

Perspective

Appraisal or Documentation: Can We Appraise Archives by Selecting Content?

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Abstract: The author outlines the various roots of today's appraisal theory and traces their influence on issues debated today. She describes the influence that early twentieth-century Weberian bureaucracy had on archival principles, and she suggests linkages with theories that precede the Second World War and were the basis for the Schellenberg bulletin. She shows how archival theories and debate were overlaid by the political impact of the Cold War confrontation before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain, noting that since that time, archives have been able to assume their role as windows on government. Now archives must clarify their tools and methods to ensure that traces of decision-making processes are visible and transparent. Different methods, such as documentation strategy and acquisition strategy are discussed in the context of their impact on daily work in archives.

About the author: Angelika Menne-Haritz is director of the Archives School of Marburg, Germany, where she teaches archival sciences. With several publications and meetings on appraisal, she has engaged in a lively debate about professionalization inside the archival community. Although the author is a member of the Commission on Program Management of the ICA, responsible for the coordination of professional archival research, this article presents her views, not those of the ICA. The international community of archivists is engaging in more and more discussions of problems that are affecting most countries in spite of differing national traditions in records management or in historical orientation. In carrying on this professional debate across many geographical frontiers, it seems useful for archivists to regard each other not as representatives of national traditions but as colleagues with experiences and ideas to share.

THE QUESTION OF WHETHER archivists should appraise archives or document society is another way of asking whether archivists should take a content-oriented or more formal approach in building and shaping archival fonds. It is the old question of selection according to attributed values or appraisal on the basis of the principle of provenance. In its broadest sense, *appraisal* is a judgment about inherent values—the valuation of property, goods, or other objects in terms of prices or other criteria, by a person who is authorized to make such a judgment. The selection is made for a specific purpose, and individual items are selected because they conform to a predetermined demand. Value is attributed from the outside and its validity is derived from the item's usefulness for particular needs.¹

Many current archival traditions are rooted in medieval times, when items were selected to be preserved in archives because they had legal, political, or—in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—historical importance. But is that still the mandate of today's archives? Is there an alternative? What about approaches that try to base appraisal on the principle of provenance? What about the ranking of records creators, the functional analyses, and the Schellenbergian evidential values? *Appraisal*, in the original sense, means analyzing and estimating a value, which cannot arbitrarily be attributed to something. The price of a manufactured item, for example, is not necessarily as high as its vendor would like to set it. That price oscillates between two limits: the compensation the manufacturer requires to justify its investment, and the price the market will allow.

In very complex cases, such as the purchase of lands and houses, an estimate of

the item's inherent value must be made by a specialist qualified in that sort of appraisal. In such cases, the price does not depend on the value attributed from the outside but rather on an analysis of the item's inherent qualities. Can archival appraisal be compared to the estimation of such inherent values as these? If so, by what methodology do archivists incorporate this skill as part of our professional know-how?

Why Do We Appraise?

If colleagues in different countries, in various kinds of archives, are asked why they appraise, they often give the same answer: "We cannot preserve everything—there is not enough space available, and archives have too few staff members to describe everything." But a closer look at the routine practical work performed in archives indicates that those reasons are not sufficient to explain why archivists appraise.

Archivists in most countries began thinking about appraisal when they found themselves under heavy pressure to take over great quantities of records from various agencies.² This trend was especially noticeable in Germany following the First and Second World Wars. The first formal appraisal policies for Prussian archives were formulated in 1924 and were applied to records of military administrations and to records of government agencies that had proliferated in a rather chaotic way. Theoretical reflections articulated in articles in archival journals of that time demonstrate very impressively how inundated archives felt by the onslaught of unmanageable

¹For instance, see the definition of *appraisal* and *selection* in *Webster's International Dictionary*.

²Ole Kolsrud, "The Evolution of Basic Appraisal Principles—Some Comparative Observations," *American Archivist*, 55 (Winter 1992): 26–37.

masses of paper.³ After the Second World War the proposal was therefore made to use importance of function as the criterion for selecting agencies for the preservation of records. Deciding the importance of records creators from a historical viewpoint and reducing the bulk of paper by disposing of all papers from the less important agencies seemed an easier task than trying to develop consistent new theories that would offer guidelines for selecting items to be preserved from all agencies.

Today's electronic office systems enable us to see more clearly. The archivist is no longer overcome by the fear of being inundated by great masses of paper; that fear has now been replaced by the consciousness that nothing will be left for appraisal if we don't formulate fundamental principles that lead to a theory of appraisal that will guide our everyday decisions. We realize that it is necessary to understand the traditional archives more precisely before we can appropriately apply their principles in to electronic records.⁴ Experiences with electronic records sharpen our perception. We see very clearly that it is not simply quantity, nor space and cost, that creates the urgent demand for appraisal.⁵ It is the need to reduce redundancy. By reducing redundancy, we can make accessible and interpretable, for archival and research pur-

poses, the intellectual working tools of organizations. That means that the aim of archival appraisal, for both traditional material and electronic records, should be to make archives eloquent and to facilitate research. These aims are sometimes obscured by the impact of tradition.⁶

Archives' Historical Roots

Archives have strong roots that continue to have an important impact on contemporary archival practice and theory. One source of traditions was the ancient treasuries—medieval deposits of charters that were receiving archives. They were created and supported by entities such as the churches and cities in medieval Europe, whose continued existence depended on the rights granted by the documents safeguarded in the archives.

