

Theory

The Archival Documentation Strategy and Its Implications for the Appraisal of Architectural Records

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Abstract: Documentation strategy is an analytical approach to archival appraisal that looks not at individual records, but at the overall universe in which such records exist. It recognizes the inherent problem of volume with modern records, and provides a way for records creators, custodians, and users to work together to create a plan for which documentation will be preserved. Since it was first introduced in 1984, documentation strategy has met with mixed reactions from the archival profession, and has received its most theoretical examination from the Canadian archival community. With a role in the worlds of both archival theory and archival practice, documentation strategy can be applied to the appraisal of architectural records with the development of broad goals for documenting architecture through the coordination of records creators, custodians, and users, and through the creation of institutional archives.

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Introduction

THE ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTATION STRATEGY was introduced a little more than a decade ago by Larry Hackman and Helen Samuels, in a session at the Society of American Archivists annual meeting in 1984. In archival science terms, the life of the concept has been extremely short, but it relates deeply to the fabric of archival theory, methodology, and practice. It was formed in response to real documentary issues posed to the archivist by modern records, and, if one looks very closely, it is possible to find its seeds ten, twenty, and even fifty years ago in the writings of archival pioneers and subsequent codifiers of archival knowledge.¹ In the past decade, however, the impact of archival documentation strategy has been considerable. Most important, it has stimulated (along with other crucial factors such as the development of electronic records and of graduate archival education programs) the discussion of archival appraisal theory *and* practice, a topic that had been largely dormant since its discussion by pioneer archival thinkers such as Jenkinson, Norton, and Schellenberg—all of whom had produced their most mature and significant work by the mid-1950s.² However, the archival documentation strategy is important also because it is fundamentally a methodology that can assist archivists and other allied professionals in developing practical approaches to large-scale documentary and appraisal challenges like those of documenting architecture, the work of architects, and the influence of architectural firms and schools.

In this brief paper I have endeavored to do the following: (1) define the archival documentation strategy; (2) discuss its reception in the North American archival community, the place of its birth and the site of its most vigorous discussion; (3) consider its place in archival theory and practice; and (4) address its practical advantages in appraising architectural records and documenting the development of architecture. I have been expansive in my effort to chronicle archivists' consideration of the strategy because I think these discussions suggest its salient and beneficial aspects for the appraisal of architectural records.

Defining the Archival Documentation Strategy

Between its introduction in 1984 and the publication of the most recent glossary on archival terminology, the definition of the archival documentation strategy has evolved through refinement and argumentation, in the manner of most basic archival precepts and processes. The most recent statement in the Society of American Archivists' 1992 glossary defines the strategy as:

An on-going, analytic, cooperative approach designed, promoted, and implemented by creators, administrators (including archivists), and users to ensure the archival

¹A lengthy essay of mine on archival appraisal principles and the archival documentary strategy in the fall 1994 issue of *Archivaria*, provides a more detailed discussion of these points. Without setting out all of the solid theoretical or even practical bases of the strategy, that article demonstrates that the elements of twentieth-century documentation that have plagued archivists and created the crucible for the development of the concept have been discussed or at least observed for some time.

²Hilary Jenkinson's primary contribution was his 1922 *Manual of Archive Administration*, 2d rev. ed. (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co., Ltd., 1966). Margaret Cross Norton's major writings were published in the 1930s and 1940s and have been conveniently compiled in *Norton on Archives: The Writings of Margaret Cross Norton on Archival and Records Management*, edited by Thornton W. Mitchell (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975). T. R. Schellenberg's most important contribution was his *Modern Archives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

retention of appropriate documentation in some area of human endeavor through the application of archival techniques, the creation of institutional archives and refined acquisition policies, and the development of sufficient resources. The key elements in this approach are an analysis of the universe to be documented, an understanding of the inherent documentary problems, and the formulation of a plan to assure the adequate documentation of an issue, activity, or geographic area.³

In order to provide a working definition of both the strategy's concept and its method, it is necessary only to break down the elemental components of this definition.

