

Macroappraisal in Theory and Practice: Origins, Characteristics, and Implementation in Canada, 1950–2000

TERRY COOK

University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada (E-mail: tcook3957@rogers.com)

Abstract. Macroappraisal as developed in Canada has had significant currency in archival literature over the past decade, and aspects of its program and ideas have been implemented in other jurisdictions. For the first time, this essay probes the theoretical and practical origins of macroappraisal in Canada since 1950 and why its originators no longer found convincing the predominant status quo on appraisal as articulated by T.R. Schellenberg. The essay then summarizes the theory of macroappraisal as articulated at the National Archives of Canada, and the strategic and program infrastructure developed in the 1990s to turn the new theory into operational reality. As no archival concept is universally locked in time, the evolution and changes in the macroappraisal program, both in theory and strategy, are also analysed in its Canadian home base over its first decade, as well as some internal and external criticisms of it. The essay intends to illuminate the deeper context of macroappraisal, so that an international audience may better understand its strengths and weaknesses. As the author is the principal architect of macroappraisal, the essay consists of equal parts of archival history, theoretical analysis, and personal reflection.

Keywords: archival appraisal, archival history, archival theory, functional analysis, macroappraisal, National Archives of Canada, records disposition

Macroappraisal is the “Canadian way” of doing archival appraisal.¹ In a single-sentence summary, macroappraisal assesses the societal value of both the functional-structural context and work-place culture in which the records are created and used by their creator(s), *and* the interrelationship of citizens, groups, organizations – “the public” – with that functional-structural context. If appraisal designates the long-term value of the content of records, or series of records, for their potential research values, macroappraisal assesses the significance of

¹ I hereby sincerely thank five colleagues for their careful reading of this text, and for their very helpful suggestions. Richard Brown, Candace Loewen, and Dan Moore of Library and Archives Canada, Helen Samuels recently of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Tim Cook of the Canadian War Museum all significantly improved the essay with their comments, but they are not responsible for any errors that remain or for the interpretations that follow. See also the additional qualification in note 7.

the context of their creation and contemporary use. Appraisal is about records; macroappraisal is about their broader (or “macro”) context.

Macroappraisal involves a theory for determining the appraisal value of records and a new practice (strategy, methodology, and criteria) for implementing that appraisal value-determination theory. The leading advocates of macroappraisal insist that theory and practice are each essential sides of the macroappraisal coin, even though some observers argue more in favour of one side only, usually practice, and getting on with the work rather than thinking about it. But without clearly stated and well-understood theory that is continually evolving and relevant, appraisal practice soon becomes directionless, inconsistent, and, when challenged, undefendable to the wider public and unaccountable within larger archival mandates. Conversely, theory is merely an ivory-tower conceit if it does not result in good “records” actually being brought under control as “archives.”²

To complicate further the analysis in this article, macroappraisal as theory and practice takes place within a planned and systematic approach to records disposal, or records disposition as it is more commonly called in Canada. This planned approach to records disposition is the records management operational framework; macroappraisal is the archival substance at its heart that gives it life. The framework and the substance are interrelated, obviously, but they are conceptually distinct, although sometimes they each compromise the ideal workings of the other with the hard realities of different working cultures, resource levels, and participants’ expectations.

Macroappraisal also insists that appraisal is a distinct archival function from acquisition, with which it is all too often equated (even subsumed) in archival thinking and practice. Appraisal is the theory and methodology for determining the value of archives – which records should be kept and which ones should be destroyed, and why. Acquisition is a separate, if related, series of policies, strategies, and methodologies, and often legal requirements, to determine whether the records appraised as having archival value can actually be transferred to the custody and control of the archival institution. Analysis of acquisition issues is incorporated into the macroappraisal process,

² This essay will use this North American terminology consistently throughout the text, where “archives” or “archival records” (as documents) refer to those records designated by an archival institution as having long-term value to citizens and society beyond their initial and (possible) lasting value to their creator. Before that archival appraisal designation, they are referred to as “records.”

but is conceptually separate from the core keep-destroy appraisal decision which is the focus of this article.

Macroappraisal insists that appraisal requires extensive research by archivists into institutional functionality, organizational structures and work-place cultures, recordkeeping systems, information workflows, recording media and recording technologies, and into changes in all these across space and time. Appraisal is not a mere process or procedure, the standardized application of models or templates, but a work of complex scholarship. As much archival literature now recognizes, appraisal has grave consequences for society: "As we archivists appraise records, we are doing nothing less than shaping the future of our jurisdiction's documentary heritage. We are deciding what will be remembered and what will be forgotten, who in society will in future be visible and who will remain invisible, who will have a voice and who will not." Macroappraisal is the process that defines which of these creators, and functions, programs, and activities – and therefore their related records – will be reflected in archives, and, as starkly, and with finality, which will not. "We archivists," I have asserted before, when we undertake appraisal, "are literally co-creating archives. We are making history. We are exercising power over memory."³ With the stakes so high, the resource commitment to doing the job well is more than justified. Macroappraisal evidently also demands, and indeed celebrates, an active, interventionist, research-based role (and professional definition) for the archivist, who perforce in this function must exercise interpretation and judgement in the very choice of what becomes the archive.⁴

Finally, a word of qualification is necessary about the scope of macroappraisal and the rhetorical character of this essay. As will be seen, the macroappraisal approach originated in the late 1980s within

³ Terry Cook, "Macro-appraisal and Functional Analysis: Documenting Governance Rather Than Government", *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 25 (1) (Spring 2004): 7.

⁴ Macroappraisal as appraisal theory has obvious major implications for more general archival theory which cannot detain us here. But it is no accident, for example, that Canadian archivists' international lead in first articulating the "postmodern archive" originated with many of the macroappraisal pioneers. See the long listing of key postmodern archivists and their work in note 14 of Terry Cook, "Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives", *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001): 20–21. Of "postmodern" archival writers within the profession, the first chronologically (and in quantity) are Richard Brown, Brien Brothman, and Terry Cook, all long-time members of the National Archives macroappraisal program, as was Tom Nesmith in its early days, and Verne Harris acknowledges being directly influenced by the same mentalité during an extensive multi-week working visit to Ottawa.

the National Archives of Canada⁵ and was formally launched across the Canadian federal government in the spring of 1991. In this essay, I will use the terminology of the Canadian national government and the broader “citizen–state” relationship in which government functions. Yet it has always been my hypothesis that macroappraisal is equally well suited to other levels of government (provincial/state and municipal), universities, and business corporations, in all of which it has already been, or is being, implemented, and to the records of hospitals, labour unions, churches, or any other modern organization, where the “citizen–state” terminology would change, respectively, to hospital and patients, union and members, church and parishioners, and so on. I will not make this semantic qualification again, but hope that readers, seeing the “citizen–state” usage and government-centred examples in what follows, will not assume that Canadian macroappraisal is only (or overly) statist in orientation, and that they may conceive of applications for macroappraisal in their own jurisdictions and for different types of modern recordkeeping institutions.

Such application of macroappraisal to other jurisdictions underlines again the value of appraisal theory underpinning appraisal practice, for practice alone must always be rooted in local circumstances whereas theory allows a broader perspective. This long article will thus detail both theory and practice, so readers may judge the ideas about macroappraisal, and weigh them against the particular Canadian circumstances in which they have operated, *and*, equally, qualify theory and practice accordingly for their own traditions and jurisdictions.