Later, those archives took one of two paths. Some, with great continuing political importance, attracted other materials from the growing chancelleries. Others became isolated treasuries and, as the rights they assured dwindled in juridical or political importance, they developed into document museums of ancient parchments. In many cases, when the medieval charters acquired the power to attract letters and writing of importance from the living registries, they exercised an impact on the structure of the developing archives in orienting them to a selection of important, but separate, documents. Sometimes, however, the charters attracted whole series or registries of specific importance, and through this they laid the foundation of a provenance-based structure. Archival history can demonstrate quite clearly how the influence of the ancient deposits of charters created a ten-

³Ernst Müsebeck, "Der Einfluss des Weltkriegs auf die archivalische Methode," *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 38 (1929): 135–50. The acquisitions of the Reichsarchiv after the First World War were 350,000 files (10 km.) of the Imperial Office for Indemnities; 120,000 files (3.5 km.) "Occupied Western Territories"; but also 7,228 files from the Imperial Ministry of the Interior; and 4,500 files from the Ministry of Finance. The author described the problems that would occur if criteria of historical demand were applied in appraising these quantities and wrote that "the appraisal of these very contemporary records causes uneasy feelings."

⁴Trudy Huskam Peterson, "Archival Principles and the Records of the New Technology," *American Archivist* 47 (1984): 383–93.

⁵Johannes Papritz, "Das Massenproblem der Archive," *Der Archivar* 17 (1964): 213–20.

⁶For the complex problems concerning the appraisal of electronic records, see David Bearman, ed., *Archival Management of Electronic Records*, (Pittsburgh: Archives and Museums Informatics Technical Report No. 13, 1991).

dency toward the selection of important items inherent in modern archival self-consciousness. These former juridical goals of archives still exercise their influence when modern archives see themselves as secret and elitist.

But the oldest archival traditions also gave birth to an opposite tendency: the democratic tradition of open archives creating a transparency of politics—an open forum for political decisions, a tradition that was reborn with the decline of the ancien régime. The classic republic of Athens had created an archives, kept in the Metron, the temple of the mother of the gods, who became the protectress of the state's archives.⁷ This archives was intended to be the place where each citizen might have a look at everything of importance for the whole community, such as laws, minutes, and decisions of government, and also the place where private purchases became legitimate through their publication.⁸

A decisive difference from the later European medieval archives, this open archives laid the foundation of the second important goal of contemporary archival work. The medieval selecting archives, as described earlier, were receiving deposits with privileges and other materials destined for secret conservation to secure granted rights. The archives of Athens was also a selecting archives, but in contrast to the medieval secret depositories, it was open. And it was not a receiving archives; rather, it preserved material from the issuing body, the records creator, and it kept that material for the purpose of publication. The items selected for preservation were useful for the public and for the understanding of politics. Because the transparency of politics

is a prerequisite of democratically organized states, the archives took on the role of guaranteeing a view of the decision-making process. The same intention of publicizing political decisions was the mandate of the first National Archives in France in its early years and also that given by the German revolutionary parliament in 1848 for its archives. These archives, intended for use by the public, had to guarantee a clear view of political decision making. Instruments of the government, they guaranteed the public inspection of politics and ensured a necessary complement to the representative exercise of power entrusted to some citizens through the elections.

The Roman Empire did not continue the republican traditions of Greece. The French National Archives was eventually given the mandate to collect ancient treaties and charters with notified rights for the case of restitution applications. The archives of the Paulskirche were never created. Instead, the installation of a German Reicharchiv after the First World War was strongly influenced by historical necessity; it produced a pure research institute with an archives as one of its four departments.

Nevertheless, these historical developments demonstrate the roots of the other part of archival self-consciousness, which is the basis of the public functions of archives. They demonstrate an alternative to selecting items according to their juridical, political, or historical importance and keeping them secret out of fear of losing privilege. They show the potential that archival work, especially appraisal, has for making policy and administration public and for guaranteeing the citizen's right to control elected representatives. Modern state archives in democratic societies are comparable to those classic archives, which were part of the issuing body and were open for public inspection. They have a dual role. They make evident the decision-making processes that affect public life and they help guarantee rights, not for the ar-

⁷Ernst Posner, *Archives in the Ancient World*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972, p. 104.

⁸Adolf Brenneke, *Archivkunde: Ein Beitrag zur Theorie und Geschichte des Europäischen Archivwesens*, bearb. v. Wolfgang Leesch (Leipzig: 1953), p. 109.

chives holding body but for the public. That is why we regard it as so self-evident that the right of access is granted by law to every citizen.