The archival documentation strategy has four basic elements. First, the strategy is an *analytical tool*. It provides a methodology for considering the nature, complexities, challenges, and issues presented by some aspect of the documentary universe under consideration (whether it be topical or geographical or specified in some other manner). The strategy is used to examine the records of that universe, considering their importance, inherent characteristics, and other aspects from the perspective of archival and documentary objectives formulated through careful analysis of the aspect of society being considered. Should architectural records, for example, be viewed primarily as evidence of architects, as products of a profession, or in conjunction with the built environment and a much broader aspect of testimony to the basic human impulse to have shelter? In other words, merely examining architectural records as interesting in their own right is to have extremely limited aims that may in fact minimize the value of architectural records for subsequent users. Or, to put it another way, are we trying to document the physical structure of a presidential library as the product of a commemorative function—as a “shrine”—by preserving detailed drawings and plans by a prominent architectural firm, or are we documenting the products and workings of vernacular architecture, by preserving physical remains and such routine records as building contracts, ledgers, household photographs, legal documents, and the like?⁴ Or are we documenting both aspects? As you can surmise, both aspects are extremely different, except that they require that we have clear, pre-determined documentary objectives in mind.

Essential to the strategy's analytical aspect is its emphasis on the coordination and collaboration of records creators, custodians such as archivists, and the users of records (historians and others who bring a certain subject knowledge to the process). In this sense, the documentation strategy is an *interdisciplinary process* and more, the more being that it is not just an intellectual pursuit but also an exercise in administration, public relations, and politics. For a considerable period in North American archival practice and theory, appraisal has been viewed as the responsibility solely of the archivist. While writings on the topic suggest the utility of consulting with experts when difficult appraisal decisions must be made, the general assumption always seemed to be that the archivist made the appraisal decisions based on a set of working criteria—the criteria determined by a particular institution's mandate, by traditional practice, by the standard archival reference to

³Lewis J. Bellardo and Lynn Lady Bellardo, comps., *A Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators, and Records Managers* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1992), 12.

⁴On the considerations of vernacular architecture, see Witold Rybczynski, *Looking Around: A Journey Through Architecture* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1992), 149–153; Nathaniel W. Alcock, “Vernacular Architecture: Historical Evidence and Historical Problems,” in *Material Culture and the Study of American Life*, edited by Ian M. G. Quimby (New York: Published for the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum by W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1978), 109–20.

evidential, informational, and related values, or by some combination of these.⁵ The rise of social history in the 1960s and 1970s and the migration into the archival profession of individuals educated as social historians were major contributing factors in questioning this view. Archivists became concerned about what was *not* in their repositories and more cognizant of the need to follow and even predict changing historiographical trends. By the early 1980s, the precursors of the documentation strategists had made calls for collaboration, and this interest has carried over into the maturing of the concept.⁶ The major difference is that the strategists do not focus exclusively on the scholarly historical users of archives but expand their notion to encompass both the creators of records and the wide spectrum of users—scholarly and otherwise, historical and administrative—as necessary to bringing the requisite knowledge for the solid appraisal of records. Or, in considering architectural records, can we consider ourselves to be successful in our appraisal unless we have included in the process not only architectural historians and architects, but also others who are concerned with the landscape, built environment, or even the role of regulatory agencies which are responsible for building codes?⁷

The third element of the strategy is its *recognition of inherent documentary problems*. These problems are generally described as being the vast quantity of records to be considered, the increasing complexity of the nature of documentation (ranging from the blurring of textual records with other artifactual sources of evidence to the increasing use of ever more sophisticated information technologies to create and store records), and the diversity of institutional records policies, interests, and related matters. Archivists over the past century have commented on these and similar problems, while noting that the quantity and complexity of records has really not been a *significant* problem until the past half-century. But the other basic point puts this problem in its necessary perspective. Archival methods for coping with the nature of modern documentation have not kept pace.⁸ It is simply impossible to examine all records. It may even be impossible to scrutinize all fonds. To extend this problem even further, it may be impossible to evaluate all record-creating entities. The numbers of archivists and the quantity of archival repositories are far too limited to manage the documentary heritage in this manner; this is also why the documentation strategy is not merely a *collecting* scheme, but is intended to stress the creation