Since macroappraisal was conceptualised and launched in the Government of Canada over a decade ago, it has evolved in ways planned and unplanned, to international praise, criticism, imitation, and adaptation. It now stands poised to continue its development into the 21st century, continually being reinvented as archivists respond to political, practical, technological, and theoretical change. While these more recent modifications in Canada and elsewhere are the subject of other articles in this special thematic issue of *Archival Science*, this essay was commissioned to provide the background for macroappraisal as concept, process, and methodology, and its evolution over its first

⁵ I shall use “National Archives of Canada” and “National Archivist” throughout for generic references, and for the period after 1987; and “Public Archives of Canada” and “Dominion Archivist” specifically for the period before 1987. Since its merger with the National Library of Canada in May 2004, the National Archives of Canada is now part of Library and Archives Canada.

decade. The essay is therefore organized around the following five broad themes, in five separate sections:

1. The nature of the records disposition process in the Government of Canada and the character of archival appraisal theory and practice at the (then) Public Archives of Canada, from the 1950s to the early 1980s, as the background context from which macro-appraisal emerged;
2. Practical and bureaucratic factors that lead to the adoption of macroappraisal as a new strategic approach to records disposition within government-wide records management;
3. Theoretical and conceptual trends that lead to the adoption of macroappraisal as a new theory for archival appraisal;
4. The theory and practice of macroappraisal and the planned approach to records disposition, as actually launched in 1990–1991 at the (then) National Archives of Canada; and
5. The evolution of the macroappraisal program over its first decade, including its reception in the profession, strengths, weaknesses, and changes.

Although I have written extensively before on the theory of macro-appraisal, which this article will necessarily summarize as part of section four, the origins of macroappraisal and its subsequent evolution have not yet been analysed in published form beyond individual case studies. It is necessary, however, to provide here a personal disclaimer that much of what follows is personal, and I shall write, therefore, using the first-person tense to make it unequivocally so. I had the lead role in the incident that severely challenged the old status quo for appraisal and records disposition in Canada; I also first developed macroappraisal in 1989–1990, outside my National Archives' duties, when writing a RAMP study for the International Council of Archives.⁶ I later used its insights to formulate, with the help of colleagues, the macroappraisal program for the National Archives of Canada during 1990–1991 as the intellectual core of a new planned approach to the disposition of government records, and thereafter publicized macroappraisal in lectures, workshops, and articles in Canada and internationally. Finally, I was the director at the National Archives of Canada responsible for the appraisal and disposition program for government records in all media from 1993 to 1998.

⁶ See Terry Cook, *The Archival Appraisal of Records Containing Personal Information: A RAMP study with guidelines* (Paris: UNESCO, 1991).

There is no point hiding my close involvement with macroappraisal, but it renders what follows as much personal reflection as, I hope, it is also archival history and theoretical analysis.⁷

Background: Records Disposition and Archival Appraisal to the Mid-1980s at the (then) Public Archives of Canada

The *Public Archives of Canada Act* (1912) prohibited the destruction of any government record without the approval of the Dominion Archivist. This legislative restriction involved (at least implicitly) appraising records for any possible historical and cultural value, and acquiring records having such values as archival holdings before destroying the rest. Yet for many decades, there was no articulated business process to implement these powers of the *Public Archives of Canada Act*, nor were government records acquired in any systematic fashion as archival holdings beyond older series from the colonial period predating Confederation in 1867. Beginning with the Second World War, however, the volume of government records in departments expanded greatly with the intensive wartime administration and, in the years following, with the introduction of the many programs of the social welfare state. With very little records disposition having occurred since the country was created in 1867, this rapid expansion of the state meant that departments were bursting with old records. With many new records being created and needing storage, and much enlarged staffs needing offices, a space crisis loomed. Numerous complaints were made public, too, that the history of the country since 1867 could not be written without access by scholars to records then languishing in unknown basements in government buildings.⁸

As a result, to improve the efficiency of the government's business and address the paucity of modern archival records for history, the

⁷ My views in this essay should not be assumed, therefore, to be those of Library and Archives Canada today, where all the programs are constantly evolving, as some other authors in this issue will attest, although my assertions do reflect what I believe were the policies of the institution during my time there. But I write today as an archival educator, no longer as a senior manager of Library and Archives Canada.

⁸ For this interrelated history of records management and archival administration in the 1950s and 1960s set in more detailed context, see Terry Cook, "An Archival Revolution: W. Kaye Lamb and the Transformation of the Archival Profession", *Archivaria* (forthcoming in 2006). Older but still useful pieces are Jay Atherton, "The Origins of the Public Archives Records Centre, 1897–1956", *Archivaria* 8 (Summer 1979): 35–59; and W.G. Ormsby, "The Public Archives of Canada, 1948–1968", *Archivaria* 15 (Winter 1982–1983): 36–46.

cabinet office of the Government of Canada created the Public Records Committee in 1945, with representatives from several key agencies as well as from the Canadian Historical Association. The Dominion Archivist was the de facto chairperson, overseeing a three-part continuing mandate: to control the authorization process when departments requested permission to destroy old records; to approve the introduction of all microfilming applications, the new information technology of the day; and to encourage records management as an emerging government-wide function. To achieve these aims, the Public Archives of Canada turned to the United States for guidance. Special attention was paid, through senior staff visits and conference discussion, to practices at the National Archives and Records Service (now Administration) in Washington, and to the ideas enunciated there, and through publications by its leading figure, T.R. Schellenberg. It is no great exaggeration to say that Schellenberg's ideas on government records management and archival appraisal, directly or through his successors, have dominated world archival thinking from the mid-20th century until the past decade.⁹ Canada was certainly no exception, although it adopted these only gradually as the changing business of managing government records made necessary from the 1950s to 1970s.

The Public Archives of Canada during the 1950s embraced the central features of the American life-cycle approach to records management with its classic three stages for records: an active phase in the originating government office, where they were created or received, classified or catalogued, and used regularly; then a dormant phase of occasional use or reference when they were stored in low-cost, warehouse-like records centres; and, finally, a disposition phase, when the records would either be destroyed or transferred as archival records from the records centre to the holdings of the Public Archives itself. The administrative instrument for this third process was the records schedule. Records were scheduled for the number of years that they were required to be retained for active and dormant use, and then their ultimate disposition was indicated, based on an archival appraisal. The Public Archives in these years built large records centres for dormant records storage (and would continue to do so across the regions of the country over the next two decades) and served as the focal point,

⁹ For an overview analysis of the last century's archival thinking, including appraisal and Schellenberg's influence, see Terry Cook, "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift", *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997): 17–63 (a shorter, less complete version was also published as "Interaction of Archival Theory and Practice Since the Publication of the Dutch Manual", *Archivum* 43 (1997): 191–214.)

through its program leadership, training courses, and many publications, for the new records management profession.¹⁰ This more active recordkeeping environment culminated in the Public Records Order of 1966 that transferred control of records destruction from the Public Records Committee to the Dominion Archivist, defined records in all media as subject to its provisions, encouraged systematic records management in departments, and made records scheduling mandatory for the first time, not only when destruction authorization was required.¹¹

There was nothing inherent in Schellenberg's life-cycle concept to prevent the archivist from working "up front," hand in hand, with the records manager, during the active phase of the cycle, to appraise records as part of an holistic recordkeeping regime.¹² Yet, in reality that rarely happened, at least in terms of records disposition; after the first nine years of its operation, some 80% of records centre holdings had not yet been scheduled.¹³ The records centre was envisioned as a "half-way house", in the words of its Canadian founder, Dominion Archivist W. Kaye Lamb, where departmental files "when they *ceased to be of interest to a department* ... would be reviewed by Archives personnel, and those containing material of permanent historic interest would be transferred to the Archives proper. The rest would be destroyed ... it means that older records – the official archives of the future – will for the most part fall automatically into the hands of the Archives *as they drop out of departmental use*."¹⁴ When their

¹⁰ There was a National Archives outreach program for many years of training for, and publications directed at, records managers in government departments, that addressed records classification, vital records, microfilming, file storage and retrievals, and general records management principles, including records scheduling. This was the deliberate strategy and operational practice of W. Kaye Lamb, Dominion Archivist, 1948–1969, who more than anyone else was responsible for adding the strong records management presence to the Public Archives' programs. (See again Cook, "An Archival Revolution: W. Kaye Lamb and the Transformation of the Archival Profession", forthcoming in *Archivaria* 2006.)

