rhetorical flourish, President Kennedy told Canadians in 1961, "Geography has made us neighbors. History has made us friends. Economics has made us partners. And necessity has made us allies. Those whom nature hath so joined, let no man put asunder."<sup>59</sup> Reflecting on our mutual archival evolution and future prospects for the 1990s, let me suggest that European archival traditions have made us neighbors. Schellenberg has made us friends. Electronic records have made us partners. And the information revolution has given us a common cause. May the free exchange of archival ideas and cooperation make us prosper together.

<sup>58</sup>Erick Sandberg-Diment, "The Executive Computer: How to Avoid Tunnel Vision," *New York Times*, 15 March 1987, quoted in Wurman, *Information Anxiety*, 35.

<sup>59</sup>John F. Kennedy, address before a joint sitting of the Senate and the House of Commons, 17 May 1961.