⁵This idea of appraisal as a solitary pursuit is reflected in the two Society of American Archivists' manuals on appraisal. Maynard J. Brichford suggests that the archivist "may turn to others for assistance, seeking the opinions of the administrator, the legal counsel, and the auditor" as well as "subject matter specialists" but adds the statement that "most archival records are retained primarily because the archivist believes that there is a reasonable possibility that a searcher in the future will find them useful." Maynard J. Brichford, *Archives and Manuscripts: Appraisal and Accessioning* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1977). F. Gerald Ham's recent manual reflects essentially the same perspective, with the emphasis on the archivist and a series of steps including background research, discussion with records creators and custodians, review of the records, and the use of "outside experts." F. Gerald Ham, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1993), chapter 7.

⁶For example, Andrea Hinding, "Toward Documentation: New Collecting Strategies in the 1980s," in *Options for the 80s: Proceedings of the Second National Conference of the Association of College and Research Libraries, Part B*, edited by Michael D. Kathman and Virgil F. Massman (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1982), 531–38.

⁷Contrast the approach of Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, eds., *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and the Use of Past Environments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) to Tony Hiss's "science of place," as described in *The Experience of Place* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990). What matters most is not how these individuals would tend to look at the same building, but rather the questions they would ask about it and the nature of the evidence they want to preserve.

⁸It is difficult to argue with the conclusions David Bearman makes in his *Archival Methods* (Pittsburgh: Archives and Museum Informatics, 1989).

of institutional archives as well. And, by all appearances, the problem represented by the nature of modern documentation will only become worse. The archival documentation strategy is a methodology intended to deal practically with this problem by its focus on analysis and planning. Architectural records, if we define them as the visual and written documents of architectural firms and individual architects, are not all we might want to have in order to understand a building, because we would be limiting ourselves to documenting architecture as a profession or artistic expression rather than as a truly functional aspect of humankind. We would preserve a notion of architecture that could be a distortion of a society's view of its past, much in the same fashion as historic preservation has been criticized for focusing on a limited aspect of the built environment.⁹

The final element of the strategy is that it requires the *formulation of a plan*. Formulating a plan is the effort to define, in as specific a way as possible, the documentary objectives for the topic or geographic area or whatever aspect is being considered. The plan is the effort to emphasize that, given the documentary problems represented by modern society, the archivist must develop objectives *before* any examination of records takes place. Since it is impossible to inspect all records, a well-developed and carefully thought-out scheme must be in place to assist the archivists and their allies in considering strategically what documentary sources must be considered for retention. While this may seem like simple common sense, it is probably still the case that most archival appraisal and acquisition do not include this step, but are rather the result of efforts to inspect actual records closely and determine potential value based on this inspection.

The plan is also an effort to provide a degree of measurement and/or evaluation that seems often to be missing from the current appraisal routine (indeed, from all archival work). It is the result of asking the question, "What does all the currently preserved archival documentation represent? Is it comprehensive, representative, or fragmentary, or do we even know?" Written documentation plans should provide archivists with benchmarks for evaluating their appraisal efforts; without some kind of objectives how can we even begin to determine if we are successful? We can even turn to the literature about architecture and urban planning for insight about this. Kevin Lynch, in his provocative *What Time Is This Place?*, stated, "Memory cannot retain everything; if it could, we would be overwhelmed with data. Memory is the result of a process of selection and of organizing what is selected so that it is within reach in expectable situations. There must also be some random accumulations to enable us to discover unexpected relationships."¹⁰ We know that there will always be some random preservation of architectural records; but will there also be some reasonable selection criteria whereby our memory of architecture, formed by architectural records, will be at all representative, or even accurate?

Reception of the Strategy

The response of the North American archival profession to the archival documentation strategy has perhaps revealed more about the level of maturity of appraisal practice and theory than about the utility of the strategy itself. Two essays on the archival docu-

⁹See, for example, John D. Dorst, *The Written Suburb: An American Site, An Ethnographic Dilemma* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), which provides a good understanding of how the pressure of merging societal forces can determine what aspects of the built environment are saved and how they are used in interpreting the past and the present.