Both tendencies affect contemporary discussion about appraisal.⁹ One argues for the selection of the important, the other for the duty of making decision-making processes transparent. The first intends to document the image of society; the second intends to accumulate evidence about contexts and processes, without attributing to archives an external judgment about their "proper" interests or values.

Appraisal on the Basis of the Principle of Provenance

The earliest ideas of provenance-oriented appraisal were voiced in Prussia between the two World Wars. So-called group guidelines were formulated in the 1930s on the basis of motivation reports in which archivists had expressed their appraisal decisions and their reasons for reaching the decisions.

Derived from a need for practical guidelines for handling records of recent origin that did not fit into older arrangement schemes, the principle of provenance traditionally had a threefold meaning:

1. An arrangement principle, when records are arranged and fonds are separated according to their original order.
2. An organizational principle, when spheres of responsibility and acquisition of archives are defined according to administrative structures.
3. A research principle, when it formed part of historical working methods, indicating where appropriate sources for certain research questions presumably would be found.

To these three meanings, Adolf Brenneke, archivist and professor at the former Prussian Institut für Archivwissenschaft (IfA) in the 1930s, proposed a fourth: the "free principle of provenance," which stated that records could be arranged so that they would show their organic growth without ever before having been in that order.¹⁰ This principle can be concisely stated as a community of purposes—which is more than the relationship among material—on the basis of a common origin. Brenneke proposed to replace the more biological understanding of organic development, as expressed in a contemporary Dutch manual, with a more historical meaning that would display the impact of particular historical influences on the shape of a fonds. From this viewpoint, the perhaps accidental last form of a fonds might not be the best representative of the organic structure. Every fonds must therefore be analyzed and arranged according to its own inherent criteria. Thus, Brenneke formulated the purpose and function of archival work, which is to analyze and demonstrate the organic growth of archives. Finding aids must provide access to the nonverbal indicators that make obvious and understandable the reasons for the records' existence.

This archival theory grew out of the highly developed administrative structure found in Prussia at the end of the nineteenth century and experienced by Max Weber.¹¹ This structure, characterized both by impersonality of tasks and by individual responsibility for decisions, was based on

¹⁰Brenneke, *Archivkunde*, 1953, p. 22.

¹¹Michael A. Lutzker, "Max Weber and the Analysis of Modern Bureaucratic Organizations: Notes Toward a Theory of Appraisal," *American Archivist* 45 (Summer 1982): 119–30. Lutzker states, "The records provide a mechanism for monitoring an individual's performance and set precedents for future actions" (p. 124).

⁹Luciana Duranti, "ACA 1991 Conference Overview," *ACA Bulletin*, 15 (July 1991): 23.

specialized professional qualifications.¹² It developed in a country that acquired power and political importance rather late and that as a result was less influenced by older administrative traditions than were other German territories or other European countries. Geographically and administratively separated from the central powers of the Holy Roman Empire, the comparatively young administrative structures were influenced by Roman law relatively little and retained traces of their heritage of Germanic law.

A characteristic element of the German legal tradition is the less important role played by paper or parchment. In the case of private purchases or contracts, the authenticum, the legal proof, was the memory of the participants. Authenticity was with the people, not with the paper. The notarized certification, so essential in the Roman tradition, was not deemed necessary in the German. Instead of the Latin slogan *Quod non est in actis non est in mundo*, Germanic law would have said "What I cannot remember is not in the world." In the words of Hugh Taylor, it is perhaps correct to characterize this sort of written witness—which is only support, not authenticum—as conceptual orality.¹³ In this German tradition, the records had to support, not to prove, the communication oriented to the common purpose. Administrations did not merely document society; they changed it where changes were believed to be necessary and affordable. Consequently, their records did not document an image of society; rather, they contained only that information on outside facts or phenomena needed for the common pur-

poses. But by showing how the processes had worked, the records delivered a necessary view of the context, thereby allowing the factual information to be understood.

The pre-Second World War archival theory—based as it was on experience with these administrative structures and the records they produced, and formulated in the lessons of Brenneke, Meisner, and others in the IfA in the 1930s—has had no influence on the last fifty years' debate over appraisal in Germany. Rejecting approaches for appraisal (and in some cases even for description) based on the principle of provenance, and categorizing them as belonging to the nineteenth century, postwar Germany failed to recognize the archival developments that had taken place abroad. It is really astonishing that Schellenberg's ideas, for example, did not resonate in Germany, where they seemed to originate.¹⁴ No allusions to his ideas appeared in German archival literature until the end of the 1980s, even though his bulletin on the *Appraisal of Modern Public Records* was available in German translation. Bodo Uhl explains this phenomenon by pointing out that German archivists were first and foremost historians and were thus too concentrated on the content of sources to realize the applicability of Schellenberg's concept.¹⁵ Postwar Germany's political taboos concerning Prussia probably also worked against German archivists' linking up with the ideas of the 1930s. The conditions of the Cold War reinforced content-oriented

¹²David Bearman, "Diplomatics, Weberian Bureaucracy, and the Management of Electronic Records in Europe and America," *American Archivist* 55 (Winter 1992): 168–81.