¹¹ Library and Archives Canada, Records of the Privy Council Office, RG 2, Order in Council 1749, 9 September 1966.

¹² Schellenberg too, in articulating the life cycle, envisioned several vital concerns requiring archivists to work closely with records managers during the current or active phase of the life cycle (making it de facto more of a moving interactive continuum than fixed sequential cycle). See T.R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1996), pp. 26–28. Schellenberg's work was originally published in 1956.

¹³ *Public Archives of Canada: Report, 1959–1969* (Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada, 1971), pp. 1–2, 9–22, for statistical charts and supporting narrative.

¹⁴ W. Kaye Lamb, "Presidential Address", Canadian Historical Association, *Report* (1958), pp. 1–2. Emphasis added.

dormant-storage retention periods expired at the records centre, near the end of the life cycle, the Archives would then appraise the records and decide either to acquire the records as archival holdings or authorize their destruction.

Over time, the large majority of records sent to the records centres for temporary storage were not “the official archives of the future” as Lamb had hoped, but rather common administrative and housekeeping records (relating to personnel and human resources, finance and accounts, buildings and facilities, equipment and supplies, and so on), or the voluminous case and transactional files of operational programs. The policy, research, and major operational files from central registry and executive office recordkeeping systems, at least at departmental headquarters in Ottawa, tended to be retained in record offices within departments, or in their basements or similar internal storage areas. Once these records had accumulated sufficiently over the years to cause a space problem, the archivist would be called to perform an “on-the-spot” appraisal, and the records, if judged to have archival value, would come to the Public Archives as a “direct transfer.” The records centres were thus increasingly transformed into a “half-way house” between departments and destruction, rather than between departments and archival retention. Moreover, the records-scheduling approach, as it evolved in reality (if not in theory, or as required in the Public Records Order), rarely covered non-textual media such as maps, engineering and architectural records, photographs, posters, or film, which in almost all government departments were not under the control of the records manager, but rather under the care of special custodians or librarians. And records scheduling never covered any of the machine-readable records that were increasingly being created by government from the 1960s onward with the introduction of main-frame computing capabilities.

Thus, by the early 1980s, despite vast improvements from the chaotic state of records non-management before 1945, the business of records disposition in the Government of Canada was still primarily responding reactively to records managers’ space crises in departments, or ad hoc case by case as accessions in the records centres reached the end of their scheduled retention periods; was overwhelmingly paper-based and textual in focus; was Ottawa-centred with very rare exceptions, ignoring federal government records created in regional and local offices across the nation; and was focused at the “back end,” or the third phase, of the life cycle.

With the post-war emergence of records management and records disposition, the function of archival appraisal assumed much greater

importance. Active targeting of acquisitions had long been part of the private-sector half of the Canadian “total archives” tradition at the Public Archives of Canada.¹⁵ But for the government-sector side, the de facto tendency had been much more passive, mirroring until the early 1950s the classic archival theory of Hilary Jenkinson. To preserve their alleged objectivity and neutrality, Jenkinson asserted that archivists should not appraise government records, but rather allow departmental officials themselves, through a natural process of winnowing wheat from chaff, to choose the records that would survive and thus eventually be transferred to the archival institution as historical archives.

In Canada, Dominion Archivist Kaye Lamb consciously rejected this approach as unworkable, for two main reasons. First, the age of record scarcity upon which Jenkinson based his assumptions was long gone in the exploding information universe of expanding government programs and the space crises that ensued. And, second, the archivist was better educated and better suited, in Lamb’s view, to take a long-term view on the historical value of records than departmental officials who too often were driven by short-term considerations of space and economy. Yet the archivist could no longer keep everything, but only (in Lamb’s time) some 5% of the total government record. Selection must occur. “Until recent times,” Lamb reflected in 1962, “the duties of an archivist were essentially those of a guardian and custodian. He took charge of the surviving records of the past and did his best to preserve and safeguard them. The question as to whether they should be preserved, or were worth preserving, rarely arose. By contrast, to destroy records, or to authorize or agree to their destruction, has now become an accepted part of the archivist’s responsibility. This represents a fundamental change in his duties.... The difficulty,” Lamb continued, “is to decide wisely and well what shall be destroyed and what shall be retained.”¹⁶

To this end, Lamb ensured that archivists were hired with a Master’s degree and increasingly Ph.D. degrees in Canadian history, and, once hired, were encouraged to attend national and regional historical

¹⁵ On the definition and history of the total archives concept as it originated in Canada, the best source is now Laura Millar’s incisive pair of linked articles: “Discharging Our Debt: The Evolution of the Total Archives Concept in English Canada”, *Archivaria* 46 (Fall 1998): 103–146; and “The Spirit of Total Archives: Seeking a Sustainable Archival System”, *Archivaria* 47 (Spring 1999): 46–65.

¹⁶ W. Kaye Lamb, “The Fine Art of Destruction”, in Albert E.J. Hollaender, ed., *Essays in Memory of Sir Hilary Jenkinson* (Chichester: Society of Archivists, 1962), pp. 50, 53. For Jenkinson’s views, see Cook, “What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift”, pp. 22–26.

conferences, to read widely in Canadian history and historiography, to interact closely in specialized reference and other ways with academic historians, and to do their own historical research and publication. This background and experience would enable archivists, he hoped, to assess current patterns, and anticipate future trends, in historical research and historical methodology. Such knowledge, combined with an analysis of past patterns of research use in archival holdings, would permit the archivist to decide which records were likely to have research value as archives in the future. Lamb admitted that, in part, this required the archivist “to practise the difficult art of prophecy” to identify the research values in records, “to perceive them, or to suspect their existence. ...He must attempt to anticipate needs. ...Somehow or other he must find means to pass judgment on the probable value of source material that may relate to virtually any aspect or period of the history of the state or country with which his institution happens to be concerned.”¹⁷ Lamb’s very rhetoric for the methodology of making appraisal decisions – “perceive,” “suspect,” “anticipate,” “somehow or other” – reflects what archival theorist Hans Booms has termed *Fingerspitzengefühl*, where one feels, in the tips of one’s fingers as it were, that something is intrinsically right, developing an intuitive understanding of what sources would be historical, based on this subtle empathy with historians and their research. Archivists would then target such sources/records for archival preservation.¹⁸

At the Public Archives of Canada, Lamb’s intuitive approach to appraisal gradually matured into a more systematic, codified appraisal methodology, which again, as with the life-cycle and records-centres strategies, borrowed from Schellenberg. Archivists in the Public Records Division at the Public Archives of Canada in the 1970s, for example, were explicitly schooled in Schellenberg’s method of use-anticipated appraisal. In the Division’s training manual for new archivists, the Division’s director, Jay Atherton, wrote the relevant procedural paper, wherein Schellenberg’s definitions, methodologies,

¹⁷ Lamb, “The Fine Art of Destruction”, p. 53; W. Kaye Lamb, “The Archivist and the Historian”, *American Historical Review* 68 (2) (January 1963): 392–393; and W. Kaye Lamb, “The Modern Archivist: Formally Trained or Self-Educated?”, *American Archivist* 31(2) (April 1968): 176–177. For more detail on Lamb’s views on appraisal, see again Cook, “An Archival Revolution: W. Kaye Lamb and the Transformation of the Archival Profession”, (forthcoming in *Archivaria* in 2006).