¹⁰Kevin Lynch, *What Time Is This Place?* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1972), 36.

mentation strategy followed the 1984 SAA session. In 1986, Helen Samuels presented the first published description, focusing on the strategy as a conceptual approach for dealing with the intricacies of modern documentation and drawing on her work with science and technology.¹¹ Within a year, a second essay appeared, co-authored by Larry Hackman and Joan Warnow-Blewett, that presented a very basic methodological (step-by-step) description of the documentation strategy, including a case study of the American Institute of Physics's efforts to document modern physics.¹² These two essays provided an interesting introduction, stressing why the approach was needed and providing basic information on the "how-to" aspects. Two more essays published within a year of these discussed particular applications of the strategy, rounding out what could be termed the initial phase of writing by its advocates.¹³

The initial responses to these essays, and to the concept, stressed two practical aspects, which represented very different perceptions of the archival community about itself and its work. One rejoinder was that archivists had always consulted external experts and that what was being described here was nothing new at all.¹⁴ However, the subsequent confusion, on the part of some who argued from this vantage, of the documentation strategy with records surveys (which are quite different in purpose and concept since they are based on formulating appraisal decisions in reaction to examination of records) indicated that this was, indeed, something new.¹⁵ It is an excellent way in which to re-emphasize that the archival documentation strategy is not an effort to determine objectives *as* we interact with or react to architectural records, but as a lens by which we can examine such records on the basis of broad documentary objectives formed *before* such examination. It is a manner in which we can determine *what* evidence offered by architectural records we want to preserve and even *how* such preservation might take place.

The other response to the strategy was that it was impractical—too large in scope, far beyond the resources of any archival repository, and too remote from the individual missions of archival programs—to be carried out or even attempted. Pragmatic American archivists took one look at the strategy as methodology and declared it far too cumbersome and resource-consuming to be considered. They went back to business as usual, ignoring, of course, just what they were attempting to accomplish in their appraisal labors.¹⁶ Yet, imagine the range of architectural records that might exist in various institutions or be produced in the course of normal government regulation. What is more cumbersome and resource-consuming, to deal with such records as we find them, or to attempt to survey them with no or little clear concept of what it is we are attempting to document and what evidence it is we want maintained for our use? The pragmatic approach can be a very

¹¹"Who Controls the Past," *American Archivist* 49 (Spring 1986): 109–24.

¹²"The Documentation Strategy Process: A Model and a Case Study," *American Archivist* 50 (Winter 1987): 12–47.

¹³Philip Alexander and Helen W. Samuels, "The Roots of 128: A Hypothetical Documentation Strategy," *American Archivist* 50 (Fall 1987): 518–31; Richard J. Cox, "A Documentation Strategy Case Study: Western New York," *American Archivist* 52 (Spring 1989): 192–200.

¹⁴For example, Terry Abraham, "Collection Policy or Documentation Strategy: Theory and Practice," *American Archivist* 54 (Winter 1991): 44–52.

¹⁵See, for example, Ellen Garrison, "The Very Model of a Modern Major General: Documentation Strategy and the Center for Popular Music," *Provenance* 7 (Fall 1989): 22–32.

¹⁶See, for example, Frank Boles, "Mix Two Parts Interest to One Part Information and Appraise Until Done: Understanding Contemporary Record Selection Processes," *American Archivist* 50 (Summer 1987): 356–68.

broad path leading to the destruction of any clear, coherent documentary record of architecture or of whatever aspects of it we wish to document.