¹³Hugh A. Taylor, "Transformation in the Archives: Technology Adjustment or Paradigm Shift?" *Archivaria* 25 (Winter 1987–88): 12–27.

¹⁴Kolsrud, "Evolution," pp. 26–37.

¹⁵Bodo Uhl, "Grundfragen der Bewertung von Verwaltungsschriftgut. Anstelle einer Besprechung von T. R. Schellenberg," *Mitteilungen für die Archivpflege in Bayern. Sonderheft 9* (Munich: Bewahren und Umgestalten. Walter Jaroschka zum 60. Geburtstag, 1992), pp. 275–86. Uhl gave a complete survey of the history of German appraisal theory during a conference in 1989. His paper is published under the title "Der Wandel in der archivischen Bewertungsdiskussion," *Der Archivar* 43, Heft 4 (1990) 529–38.

appraisal on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The *Entspannungspolitik* (détente policy) had since the late 1960s hampered public critical remarks about the socialist states and the free professional discussion between East and West, which—concerning archives—always had political implications. Only since 1989 has an open professional debate seemed possible without an implicit or explicit demarcation between political enemies or friends.

Documenting Society

Postwar Germany formulated several approaches to content-oriented selection. In 1957 Wilhelm Rohr observed that in the 1920s the up-to-then passive, confident attitude changed and a systematic approach was developed to cope with practical challenges: "A systematization of appraisal started and raised the claim to a conscious principle that archival institutions have to receive archives and records of all administrative agencies, no matter which form they have or where they are situated in hierarchy."¹⁶ In contrast to that situation, Rohr stated, modern agencies in his time delivered a pure mass records production that had no value after its creation. Georg Wilhelm Sante spoke in the same tenor when he said, concerning the acquisition and appraisal of modern records, "We see that drudgery as a sure ruin of the academic archivist. Certain developments in the profession of librarians, who run the danger of losing their academic character by simply serving their books, should warn us not to go in the same direction and be

overrun by the bulk of records."¹⁷ And Fritz Zimmermann stated that archival value depended on content and that the idea of provenance had to be relegated to the background.

In 1970 Hans Booms joined this current with a paper he presented at the German annual archives conference; this paper later was printed in an enlarged version in 1972 and subsequently was published in *Archivaria*.¹⁸ Booms's paper was written when constant and regular acquisitions from large administrations had started and, for the first time in archival history (or at least in the history of archives in West Germany), no guidelines existed for continuing acquisition and appraisal in a routine, peaceful manner. This essay, with its statement that the principle of provenance is not an adequate means of appraisal and that its suitability as even a principle for arrangement should be reconsidered, expressed sentiments quite the opposite of the actual practice of the Federal Archives, of which Booms was about to assume the director-

¹⁷Georg Wilhelm Sante, "Archive und Verwaltung—historische Provenienz und Probleme der Gegenwart," *Der Archivar* 10, Heft 1 (1957): 7–16. In this paper for the annual conference in Koblenz in 1957, he wrote that archives should have in store a documentation of society as large as possible for historical research.

¹⁸Hans Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage: Issues in the Appraisal of Archival Sources," *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987): 69–107. He confirmed his concept of a contemporary documentation plan again at the ACA 1991 conference and defended it there against German critics, arguing that the practical application of a documentation plan in East Germany proved the applicability of his theory without considering the differences between socialist and democratic societies. His paper was printed as Hans Booms, "Überlieferungsbildung: Keeping Archives as a Social and Political Activity," *Archivaria* 33 (1992) 25–33. See also Siegfried Büttner, "Ressortprinzip und Überlieferungsbildung," in *Aus der Arbeit der Archive. Beiträge zum Archivwesen, zur Quellenkunde und zur Geschichte. Festschrift für Hans Booms*, edited by Friedrich P. Kahlenberg, (Boppard: Schriften des Bundesarchivs 36, 1989) pp. 153–61.

¹⁶Wilhelm Rohr, "Zur Problematik des modernen Aktenwesens," *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 54 (1958) 74–89.

ship. His essay can be fully understood only if it is viewed in the context of the political situation in Germany at that time. Like Sante, Rohr, and others before him, Booms pleaded for a complete documentation of society at a given time and postulated this task as a professional duty of archivists.

On the common basis of the demand for historical research as guidance for appraisal, Booms offered a suitable model, the documentation plan, which in fact was realized ten years later in the East German GDR.¹⁹ Given the political differences between West and East Germany from 1945 until 1989, it is rather astonishing that the ideas pronounced and formulated in the West were put into practice in the East. The archival history of the GDR can in fact be regarded as an experimental realization of content-orientated appraisal, as opposed to the intention of archives to make decision-making processes evident. German archivists face a challenging task and some extremely useful work in performing a detailed analysis of policies and procedures in the archival administration in the GDR. Without anticipating the results of such investigations, I will describe in the following some of the decisive elements of appraisal theory and practice in East Germany, and I will try to show how and why this series of events demonstrates the weaknesses and dangers of a content-oriented appraisal for archives.