¹⁸ Hans Booms, “Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage: Issues in the Appraisal of Archival Sources”, trans. Hermina Joldersma and Richard Klumpenhower, *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987): 84–85. Booms’s work was originally published in 1972.

and even models were referenced throughout the text. Schellenberg's evidential, informational, and similar values were used to categorize the kinds of records that historians might want. Atherton concluded, true to the Lamb and Schellenberg tradition, that "the basic requirement for selecting sources ... is that the archivist must become fully informed about the history and times to which the holdings relate. This fact cannot be stressed too highly. He must know or learn from all the available sources who were the important people, organizations, events, and places. He must also, in the final analysis, keep in mind one general rule of thumb: 'If in doubt, *keep it!*'"¹⁹

So by the later 1980s, the theory and methods of appraisal of government records at the Public Archives of Canada had evolved from passive reception, space permitting, of surviving records, to active appraisal based on historical empathy and intuition, to Schellenbergian assignment of categories of values, all driven by a desire to have the best record for actual or anticipated historical research use.

Practical Reasons for Adopting a New Approach to Records Disposition

Records scheduling, therefore, as it had developed to the 1980s, served the interests of records managers in the first instance, not those of archivists. Issues of administrative efficiency, cost savings, and space management dominated the process, not identifying the best archival record. Disposition was primarily the business of destroying unnecessary records that departments no longer needed or that were taking significant space; appraisal was an incidental, reactive process attached to disposition, and would have had little presence at all save for the legislative power of the Dominion Archivist to control records destruction. Retention of records for long-term business or operational purposes (and related fiscal and legal accountabilities) was also confused with retention for archival and historical purposes. Moreover, the records centres were largely serving the storage needs of departments for records with relatively short retention periods, and not as the half-way houses for moving valuable records from departments to the archives. While more than 20,000 metres of valuable government records were transferred to the Public Archives after 1945 using this system, internal reports were increasingly critical that the best records were not being appraised, let alone scheduled and acquired as

¹⁹ Jay Atherton, "The Appraisal of Government Records", 1971, revised 1973, in "Public Records Division Familiarization Course February 1976", pp. 7-1 to 7-8 (copy in possession of the author), original emphasis.

archives. By the end of the 1980s, the senior National Archives manager in charge of the appraisal function, Eldon Frost, labelled this reactive life-cycle approach of records scheduling as the “weak link in the chain ... of archival acquisition.”²⁰

This growing weakness in traditional records scheduling as an operational framework for conducting appraisal became starkly apparent when pressure increased on the system from several directions. The first came after 1983, with the passage in law of the *Privacy Act*. Under its terms, Canadian citizens had a legislated right to know how long the government would keep personal information about them and what its ultimate disposition would be. To supply this required disposition notification to Canadians through published guides in every post office across the country, records managers launched an intensive records-scheduling campaign for all Personal Information Banks, that is, for every single individual series or collection of personal information case files maintained by the government. To no one’s surprise, there were many thousands of such series, containing hundreds of millions of individual files. Archivists were soon inundated with requests to do appraisal work in connection with these proposed records schedules. If the series were judged to have historical research value, should the files be acquired in whole, or in part, by using some qualitative selection or quantitative sampling procedure (neither of which methodologies had been investigated by the Public Archives for use at that time).

Requests for scheduling approvals under the *Privacy Act* regulations came rapidly from all over the country: for a series of 200 boxes of old immigration-entry case files in Halifax; for 600 boxes of immigration-settlement-assistance case files in Vancouver, for some current immigration-deportation series in Toronto, all without the archivist knowing what was on the headquarters’ policy records, registry files, microfilm, databases, or visual media. What was true of immigration was reflected in scores of other departments, and in thousands of regional and field offices. Moreover, policy coordination areas in departments that extracted and built longitudinal citizen profiles from databases from systems in, say, six feeder branches were not ready for appraisal at all, yet without that vital connection, the archivist struggled

²⁰ Eldon Frost, “A Weak Link in the Chain: Records Scheduling as a Source of Archival Appraisal”, *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–1992): 78–86. For a thorough analysis of the problem, based on major internal analysis and departmental studies, see Bryan Corbett and Eldon Frost, “The Acquisition of Federal Government Records: A Report on Records Management and Archival Practices”, *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983–1984): 201–232.

to appraise, in isolation, one small portion of the records in but one of those six feeder branches. In this environment, archivists were appraising, under intense pressure for rapid turnaround times, case files at the bottom of the administrative hierarchy without knowledgeable context about the related executive, policy, research, and operational files at the top, or of possible duplication of these paper case files in databases or micrographic applications, or in regional or local records in various media across the country. Moreover, relying on spotting long-term historical research trends, following Schellenberg, for these much more recent case-file records, with typically rather short retention periods, was almost impossible. As a result, archivists postponed the appraisal decision, designating many such series of case files "to be sampled or selected by a means yet to be determined." This placed scores of series in a kind of limbo, neither judged fully archival nor authorized for destruction, even if it did allow many other series to be destroyed. Finally, the unplanned nature of all this work created administrative chaos: in the worst case, one department had 22 draft records schedules at the National Archives awaiting approval for numerous series, the appraisal of which formed only part of one archivist's portfolio of responsibilities; it took four years for the last of the 22 to be processed.

This situation satisfied no one: poor service to Canadians in terms of the *Privacy Act* requirements; poor appraisal decisions based on fragments of records torn out of context from the entire related information universe for the government function involved; incomplete or postponed appraisal decisions from uncertainties over case-file selection and sampling methodologies; huge scheduling backlogs (and therefore unresolved space crises in departments and records centres) as the Archives could not meet these urgent demands; and rising complaints, not surprisingly, from the records management community that the Archives was failing its own assigned mandate to control records destruction in a timely way, thwarting thereby the efficient administration of the federal government. It was a graphic illustration that the business of records disposition seriously affects the business of government.

This already intense pressure on the scheduling system from the *Privacy Act* was significantly magnified with the passage of the *National Archives of Canada Act* in 1987. At a stroke, the number of government agencies now required by law to seek the authority of the National (formerly Dominion) Archivist before destroying any of their records doubled from 64 to 128, and really closer to 170 when various semi-autonomous boards, commissions, and tribunals were included. In replacing the outdated 1912 *Public Archives of Canada*

Act for controlling records destruction, the refreshed mandate in this new legislation significantly augmented the credibility and profile of the (now) National Archives of Canada, and so was very welcome. But it also increased the financial and administrative burden on a much larger number of government agencies for storing unscheduled records, especially if the records disposition system continued to be dysfunctional and records scheduling slow and inefficient. This, in turn, increased expectations that the National Archives would live up to its new mandate in a timely and efficient way.

In fact, the new *National Archives of Canada Act* formed, with the *Privacy Act* and its twin, the *Access to Information Act*, a triumvirate of integrated information policies for the Government of Canada. Together they combined the twin rights of accessibility to government information and protection of sensitive personal information with control of records destruction. Without control over records destruction, the other two rights were meaningless. These linkages were made explicit in the *Management of Government Information Holdings Policy* (MGIH) issued in 1989 by the Treasury Board of Canada, the central agency of government responsible for the overall management of the public service. For the Treasury Board, the value of records was less for supporting history and culture and more for facilitating efficient government, the rights of citizens, and accountability. This MGIH directive strongly reinforced the need for good recordkeeping practices across government, including disposition and archival transfer, encompassed the new computer-generated records of the automated office, and appointed a “senior official” in every department to be accountable for managing its information resources. Updating the Public Records Order of 1966 in light of the three new pieces of 1980s legislation, the MGIH Policy reflected the significantly changed environment of new recording technologies, new public expectations, and new government accountabilities.²¹ The National Archives of Canada was now recognized as a central player in the management of government information, not just as a cultural institution like the national museums or national art gallery. Yet with the new visibility came new responsibilities to approach all aspects of records management in less of an ad hoc fashion than in the past.