The next phase of reception of the strategy by the North American archival community, which is actually the current phase, was its examination through the perspective of archival theory. While this phase had its start in the United States, as part of a wider debate about archival theory, it has had a distinct Canadian flavor. The Canadian archival community has been blessed with the establishment of strong graduate archival education programs, a national archives dedicated to archival theory and experimentation with new methods, an archival journal interested in lively debates about the content of archival theory, and a professional association that holds annual meetings with sessions that stimulate further thinking about archival theory and its relationship to practice. While these elements also exist in the United States, the size and diversity of the archival community strain the channels of exchange with ongoing, unresolved debate, not about archival theory or its specifics, but about whether there is such a knowledge base or if there should be graduate education, or even if there is a need to read professional literature.¹⁷ In the United States, one critic would select the documentation strategy as the epitome of inadequate and misplaced theorizing,¹⁸ while another—looking from the perspective of electronic records and their myriad of challenges—would declare that the strategy (whatever its limitations) was refreshing, since present appraisal practices and theory were limited in their effectiveness;¹⁹ in Canada the documentation strategy has been discussed mostly in view of theory, methodology, and practice. Indeed, the 1991 Association of Canadian Archivists meeting featured a number of sessions on archival appraisal theory and practice, in particular scrutinizing the archival documentation strategy.

In Canada, the documentation strategy has been examined from new viewpoints. It has been incorporated into a new model for archival appraisal theory and practice, most notably by Terry Cook, whose contribution to this volume explains the documentation strategy as part of a broader array of appraisal approaches dubbed “macro-appraisal.”²⁰ Others have utilized the documentation strategy as a foil for developing other new emphases for archival appraisal. Terry Eastwood, for example, has described the difficulties in the reliance on traditional archival appraisal criteria, such as evidential and informational values, and begun to build a new appraisal theory revolving around social memory and societal use of archives.²¹ Finally, others are viewing the archival documentation strategy as an assault on traditional archival mission and theory, stressing that it is the methodology not of archivists but of documentalists.²²

¹⁷Anyone who has spent several months reading the postings of the Archives and Archivists Listserv has witnessed animated debates about such topics, a much lower level of discourse than seems evident in the pages of *Archivaria* or at the sessions of the Association of Canadian Archivists.

¹⁸John W. Roberts, “Archival Theory: Myth or Banality,” *American Archivist* 53 (Winter 1990): 110–20.

¹⁹Margaret Hedstrom, “New Appraisal Techniques: The Effect of Theory on Practice,” *Provenance* 7 (Fall 1989): 1–21.

²⁰Terry Cook, “Mind Over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal,” in *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor*, edited by Barbara L. Craig (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1992), 38–70. See also his “Documentation Strategy,” *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992): 181–91.

²¹Terry Eastwood, “Towards a Social Theory of Appraisal,” in Craig, *The Archival Imagination*, 71–89, and “How Goes It With Appraisal,” *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993): 111–21.

²²Luciana Duranti, “The Concept of Appraisal and Archival Theory,” *American Archivist* 57 (Spring 1994): 328–44.

Obviously, advocates of the documentation strategy concept view the first trend with pleasure and the last with curiosity; the original advocates have never argued that the strategy was intended to replace any appraisal theories or methods but to help apply them more usefully, given the reality of the documentary universe in the late twentieth century. In fact, Terry Cook's initial criticism of the strategy, that it is a "strategy, a methodology and much useful practical advice, but not a new appraisal theory,"²³ is an important assessment but not one to worry much about at this point; the crucial message is that it provides good advice that few are following and that opens a window on new solutions to long-standing problems. The movement toward new foci for appraisal, such as memory and use, also falls within the purview of the original strategists, who have never suggested that there is not room for other appraisal approaches. Finally, the archival documentation strategy provides a means of considering broad documentary objectives that enable the archivist to determine how to use accepted appraisal concepts of evidential, informational, intrinsic, or other such values. In fact, without the broader view as to what it is you are striving for in preserving architectural records, I would argue that it is impossible to use these appraisal criteria in any realistic manner. Can you look at all of the recorded evidence of architecture in our society? Does the notion of informational value really help you much in determining what records should be saved if you lack broader appraisal objectives or the ability to have some grasp of the universe of available records on architecture?