The experiences of East Germany archives make very clear the dangers inherent in selecting important items for preservation. Content-oriented selection opened archival work to political instrumentalization. Selection required external confirmation, and the archives could not decide for themselves the premises for selection. As-

suming that "the value of archives is determined by the social importance of the events, activities, and subjects it refers to,"²⁰ a Framework Documentation Profile was elaborated at the beginning of the 1980s, listing about five hundred events that ought to be documented. This listing had been approved by historians from the Humboldt University²¹ and had been legitimated by the Ministry of the Interior. Among these events were, for example, high-standard arrangement of national and regional cultural events; growth of reading and studying books as a constant lifetime habit; and the impact of the capitalist world market and the imperialistic politics of boycott on the production of the collective

²⁰Gerhard Enders, "Zur Problematik der Archivwürdigkeit," *Archivmitteilungen* 17 (1957): 89–92, 90.

²¹Lieselott Enders, "Stand und Probleme der Ausarbeitung des Rahmendokumentationsprofils der Staatlichen Archivverwaltung der DDR," *Archivmitteilungen* 32, Heft 5 (1982): 173–75. She explains the intentions: "The RDP [*Rahmendokumentationsprofil*, which is translated here as the "Framework Documentation Profile"] gives an objective reflection of the manifold historical knowledge on a certain level of abstraction and on the basis of the actual reachable level of perception by the historical sciences." For regional application see Hans-Sigismund Gold and Günter Müller, "Dokumentationsprofil und Rahmen-Nomenklatur als Grundlagen der Bestandsergänzung der Kreis- und Stadtarchive," *Archivmitteilungen* 32, Heft 5 (1982): 166–72. On the basis of local chronicles, "documentation profiles shall reflect the political, socioeconomic and cultural particularities of a region, which have to be documented according to the social necessities by archives." There was published only one critical voice, that of Ulrich Hess ("Methodische Fragen bei der Ausarbeitung von Archivgutverzeichnissen," *Archivmitteilungen* 27, Heft 4 [1977]: 132–34), who made the very important remark that the problem needs to be solved and that "on the one hand historical processes, structures, and facts have to be documented, while on the other hand archival information is handed down only in such contexts in which the original records builders brought them. Archives have grown up to serve very concrete events and don't reflect the social processes and structures themselves, but deliver merely single facts, from which such knowledge about structures can be derived by comparison of testimonies of different times and by other ways of historical research."

¹⁹Angelika Menne-Haritz, "Methodische Richtlinien für die Bewertung von dienstlichem Schriftgut," *Der Archivar* 45, Heft 2 (1992): 126–30.

combines and firms. Archival appraisal of administrative files attempting to illustrate statements such as these, which had been preapproved by state authorities, fits the records into a politically desirable image of history. What makes such documentation plans critical is the fact that they rely on an assumed knowledge of history. Content-oriented documentation plans stand archival working methods on their head because the results of research must not only be anticipated, they must also be evaluated before archives can be appraised and arranged.²²

Both the content of the documentation plans and the working methods they imply create insurmountable contradictions. Archivists are supposed to possess secondary qualifications, usually as historians, and this seems to be inalienable and even more important than professional archival training for the central task of making appraisal decisions. Because of the working methods it implied, the Framework Documentation Profile, which Hans Booms considered in 1990 to be the realization of his ideas from 1970, was the decisive instrument for the political instrumentalization of archives in the service of the socialist state.

The example of the GDR seems to be the only case in which a documentation plan has been implemented. Great difficulties arose when the implementation was attempted in daily archival work.²³ Nevertheless, the intentions of the plan are obvious, and they indicate where such strategies may lead archivists. As important decisions are delegated to authorities outside the profession, archivists are reduced merely to executing guidelines that we cannot investigate, even if they cause us to act as in-

struments for political purposes we would not support as individuals.

Archival Values as Appraisal Criteria

Theodore R. Schellenberg—influenced by Prussian theory and practice that had been transferred to the United States by the German emigrant Ernst Posner, the former deputy director of the Prussian State Archives under the directorship of Brenneke—developed a theory that is until today the only one that most consequently applies the premises of a free principle of provenance to appraisal.²⁴ Since his ideas are among the misunderstood archivistic reflections, I will attempt to characterize his concepts.²⁵

Schellenberg noted that “public records are preserved in an archival institution because they have values that will exist long after they cease to be of current use, and because their value will be for other than the current use.”²⁶ Following this obser-

²⁴Theodore R. Schellenberg, *The Appraisal of Modern Public Records*. Bulletin of the National Archives 8 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives, 1956). The publication of the text in Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walch, *A Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory and Practice* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives, 1984), skips decisive parts of the original text. For example, the definition of records in the beginning and nine pages with examples for evidential values are omitted, where Schellenberg states, for instance, “Records that evidence genuinely significant matters relating to either direction or execution have permanent value. . . . Usually the evidence on an agency’s program is adequate that is provided in the form of (1) summaries (statistical or narrative) of transactions of a specific kind, (2) a selection of records on particularly significant transactions, and (3) a selection of records on transactions that are representative of all or most of the transactions of a specific kind” (p. 252). Reduced from 40 pages to less than half of the original, the text loses a lot of the persuasive power inherent just in the examples of practical applications of the tests on evidential or informational values.