²¹ A retrospective review (and summary) of the policy is available on the Library and Archives Canada Web site: see <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/a-notre-sujet/010/012010-201-e.html> (consulted 1 October 2004). For a good overview, see Michael Nelson, “Federal Information Policy: An Introduction”, in *Government Information in Canada*, vol. 1, no. 3.1 (1995): available at <http://www.usask.ca/library/gic/v1n3/nelson/nelson.html>, (consulted 3 October 2004).

Over the course of the 1980s, all these factors outlined above made the traditional approach to records disposition seem more and more outdated and in need of substantial reform. One factor, however, burst upon the National Archives of Canada and suddenly made such reform very urgent. In the early 1980s, for a variety of factors, Canada decided to prosecute Nazi war criminals who had entered the country after 1945. Media was quickly galvanized, the issue became very politicised, and the federal government responded by appointing a Royal Commission of Inquiry to investigate the matter thoroughly.²² Immigration records were especially needed to track down possible Nazis living quietly in Canada, and to deport them for illegally entering the country. Post-war overseas-application case files on individual immigrants became a special focus of the Commission's intensive historical research. Most of these files had been destroyed, however, many very recently, apparently under questionable circumstances.

The government was outraged. The cabinet minister responsible for law enforcement publicly called the destruction "a culpable act" or, at best, "a monumental blunder." He stated that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and various judicial authorities for which he was responsible "were absolutely furious;" he specifically condemned the National Archives' records disposition process as "incomprehensible ... a file destruction policy working in thin air." The media smelled blood, and similarly attacked the Archives' disposition procedures. Canada's two major national newspapers used such headlines as "Missing Files Hinder Search for Nazi War Criminals," or "Nazi Inquiry Told Vital Files Were Destroyed 'Mysteriously.'" Another respected paper, under the banner, "The Vanishing Files," characterized the records scheduling process as "bizarre" and "ridiculous," the explanations offered by departmental records managers and Archives' staff a "lame excuse." The whole destruction process it termed a "scandalous act."

As a result of this national uproar, the Deschênes Commission held two extended sessions of special inquiries into records scheduling

²² For a recent extended analysis of this event, which includes sources for all the quotations that follow, see Terry Cook, "'A Monumental Blunder': The Destruction of Records on Nazi War Criminals in Canada", in Richard Cox and David Wallace, eds., *Archives and the Public Good: Accountability and Records in Modern Society* (Westport CT and London: Quorum Books, 2002), pp. 37–65. In Canada, a Royal Commission of Inquiry is the highest and most thorough form of public inquiry, and is reserved usually only for matters of grave national concern; in this case, the Honourable Jules Deschênes, former Chief Justice of the Quebec Superior Court, was appointed as Commissioner, and the inquiry was often referred to as the Deschênes Commission.

generally, records disposition specifically, and archival appraisal methodologies. Here archivists and records managers had to defend publicly, under sworn oath, a disposition system that they knew over the previous decade was breaking down and an appraisal approach that seemingly had produced the wrong result. No archives in any country could wish for a worse scenario: not only were its records disposition policies openly ridiculed by senior politicians of its sponsoring government and in the national media, and made subject to formal and very prominent judicial investigation, but the issue involved the most grievous case of human rights abuse in the history of the world. The National Archives of Canada and its disposition and appraisal processes stood accused of collusion in a state cover-up of the war criminals of the Holocaust, and of grievous incompetence in two of its core functions: records disposition and archival appraisal.

While the National Archives ultimately was not censured in the Deschênes Commission's 1987 final report, the experience had a major internal impact. My (then) colleague, Robert Hayward, who with me was one of the two key National Archives witnesses called to testify at length before the Commission, asserted that the experience "forced the [government archives] division to look carefully at what it was doing and sharpen its focus on how improvements could be made." We realized collectively that "our work was open to public examination and we were being held accountable for our actions, and that we should take whatever measures were needed to improve our selection and scheduling of government records. The Commission of Inquiry acted as a catalyst in that term's purest scientific sense" to reforming a records disposition system that had gradually broken down or become outdated.²³

Subsequent internal examination led the National Archives to resolve to document appraisal and disposition (at first, still using traditional Schellenbergian use-based appraisal approaches) more fully and transparently; to clarify the roles and especially the accountabilities of departments *versus* the Archives in terms of setting retention periods and the actual timing of records destruction (as opposed to the authority to do so); and to link formally in archival documentation the records schedule disposition authority with each new accession of incoming archival records as an audit trail of the destruction and appraisal processes. More fundamentally, the events surrounding the Deschênes Commission on Nazi War Criminals marked the beginning of a major effort to re-engineer the records disposition processes

²³ Robert J. Hayward, "'Working in Thin Air': Of Archives and the Deschênes Commission", *Archivaria* 26 (Summer 1988): 130–131.

at the National Archives, eventually leading to the new planned approach that is the operational framework of macroappraisal. The ad hoc approach of the past, with its piecemeal and poorly documented results, could withstand neither the public scrutiny nor required accountability of a new era.

Conceptual Factors for Adopting Macroappraisal as a Theory of Archival Appraisal

If the experience of the Deschênes Commission crystallized the practical failings of the records disposition and scheduling processes, it also fundamentally challenged the Schellenbergian basis for determining the appraisal value of records. A “keep-destroy” appraisal decision-making process based primarily on anticipating future research use is very difficult to defend when the records have already been destroyed, and yet a cabinet minister, the national police force, victim and human rights lobbying groups, departmental officials, and a Royal Commissioner all wanted to use them, under the spotlight of national media condemnation. As one lobbyist asserted forcefully at the time and later in a book, government “record retention must be tied to the administration of justice.... We need a policy ... that records be retained that could be useful for criminal cases and not just for historical cases.” He charged that an appraisal policy that failed to consider the citizen, and human rights, in documenting the state through official records was nothing less than colluding with the state in protecting the status quo, in this case the complacent cover-up for decades of Nazi war crimes in the interests of Cold War politics.²⁴

The accusation was credible, and very disturbing to me personally as a key participant in this actual records destruction and later its principal official defender before Deschênes. Were archivists in appraising records only to serve the legal and fiscal needs of their sponsors or the subject content interests of academic historical research? Were archivists acting ethically by striving, as traditionally, to be objective, neu-

²⁴ David Matas was an active Jewish participant before the Deschênes Royal Commission on Nazi War Criminals, with formal standing as Senior Counsel representing The League for Human Rights for B'nai B'rith Canada. His cited words come from *Winnipeg Free Press*, 4 December 1985; and David Matas and Susan Charendoff, *Justice Delayed: Nazi War Criminals in Canada* (Toronto: Summerhill Press, 1987), pp. 84–88, which pages focus on his criticism of the destruction of the overseas immigration application forms. See also, in response to the National Archives' published defence of its actions, his rebuttal letter to the editor, “Immigrant Files and Nazis”, *Globe and Mail*, 21 August 1986.

tral, value-free guardians or keepers of an inherited documentary heritage, or should they be reaching out to identify and then construct a broader archive as its active mediators and co-creators?