Reevaluating the Strategy as Theoretical Concept or Practical Tool

How one views the archival documentation strategy in the context of archival theory probably depends initially on one's attitude toward archival theory, certainly as reflected in some of the discussions and debate that have been prompted in Canadian archivy. Anyone who is wary of theorizing about archival practice is likely to view the documentation strategy with suspicion. Why is this the case when the strategy can also be considered a method only, as well as a stimulant to theorizing? Those who are antagonistic toward archival theory generally stress on-the-job or nuts-and-bolts training; the archival documentation strategy thus appears to them as the height of "pie-in-the-sky" theorizing because it is predicated on multi-institutional and interdisciplinary collaboration and co-operation and, so it seems, encourages research and reflection rather than policy and action. In fact, I will go so far as to say that some who are antagonistic toward such approaches as the documentation strategy tend to view as theorizing any practice their institutions do not follow. "Our institution has always appraised architectural records in one manner, and I see no reason to change," they might argue. But can we really assess the value of an appraisal approach if it is based on isolated efforts, institutional tradition, and training by apprenticeship? This question is not intended to be critical of either motives or knowledge, but rather to stimulate thinking about what the present appraisal approaches to architectural records actually represent.

At the same time, it appears that if an archivist has a high assessment of the importance of a theoretical foundation for archival practice, the source of the theory itself will determine his or her view of the archival documentation strategy. Those who hold to traditional European theory seem to insist on the need to read texts, arguing for diplomatic and hermeneutical approaches that place evidence at the fore, and to see the documentation

²³Cook, "Documentation Strategy," 186.

strategy as a nonarchival, documentalist method for examining documents selectively. They see the strategy's focus on collecting, information, and subjects rather than evidence. On the other hand, those who ascribe to archival theory but see it as an evolutionary process that must adapt to changing recordkeeping and information systems seem more susceptible to endorsing the archival documentation strategy as a bonafide archival theory and method. They recognize that the documentary problems the strategy was initially formulated to address are real and that, however desirable it may be to scrutinize the form, function, and evidence of *every* record, it is simply impossible to do so. These individuals see the strategy as a contribution to archival theory because it expands on method by testing the archivist's mission against social realities. In the appraisal of architectural records, what do we seek to do, or whom do we seek to serve? These questions are *crucial* in dealing realistically with any aspect of society, including its architecture.

While I lean toward the latter position, I suspect I may represent yet another camp in the view of archival theory and the relationship of the documentation strategy to it. I view the notion of theory in archival science as the formulation of general principles which recognize patterns in the manner in which archival records are created and administered.²⁴ I also view the theoretical aspects of archival science as something inexorably linked to practice, meaning that the principles capture the fundamental, consistent aspects of that practice *and* that the formulation of appraisal theory in particular requires speculation, experiments, and sharing of appraisal decisions.²⁵ This is not some cynical or simplistic notion of theory, but is, in fact, consistent with that used by other fields. A general definition of theory notes that "theories are logically interconnected statements about the world that describe, explain, and predict the occurrence of phenomena. They are based on empirical generalizations about the world, which are in turn based upon analysis of our direct observations."²⁶ From the perspective of management, we can come up with another, similar view: "models and theories are basically representations of actual events. They depict and characterize phenomena in an organized way."²⁷ Even in the sciences the quest for "reliable knowledge" is based on an internalization of concepts and operations, "living pictures in the minds of those who have learnt them."²⁸ The archival documentation strategy is a contribution to archival theory because it is based on a reaction to the strengths and weaknesses of archival appraisal principles derived from practice and utilized over time in a rapidly changing documentary universe. As such, the strategy is both new archival theory *and* a contribution to methodology and practice; we need it in both areas.

F. Gerald Ham described the documentation strategy as "highly theoretical and untested in the crucible of practice."²⁹ This statement fails to mention, of course, that the strategy has already had an enormous impact in the current discussion about appraisal theory, or that the use of such macro-appraisal approaches is the only solution to con-

²⁴Terry Eastwood, "Nurturing Archival Education in the University," *American Archivist* 51 (Summer 1988): 235; Frederick Stielow, "Archival Theory Redux and Redeemed: Definition and Context toward a General Theory," *American Archivist* 54 (Winter 1991): 17.