²⁵See, for example, Gerald Ham, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts*, SAA Archival Fundamental Series (Chicago: SAA, 1993), p. 8 and also p. 53, where the author speaks about Schellenberg’s “top of the iceberg” appraisal model.

²⁶Schellenberg, “Appraisal,” p. 238.

²²Wilfried Schöntag, “Der Auswertungsauftrag an die Archive. Fragen aus staatlicher Sicht.” Paper presented at the 64th German Archival Annual Meeting in 1993 in Augsburg; printed in *Der Archivar* 47, Heft 1 (1994): 31–40.

²³Hess, “Methodische Frage,” p. 134.

vation, he formulates the basis of his theoretical approach, which is the discrimination between primary and secondary values. The primary values are based on the usefulness of records for the administrative activities for which they were created. The secondary values are based on the records' usefulness for investigation and research. Neither archivists nor the administrative sciences yet have a concept of primary values.²⁷ Schellenberg offers instead a concept of secondary values, which can guide appraisal decisions for archival retention. There he makes his well-known but often misunderstood distinction between evidential and informational values. The concept of informational value is quite clear.

Informational Value

Even for the evaluation of the mere informational content of records, Schellenberg offers a set of steps for a formal analysis. The test for informational value is to check for the factual information about the subjects of administrative activities, such as persons, things, or phenomena. To this end he offers three criteria:

1. *Uniqueness, both of the information and of the record.*
2. *Form of information in the records and the form of the records themselves.* This means the degree to which information is concentrated. "A few facts about a few persons, things, or phenomena, many facts about a few persons, things and phenomena, or many facts about diverse matters—persons, things, phenomena." But the physical condition is

also important under the aspect of form, as well as the form and arrangement in which the information is presented.

3. *Importance of the information and other aspects, including intrinsic value.* This third criterion is the place for advice from the outside, for historical or other specialists' needs, for the evaluation of facts in view of future needs.

These three steps, however, are not enough to allow the estimation of the informational value of a record to begin. First, the evidential value of the record must be established.

Evidential Value

Evidence is understood as the answers to questions such as the following: "Which records series are essential to show how each substantive function was performed at each organizational level in both the central and the field offices? What are the successive transactions in its execution?" and "Which records should be preserved in exemplary form to show the work processes at the lower organizational level?"²⁸ That means that evidence is something that is shown, that must be read between the lines, and that is not necessarily to be found in the texts themselves. Evidence means patterns of processes, aims and mandates, procedures and results, as they can be examined. It consists of signs, of signals, not primarily of words. It might be in symbols, like crosses or lines showing that a person who, according to a job description, has to assume responsibility for a certain task has actually seen the document, has read it, and is aware of the decisions behind it. It might be the location of a certain piece of text in the upper left corner of a record, giving it the function of an address. It might even

²⁷For the aspect of evaluation for primary purposes in electronic office systems, see Charles M. Dollar, "New Developments and the Implication on Information Handling," in *Information Handling in Offices and Archives*, edited by Angelika Menne-Haritz (Munich: K. G. Sauer, 1993) pp. 56–65.

²⁸Schellenberg, "Appraisal," p. 244.

be the following up of records in a file, indicating a sort of working order. Or it might be a certain cover of a folder or some specific handwriting telling where the folder originated. All those are nonverbal signs that must be interpreted in context to disclose their meaning. To one who understands them, they will tell how processes worked and who was responsible for which decision.

The current misunderstanding of Schellenberg's differentiation between evidential and informational values suggests that evidence is found in records about procedures and guidelines.²⁹ That is not what he means, but this misunderstanding can be explained by the wording of his writings. He writes, for instance, "Records *containing* such *facts* are indispensable for government itself and for students of government." These formulations tell us to look for words and texts that contain the searched-for evidence in their content. So we will naturally turn to the records of the higher levels, where decisions about procedures and policies are formulated. We will look for texts in which processes are described, and we will not find the processes themselves. Aren't those also informational values, then? Aren't those processes, procedures, aims, and policies, decided about in the department or at the higher levels in hierarchy responsible for organization, also phenomena, that are treated administratively?