The experience with the Deschênes Commission shattered my faith in the Schellenbergian value-determination appraisal paradigm on which I had been raised as an archivist, and equally exposed the moral ambiguity of the archivist's passive, ad hoc approach to conducting appraisal. I looked anew at what we had been doing at the National Archives of Canada in following Schellenberg, and the flaws soon became evident. Aside from the crystal-ball impossibility of trying to predict the future, a difficulty that Kaye Lamb admitted decades earlier, the "value-through-use" approach to appraisal in mirroring or anticipating historical trends is fraught with conceptual difficulties: what about ever-changing trends in historiography that would render the resulting archival record a very fragmented patchwork, to say nothing of being skewered by lobbying by well-organized groups of users; what about a growing number of users of archives from a rich variety of non-historical disciplines (biologists, for example, or climatologists, or engineers, or nurses) for whom the archivist's historical training sheds little light; what about non-academic users (genealogists and railway buffs) and public policy users (such as Nazi hunters or Japanese-Canadian wartime-displacement-claims lawyers); what about archives as evidence for the protection of the rights of citizens (claims for past Aboriginal abuse or CIA forced-drug-testing victims); what about archives being able to reflect those marginalized citizens in society who do not use archives and whose needs thus would be excluded from any measurement of past use? As Booms brilliantly critiqued the Schellenbergian method – although he did not call it that, linking appraisal to historical trends and patterns of use amounts to little more than history-educated, archivally experienced archivists employing "subtle intuition" based on their "ability to empathize with historical events ... even if they are generally unwilling to admit it." The Deschênes Commission made it abundantly clear that appraisal based on empathy, intuition, and experience did not amount, in Booms' words, to "self-evident standards of value," to say the least. Such an approach was simply no longer ethically defensible in an era of greater accountability.²⁵

Aside from these conceptual problems with a "use-focused" approach to appraisal, there were serious methodological problems as well. How could archivists themselves measure patterns of past use (even assuming the archival institution documented this process well over many years) as a valid predictor of likely "value" when there is no level

²⁵ Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage", pp. 84–86.

playing-field on which such use occurs: some records being restricted from use by access provisions, physical frailty, or poor finding aids; and other records being very popular and heavily used in archival exhibitions and cited in many researchers' books, even diffused by microfilming and digitisation by archives, thus creating a self-perpetuating loop of more and more use? As well, as noted, the use-based timetable for conducting archival appraisal was de facto at the end of the operational "life cycle" of the record, which was often several decades after the first documents were created and placed on the files or in the boxes being appraised. This extended passage of time did allow some of Lamb's and Schellenberg's historical perspective to develop more clearly. But that luxury of time was no longer possible. Given the huge volumes of modern paper records and their much shorter retention periods to reduce massive storage costs, and the technological transience of their computerized counterparts, appraisal now had to occur before, at, or shortly after, the creation of the records, not some decades later.

Clearly, then, some different theoretical approach to determining appraisal values seemed to me essential to replace the Schellenbergian paradigm. And I was not alone in my misgivings. Certain archival thinkers reinforced my personal voyage of discovery. As early as 1975, American archivist Gerald Ham had asserted that the Schellenbergian approach had resulted in "a selection process [that was] so random, so fragmented, so uncoordinated, and even so often accidental ... [one that] too often reflected narrow research interests rather than *the broad spectrum of human experience*. If we cannot transcend these obstacles, then the archivist will remain at best nothing more than a weathervane moved by the changing winds of historiography."²⁶ In his influential 1981 article addressing the pressing need for an archival theory that moved beyond Schellenberg's pragmatic methodologies, Frank Burke focused on grounding archival concepts (which I now read to include appraisal concepts) within their broader society, within a sociological

²⁶ F. Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge", in Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walch, eds., *A Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory and Practice* (Washington: Society of American Archivists, 1984), pp. 328–329, emphasis added. Ham's article was originally published in 1975. Even at NARA, Schellenbergian concepts were subjected to harsh criticism for not being very susceptible even to changes in the historiographical weather, in particular being slow and then unimaginative to respond to the revolution in women's history and historiography, and what this should mean, following Schellenberg, for developing new appraisal criteria and obtaining different acquisition results. For an insider's analysis and critique, see Elizabeth Lockwood, "'Imponderable Matters': The Influence of New Trends in History on Appraisal at the National Archives", *American Archivist* 53 (Summer 1990): 405.

and historical understanding of recordkeeping, within human psychology about memory, and within new understandings of managerial and organizational cultures well beyond the Weberian hierarchies assumed by Schellenberg.²⁷ Two years later, Richard Berner, in surveying the history of American archival theory, asserted that he was deliberately excluding appraisal, since there was no “body of appraisal theory” worth including – even though the book was dedicated to no less than his “friend and teacher”, T.R. Schellenberg!²⁸ Helen Samuels in the mid-1980s wondered, with George Orwell, “who controls the past,” declaring that appraisal and selection needed to change for modern societies with their integrated institutions with multiple-internal and cross-functional relationships, and with their new information technologies; appraisal as a result should become more holistic in conception and strategy, thereby offering “the future not individual trees, but a forest.”²⁹ Hugh Taylor’s imaginative probing of archivy in these same years stressed its multi-media nature, and that too many appraisal decisions for institutional records resulted in an archive of bureaucrats talking to one another, rather than evidence of the “process and impact” of administration on those governed.³⁰ This insight dovetailed nicely with calls from inside and outside the archival profession that greater attention should be paid to appraising and acquiring case files in light of the needs of the “new social history” from the bottom up,³¹ which just added more fuel to the fire of the forced appraisals by the

²⁷ Frank Burke, “The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States”, *American Archivist* **44** (Winter 1981): 41–43. On the hierarchical and Weberian mindset, see Schellenberg’s discussion of evidential value (and accompanying chart) in *Modern Archives*, pp. 142–144.

²⁸ Richard C. Berner, *Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Analysis* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1983), pp. 6–7.

²⁹ Helen Willa Samuels, “Who Controls the Past”, in Randall C. Jimerson, ed., *American Archival Studies: Readings in Theory and Practice* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2000), 210 pp. Samuels’s article was originally published in 1986.

³⁰ Hugh Taylor, “The Discipline of History and the Education of the Archivist”, in Terry Cook and Gordon Dodds, eds., *Imagining Archives: Essays and Reflections by Hugh A. Taylor* (Lanham MA and Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2003), p. 59 for the quotation, and throughout many of the essays in this volume for the ideas. Taylor’s article was originally published in 1977.

³¹ The best statement is in Tom Nesmith, “Archives from the Bottom Up: Social History and Archival Scholarship”, *Archivaria* **14** (Summer 1982): 5–26, reprinted with corrections in Tom Nesmith, ed., *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1993). Two other important studies aimed at archivists are G.J. Parr, “Case Records as Sources for Social History”, *Archivaria* **4** (Summer 1977): 122–136; and Peter Gillis, “The Case File: Problems of Acquisition and Access from the Federal Perspective”, *Archivaria* **6** (Summer 1978): 32–39.

National Archives of thousands of Personal Information Banks as required by the *Privacy Act*.

In addition to these important archival straws in the wind, feminist theorists also spoke very strongly to me in these years; among much else, they levelled a powerful attack on archives as bastions of patriarchy, marginalising women's voices and experiences, overlooking "ordinary" life (often revealed through case files) by past archival emphases on national politics, war, and dead white men.³² Postmodern theory, especially then the work of Michel Foucault, complemented these feminist assertions; I now understood that records classification systems were far from being dispassionate entities, but rather reflections of institutional power by controlling information and its subjects (in both senses), all rooted in contextual social theory and work-place realities. Foucault's cultural theory reflected the new anthropology in perceiving that "social practices are historically specific and that each process must be approached through a process of thick description." That in turn raised for me the possible linkages between society and records, and between societal values and archival appraisal values, and the kind of research necessary to uncover them. In searching for "values" in records to preserve as archival holdings, I began to muse that archivists should try to explore more closely, through similar "thick" contextual research, the power-record and the citizen-state-record interconnections.³³

The challenge of machine-readable or electronic records also struck me as requiring a different theoretical (as well as strategic) focus for appraisal. At the end of 1986, the National Archives of Canada merged the two divisions responsible for paper-based and electronic records, and so the problem for me (and my paper-based managerial colleagues) passed from being a hypothetical archival issue to a concrete work challenge. Hugh Taylor perhaps best defined the conceptual transformation forced by these new recording media. He asserted that the very notion