²⁵Robert Sink, "Appraisal: The Process of Choices," *American Archivist* 53 (Summer 1990): 453.

²⁶Judith A. Perrolle, *Computers and Social Change: Information, Property, and Power* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1987), 30.

²⁷John R. Rizzo, *Management for Librarians: Fundamentals and Issues*, Contributions in Librarianship and Information Science, no. 33 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 19.

²⁸John Ziman, *Reliable Knowledge: An Exploration of the Grounds for Belief in Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 101-2.

²⁹Ham, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts*, 12.

tending with modern documentation, or that the other more traditional appraisal criteria and methods have little empirical documentation suggesting any rigorous testing in practice. Let's come closer to home. Are you *completely* confident that the architectural records you have appraised are the best records for whatever aspect of architecture you are documenting? Are you *completely* confident that you have, in fact, systematically documented any aspect of architecture, rather than just accumulated some interesting, even valuable architectural records? Again, these questions are not meant to be critical, but they are meant to do what the archival documentation strategy seems to help us do best—see the forest for the trees, or, in this case, see architecture in society for the individual buildings.

Examining the Strategy for the Appraisal of Architectural Records

Where does all this leave us, when considering the appraisal of architectural records? I think there are three recommendations to be made in this context, bearing in mind that I know little about architectural records other than the small body of writings on this topic in archival literature.

First, *concentrate attention on broad documentary objectives for architecture*. This will enable you to avoid becoming fixated on specific types of records at the expense of documenting the important and essential aspects of architecture, architects, architectural firms, and related matters. Developing a specific plan for documentary objectives will provide a means of measuring the effectiveness of your appraisal activity. It can also assist you in identifying some of the kinds of visual records associated with architecture that require additional analysis and more specific investigation into form and function. These broad documentary goals can be achieved in much the same way as you would develop an acquisitions policy for a specific repository, by bringing together experts to determine the scope of appraisal and by developing specific benchmarks for evaluation.

Second, *bring together architectural records creators, custodians, and users in whatever direction your appraisal work may lead you*. The alliance of these various groups can both assist in developing better support for the preservation of architectural records, and help you to produce some effective new methods for dealing with problems unique to the appraisal of such records and the documentation of architecture. It would be interesting to consider not only the evidence inherent in the records of architects and architectural firms, but also the relationship of documentation maintained by other governmental organizations, professional associations, and other groups, and, casting even further afield, to determine the relationship between architectural records and the physical structures themselves. It is easy to see how the historic preservation and urban planning professions, along with the citizens interested in maintaining the physical fabric and stability of their communities, would provide important insights into the appraisal of any documentary evidence relating to architecture.

Third, *focus on the creation and maintenance of institutional archives*. The North American archival community has devoted far too much attention to collecting. And this collecting has often been haphazard or fixed on documentary fragments. A bigger problem may be the contraction of a regulatory or nurturing environment for the creation of institutional archives. There are far more archival records than can be preserved in the present array of archival and historical manuscripts repositories. The documentation strategy can be used to identify organizations that should be encouraged to establish institutional archives and to encourage existing repositories to expand their acquisition scope to preserve records (endangered and essential) for which there is no home repository. The archival

documentation strategy is not a collecting strategy; instead it should be used as an analytical device to identify broad documentary objectives, important trends, crucial individuals, and the like.

Conclusion

The archival documentation strategy is a practical, down-to-earth concept which architectural archivists, architectural historians, and architects themselves should consider. It adds a synergetic aspect to archival appraisal, synergy being the "process in which an aggregated, combined action of different elements together produces more effective or efficient results than each could produce by itself."³⁰ The synergy comes from bringing together archival experts, records creators, subject specialists, and others in order to do one very important thing: think about objectives *before* examining any records. Appraisal of particular architectural fonds will be more meaningful. And the appraisal process will have the greater chance of being successful by a move from reactive analysis of specific records to planned appraisal.

³⁰Joseph Z. Nitecki, "Conceptual Dimensions of Library Management," *Journal of Library Administration* 1 (Summer 1980): 49.