So in Schellenberg's ideas and his words there is a certain contradiction that leads us in the wrong direction. But his distinction between primary and secondary values makes clear that evidence is needed as a

basis for an accurate understanding of what happened. It is the foundation for the analysis of the *interpretive information* as a necessary supplement to the factual information. The difference between primary and secondary purposes indicates the aim of archival work, which is to make archives understandable and interpretable. Archives appraised and described according to this goal will reflect the community of primary purposes—not only as the relationships of concerns—on the basis of common functional origin.³⁰ So the theory of the distinction between the primary and *secondary values* of records, defining secondary values as the evidence on the primary purposes, can be regarded as the application of the Free Principle of Provenance for appraisal.

Today's Trends: Documentation of Society on the Basis of the Principle of Provenance

Some published trends in contemporary appraisal theory are articulations of broad currents inside our profession. They are best formulated and described in publications in the United States and in Canada, but to some extent they also relate to German ideas, which are less rigid than those formulated in Hans Booms's article. Among those newer trends are the concepts of documentation strategy and acquisition strategy.

Both concepts rely on a common assumption: that the aim of archival work has to be the representation of as accurate an image of society as possible. To accomplish that aim, it is assumed that archivists must first analyze what has to be docu-

²⁹Timothy L. Ericson, "At the 'Rim of Creative Dissatisfaction': Archivists and Acquisition Development," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–92): 66–77; Ericson states, "The fact that Schellenberg and others chose the word 'value' is unfortunate, because they were really talking about evidential and informational content" (p. 67).

³⁰Wolfgang Leesch, "Gliederung und Bedeutung der Archivwissenschaft," in *Archivar und Historiker. Festschrift für Heinrich Otto Meisner*, (Leipzig: 1953) pp. 13–37, where he states, "Jeder Archivkörper trägt das Mass der zulässigen und notwendigen Kassation in sich." (All archives bear in themselves the measures for the admissible and necessary disposals.)

mented before looking for an appropriate documentation. Both concepts try to realize this ambition in different ways, and in contrast to, for example, the ideas of Hans Booms, they don't deny the usefulness of the principle of provenance. They do accept it in differing degrees for research and arrangement purposes but not for final appraisal decisions.

For documentation strategy, archives have to document certain social functions or phenomena that are important for the image of society. If the documentation cannot be found, the archivist himself or herself must produce it. Information in other sources, such as reports and scientific journals, is the basis on which archival material is selected to complement the published documentation.

In contrast, acquisition strategy concentrates on administrative functions, suggesting that social life will be sufficiently mirrored in public records to give a true image of society. Whether we adopt or reject Richard Brown's stimulating philosophical excursions leading the reader to Foucault and the narrativity of texts and contexts, we have to admit that his *archival hermeneutics* mark decisive differences to documentation plans or strategies, with the attempt to formulate less subjective criteria for appraisal focusing on the functional-processive activity of the environment of records creation.

In his often-quoted article "Mind over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal," Terry Cook offers a theoretical foundation for the acquisition strategy with his concept of the primacy of process, which he compares—in a parallel movement compared with contemporary physics—to the atomic approach of the past.³¹ The imminent dangers of the strat-

egies defining values by content are, according to Cook, those of decontextualizing the record from the internal, organic relationship of its creation and imposing instead an external standard for judging value. But the acquisition strategy does not present guidelines for appraisal. One consequence of this lack of guidelines is to replace archival appraisal with a process of evaluating and ranking records creators according to their impact on societal changes, thereby suggesting that their respective records reflect the societal and historical importance of their activities. Both the documentation strategy and the acquisition strategy have as their goal documenting society. But while the documentation strategy is content-oriented, the acquisition strategy is function-oriented. In spite of those differences, both approaches try to harmonize their premises with the principle of provenance.

In *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities*,³² Helen Samuels explains that her book can be used as a guideline, translating the general functional description to the documentation of the institution concerned: "The translation process begins by studying each function and evaluating its importance to the institution through historical investigations. The result of these studies is a clear understanding of what is to be documented and what documentation is sought."³³ Samuels harmonizes the premises of this concept with the principle of provenance in the following way: "Fundamental to this activity, then,

Canadian Archivists, 1992), pp. 38–70: "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 future; and which formal functions and mandates of the creator they supported" (p. 47).

³²Helen Samuels, *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities*, (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1992).

³³Helen W. Samuels, "Improving our Disposition: Documentation Strategy," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–92): 138.

³¹Terry Cook, "Mind over Matter: Towards a New Theory for Archival Appraisal," in *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honor of Hugh A. Taylor*, edited by Barbara L. Craig (Ottawa: Association of

is the understanding of the principle of provenance that relies on a knowledge of the office which created the records as a means to locate, arrange and describe them. . . . Functional analyses provide the understanding of why specific documentation is sought. Archival principles determine how those records are located, arranged and described."