³² This feminist impact on macroappraisal theory, with appropriate citations for its time, may be found in Terry Cook, "Mind Over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal", in Barbara L. Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh Taylor* (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1992), p. 43, pp. 63–64.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 43–44 for the influence of Foucault's writings, and Paul W. Kahn, *The Cultural Study of Law: Reconstructing Legal Scholarship* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 35. For an excellent analysis of the relevance of anthropological theory and methodology for the postmodern archive, see Elisabeth Kaplan, "Many Paths to Partial Truths": Archives, Anthropology, and the Power of Representation", *Archival Science* 2.3–4 (2002) (one of two special double thematic issues on "Archives, Record, and Power"): 209–220.

of an original, physical record is “increasingly elusive and could almost disappear. Electronic communication, especially in its interactive mode, can become a continuous discourse without trace, as both act and record occur simultaneously with little or no media delay or survival.” In such interactive and transient transactions, Taylor saw “a return to conceptual orality,” that is to say, a return to a state where words or documents gained meaning only insofar as they were “closely related to their context and to actions arising from that context.” As in the oral tradition, meaning (and thus archival “value”) for electronic records would “lay not in the records themselves, but [in] the transactions and customs to which they bore witness as ‘evidences.’”³⁴ This point about the value of the context surrounding the records was also powerfully reinforced by David Bearman’s prominent assertion of the “power of the principle of provenance,” and his influential advice to me in 1986, as I struggled with these issues after the Deschênes Commission and in light of electronic records: “the secret to appraising records is to put a bag over them, and focus on the context of their creation.” The essential kernel of Bearman’s thinking I later summarized, for its impact on my own conceptualising of macroappraisal:

Ignore the physical and concentrate on the conceptual: forget the recorded “products” and focus on the “process” of their creation and contemporary use. Understand the creation and authorship of records, their animating functions and activity, their transmission and system interconnections, ... and the importance or value of the resulting records will almost be self-evident. Suddenly, everything “crystallized” for me; I saw through the central contradiction of so much archival thinking based on the physical instead of conceptual legacies from the past. Because early archival theory arose from rules developed for physically arranging and rearranging old records in the stacks, the physical character of archives had achieved almost sacrosanct status in the profession. Given the immense volumes of modern paper records and the transient nature of their random-stored electronic counterparts, however,

³⁴ Hugh A. Taylor, “‘My Very Act and Deed’: Some Reflections on the Role of Textual Records in the Conduct of Affairs”, *American Archivist* 51 (Fall 1988): 468; Hugh A. Taylor, “Transformation in the Archives: Technological Adjustment or Paradigm Shift?”, *Archivaria* 25 (Winter 1987–1988): 24; Hugh A. Taylor, “The Collective Memory: Archives and Libraries As Heritage”, *Archivaria* 15 (Winter 1982–1983): 118; and Hugh A. Taylor, “Information Ecology and the Archives of the 1980s”, *Archivaria* 18 (Summer 1984): 25.

the profession would only survive in future by downplaying the physical and asserting the conceptual character of archives.³⁵

Bearman's extolling the power of the principle of provenance meshed happily with a Canadian-based "rediscovery of provenance" then occurring, based on the "history of the record" in Tom Nesmith's phrase, on moving from content-based "information" to context-centred "knowledge" in my own prescription, on accepting Hugh Taylor's assertion that "we need a new form of 'social historiography' to make clear how and why records were created; this should be *the* archival task...." Taylor asked rhetorically: "Do archivists see their work as essentially empirical, dealing with individual documents and series to be arranged, controlled, and retrieved as ends in themselves, or are we concerned with the recognition of forms and patterns of knowledge which may be the only way by which we will transcend the morass of information and data into which we will otherwise fall?"³⁶ Bearman's and Taylor's reflections offered a way out from the overwhelming burden of voluminous modern paper records and their more troublesome electronic equivalents: move from the subject content of records (Schellenberg's "informational values") to the patterns, trends, and ideas of the context of records (and thus to a renewed sense of provenance). I then characterised this movement as "Mind Over Matter."

Here, then, to summarise, were the intellectual roots of macroappraisal as a theory: the intellectual bankruptcy (and the impossibilities for practical application) of the Schellenbergian conceptual paradigm; appraisal results that against their animating theory were increasingly seen as fragmented, random, and impossible to defend under public scrutiny and heightened accountability; increasing concern that archivists

³⁵ Terry Cook, "The Impact of David Bearman on Modern Archival Thinking: An Essay of Personal Reflection and Critique", *Archives and Museum Informatics* 11(1) (1997): 20. See also David A. Bearman and Richard H. Lytle, "The Power of the Principle of Provenance", *Archivaria* 21 (Winter 1985–1986): 14–27.

³⁶ See, again, Nesmith, "Archives from the Bottom Up: Social History and Archival Scholarship", and especially his "Introduction: Archival Studies in English-Speaking Canada and the North American Rediscovery of Provenance", in Nesmith, *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance*, pp. 1–28; Terry Cook, "From Information to Knowledge: An Intellectual Paradigm for Archives", *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984–1985): 28–49; and, for the quotations, Taylor, "Transformation in the Archives", p. 24, original emphasis, and Hugh A. Taylor, "Towards the New Archivist: The Integrated Professional", 1988, first published in Cook and Dodds, eds., *Imagining Archives: Essays and Reflections by Hugh A. Taylor*, p. 154. Nesmith's book (*Canadian Archival Studies*) was designed, in part, to showcase the rich variety of this rediscovery of provenance, based on research into and analysis of the context of records and records creators, as was the continuing section, "Studies in Documents", in *Archivaria* that he formalized.

needed to change from being passive guardians of archives to become active shapers of the documentary heritage to reflect better in their holdings Ham's "broad spectrum of human experience"; a growing realisation that archives (and history) were agents of power and memory, of inclusion and exclusion, and appraisal theory needed to engage rather than deny the "postmodern" and "feminist" critique; and, finally, a heightened awareness that appraisal (indeed, all archival) work must embrace the conceptual as well as the practical, exploit the rediscovered power of provenance and deep context, comprehend thereby Hugh Taylor's holistic patterns of knowledge, if it were to flourish in a virtual world drowning in a sea of decontextualised information.

A new "societal" framework for thinking about appraisal "values" had begun to emerge from this potent mixture of the unease over older approaches and the appeal of new ideas. This societal perspective represented a major shift in the archival theoretical discourse that traditionally was centred on the state to one reflecting the broader society that the state serves. In this light, it was suggested that archives should be of the people, for the people, even by the people.³⁷ Archives should be more than creatures of the self-serving memories of the state or the changing needs of special clienteles, including the traditional one of academic historians. Rather, as Booms illuminated, "If there is indeed anything or anyone qualified to lend legitimacy to archival appraisal, it is society itself, and the public opinions it expresses – assuming, of course, that these are allowed to develop freely. The public and public opinion," Booms noted, "...sanctions public actions, essentially generates the socio-political process, and legitimises political authority. Therefore, should not public opinion also legitimise archival appraisal?" Booms's key insight was that society, not state administrators nor specialised users, should animate the core values of appraisal decision making.³⁸ His colleague, Siegfried Büttner, asserted that archivists could reflect society (and its values) through appraisal not by some comprehensive understanding of the specific "reality" of what society's values were and then searching for records to represent these values proportionately. Rather, archivists should focus on the mechanisms or loci in society where the citizen interacts with the state to produce the clearest evidence of societal dynamics and public issues, and thus of societal values, and which

³⁷ Abraham Lincoln's memorable phrase was given its archival twist by Eric Ketelaar, in his "Archives of the People, By the People, For the People", *South Africa Archives Journal* 34 (1992): 5–16.