The traditional meaning of the principle of provenance in its three aspects is accepted. It may serve as a methodological means for the arrangement and description of records. It serves as organizational principle for the definition of the universe that ought to be documented, and it gives the guidelines for locating the appropriate sources when it is used as research principle. But it is not accepted as a basis for appraisal. Records, like other sources, are considered carriers of factual information. As there is no distinction between primary and secondary purposes, the explanatory capacity of evidence as an interpretative supplement to the informational content of records disappears, and records seem, like books, to be created for the information of posterity. So the traditional meaning of the principle of provenance can well be harmonized with a content-oriented approach. There are no cogent consequences for the methods of appraisal.

The acquisition strategy also understands provenance is not a guiding principle for appraisal. As before, it serves as a research principle. Evidence in records is seen by the acquisition strategy as a source for administrative history. Archivists are urged to incorporate a whole-hearted commitment to research into the process of records creation and, more important, into the operational functions animating that process. Through research on the process and functions of records creators, the archivist shall determine where the best documentary evidence of that reality will most likely be found. To accomplish these goals,

records should be reread as sources of evidence. Evidence is a tool for archivists. The approach is similar to that of documentation strategy even if the difference between primary and secondary purposes is acknowledged and evidence as a specific characteristic of records produced in cooperative decision-making processes is accepted.

In both documentation strategy and acquisition strategy, research precedes description. But research in administrative history cannot take place without access to effectively described, arranged, and shaped archival fonds. Administrative history cannot guide appraisal, which ought to prepare the sources for it.

The three aspects of the traditional meaning of the principle of provenance are also accepted in acquisition strategy. It works as arrangement principle, organizational principle, and research principle. The acquisition strategy goes even further in analyzing that, by implication, provenance will be rooted in the conceptual act of creation rather than in the physical artifact of the records eventually created. Function replaces office of origin. That is an important step beyond the mere descriptive meaning of provenance, a step in the direction of a functional understanding because it accepts distinct primary purposes.

Both approaches demonstrate that the traditional meaning of the principle of provenance can be harmonized very well with a content-oriented appraisal, that means being the selection of the important. It is a mere pragmatic and descriptive instrument. In contrast, the "Free Principle of Provenance," as Brenneke called it, does formulate goals of archival appraisal, saying that the result of arrangement together with description and appraisal is a fonds that mirrors organic growth and the actual activities of the records creator. This intention is the opposite of the goal of documenting an image of society.

Conclusions: Archival Appraisal Aims to Make Decision-Making Processes Evident, Not to Document Society

The aims of appraisal depend on how the aims of archival work as a whole are perceived. We have examined several content-oriented approaches to appraisal questions. The underlying premises of all of them is that archives aim at shaping as true as possible an image of society. But the raw material that we must work with does not conform to those ambitions.

Records are not pure truth. They always are purposeful, even if they don't state their purpose literally. No law can be strong enough to make people do something that has no meaning for their activities. They create records because they need them, not because someone ordered their creation. Nothing in the human community happens accidentally. Working power is not used for purposes without benefit, either direct or indirect. The benefit may be that of the community or of the society, and it may be legitimated politically. Accountability is one such social benefit that is generally accepted in democratic societies. But the steering and controlling of cooperative decision-making processes is a very direct benefit. It is the reason for the creation of records, because with their help all individual efforts can effectively be oriented to a common goal or purpose. That is the proper reason for the historical appearance of records, developed out of the preparatory records for medieval registers or charters and acquiring with time a more important role than those, finally replacing charters and registers with the growth of governments and the higher degree of division of labor.

Records are not made for posterity. Records are created because they are needed by those who create them, not as information collection but as intellectual working tools for the steering and controlling of cooperative decision-making processes.

And, therefore, records are reliable. The better they have served the primary purposes in initiating and controlling cooperative purposeful intellectual work, the more they are authentic and trustworthy in making clear those processes for secondary purposes, be they evidential or informational. Yet the evidence is not accessible without special processing of the records. It has to be worked out and made obvious by professional specialists, the archivists who are trained for this purpose. Ballast and redundancy must be disposed of to make the remaining records eloquent and lucid.

The informational content in records is never objective. It cannot be so. But it is always purposeful. So the role of evidence can be described as the insight into the primary purposes as a necessary supplement for informational values, without which the latter are meaningless or could be interpreted in the wrong way or are simply trivial. That is why redundancies must be weeded out. That is why evidence is an aim, not a tool, for archival appraisal. Archivists are the only specialists who have the theoretical and methodological tools to make evidence accessible and thus to reveal the explanatory context of information. Archivists are responsible for preserving the context as well as the information.

Archivists can be described as the only specialists for secondary purposes of administrative records, for juridical, economic, or political accountability in the sense that they enable the evidence to be laid open and that they give all users the chance to interpret the evidence in their own way, giving others the chance to follow their own arguments or to interpret the sources differently. Transparency or lucidity of decision-making processes in administration is one basis of modern representative democracies. Archives can guarantee direct insight after certain, politically defined time periods, while their actual pub-

lication and accessibility depends on necessary protection of governments against direct influences from the outside.

If archival work aims at making evi-

dence accessible, then content-oriented evaluation can supplement appraisal. But selection for documentation can never replace it.