³⁸ Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage", p. 104.

points of interaction would ipso facto also contain the best records for reflecting those values.³⁹

Booms warned that all appraisal theory (and appraisal work) would necessarily be socially conditioned and subjective, “rooted in the very essence of human existence: it is a condition that cannot be changed or removed, only confined.” This was true for all the major previous theories of establishing appraisal value, whether based on historical consciousness, experiential intuition, creator selection, bureaucratic structure, or historiographical trends. It remains true for societal-based approaches like macroappraisal. The solution is not to retreat from inevitable subjectivity into a Jenkinsonian illusion of impartiality, but rather to define appraisal theory and consequent methodology – and then carry out the actual work in adherence to these definitions – in defensible, accountable, and transparent ways.⁴⁰ Macroappraisal addressed that very challenge.

The Theory of Macroappraisal and the Planned Approach to Records Disposition, as Launched By the National Archives of Canada in 1991

At a theoretical level, macroappraisal in Canada in 1990–1991 needed to answer the fundamental question that Booms had posed: how does one document “society” through government records? How could macroappraisal conceptualize Büttner’s suggested mechanisms or loci in democratic governments where recorded evidence could be best captured about citizens, groups, and organizations – collectively, “society” – interacting with the state, both influencing it and influenced by it? The central theoretical tenet of macroappraisal is that the most sensitive part of those mechanisms, if appropriately researched and understood (i.e., analysed, or appraised) by archivists, will yield the clearest evidence of citizens, social dynamics, and public issues,

³⁹ Siegfried Büttner’s ideas have not been published in English, but a summary of them from an unpublished manuscript and his extensive comments at an international ICA experts’ meeting appear, with recognition for his influence on macroappraisal, in Cook, *The Archival Appraisal of Records Containing Personal Information: A RAMP study with guidelines*. The documentation of this citizen–state interaction through government records would be complemented with the appraisal and acquisition of personal papers of citizens, groups, and associations. Booms urges this public–private cooperation explicitly, even within the non-total-archives European context: “the sum of the activities of government offices does not equal the sum of historical-political life.” See his “Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage”, p. 101, also p. 107.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

and thus of “society.”⁴¹ The archivist then arranges to acquire the records in the most succinct form and best medium to document those mechanisms or processes appraised as most significant. No one can know with any assurance what society’s values are, and then go looking for records that reflect them. Booms was right in centring appraisal theory on reflecting society’s values, but wrong in his methodology of trying to discern *directly* what those values are by, as he recommended, researching public opinion, media emphasis, scholarly writing, and so on. In contrast, macroappraisal lets those values speak for themselves, although of course through the filter of archival mediation and interpretation. Archivists in macroappraisal research the mechanisms by which societal values will become most clearly manifested, and then develop appraisal strategies and methodologies, and appropriate benchmarked processes, to identify the best evidence of those mechanisms, which thereby will reflect those societal values, albeit *indirectly*. This is possible by consciously documenting both the functionality of government and its individual programs that are themselves the creation of citizens in a democratic society; *and*, especially, by documenting the level of interaction of citizens with the functioning of the state: how citizens accept, reject, protest, appeal, change, modify, and influence those functional programs, and in turn are influenced by them. In the words of the Librarian and Archivist of Canada, Ian Wilson, this societal focus means that appraisal decisions document the processes of “governance” – the interaction of citizens with the state in civil society – rather than just “government” – the policies and principal actions of the state bureaucracy itself.⁴²

Returning to this societal focus that forms the conceptual or theoretical underpinning of macroappraisal, sociologists have posited that all societies to varying degrees reflect a three-way interplay of social structures, social functions, and citizens (individually or as members of various social groups). Macroappraisal correspondingly seeks to suggest

⁴¹ Of course, a similar theoretical conceptualization, and then strategy and methodology, would be necessary for private-sector and personal records, to round out the “total archives” story, and complement the citizen–state interaction found in government records, but that is well beyond the scope of this article. This complementarity has only occurred with mixed success at the National Archives of Canada, however, where the government and private archives sectors exist side by side, rather than integrated in appraisal perspectives; on the need for this, against which there have been only modest improvements in the following decade, see Cook, “Mind Over Matter”, pp. 65–66, note 29, and note 39 above.

⁴² Ian E. Wilson, “Reflections on *Archival Strategies*”, *American Archivist* **58** (Fall 1995): 414–428.

how such societal values may be determined in working reality by analysing the attributes, and points of special intersection (and sometimes conflict), between these three interrelated entities: (1) the creators of records (that is, structures, agencies, offices, bureaucrats); (2) socio-historical processes (that is, functions, programs, activities, transactions – the services – which the state provides for citizens, and which citizens demand of government); and (3) the citizens, clients, customers, or groups upon whom these functions and structures impinge, and whom/which in turn influence both, directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly. Macroappraisal requires archivists to research the nature of these agents and acts, and especially the interconnections and interrelationships between them, and then to assign greater importance, or “value,” to certain functional-structural factors and sites and interactions as compared to others. Macroappraisal is thus a provenance-based approach to appraisal, where the social context of the record’s creation and contemporary use (not its anticipated research use) establishes its relative value.

To this initial macroappraisal model, Richard Brown, my National Archives colleague (and successor in managing the macroappraisal program), brought the functional-structural insights of British sociologist Anthony Giddens’s structuration theory, which posits that civil society is constituted across space and time through an interactive integration and then routinization of functions (including actions, motivations, power, memory) and structures.⁴³ Social life, or society, and thus its values are more than random acts by citizens, yet less than large, impersonal historical forces. Rather, for Giddens, human agency and social structure interact continually, and the very repetition of the acts of individual agents (or citizens) legitimizes (by making routine, natural, and acceptable) the structure(s) within the social contract of democracy. Yet this status quo can be changed when citizens start to ignore or undermine the routines, or protest actively against them. And from British-American anthropologist, Mary Douglas, and her acclaimed study, *How Institutions Think* (1986), I learned that the routinized functions of organizations (and individuals and societies) do not just concern their formal mandates in health, transportation, or immigration, for example, but also deeper functions such as how the organization remembers (and forgets), and that

⁴³ Perhaps Giddens’s best known work is *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), setting out the key factors important to understanding how society operates as a living dynamism. See Richard Brown, “Records Acquisition Strategy and Its Theoretical Foundation: The Case for a Concept of Archival Hermeneutics”, *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–1992): 34–56.

particular types of organizational cultures very much influence the nature of remembering that is encouraged or even permitted.⁴⁴

This macroappraisal theory of functional-structural and citizen-state interaction had next to be translated to the operational context of the Government of Canada.⁴⁵ The theoretical model first articulated at the National Archives of Canada posited that the formal functions of government are articulated in the form of laws, regulations, and general policy directions. These are sanctioned by democratic societies through their parliamentary representatives, and reinforced continually by public opinion polls and media intervention. In this way, these government institutions are a mirror of societal trends, activities, needs, ideas, and wishes, of the things and concepts and services, that society “values,” of what it wants to be part of its public life.

These values and wishes as defined in law, regulation, and policies are usually manifested first (and defined legally and budgeted for financially) through large groupings of macro-functions, such as (for a national government) economic development functions, natural resource development functions, defence and foreign relations functions, cultural and heritage functions, and so on. Various parts of these large macro-functions are then assigned, usually by a cabinet or privy council office, or some very senior central agency that directs the operation of the entire government bureaucracy, to various government structures, usually in the first level to large departments, and then to smaller entities often (but not always) reporting through these large departments. For these assigned functions, the institutions involved next articulate various sub-functions, which are allocated to different administrative sub-structures or offices within the institution, each with a primary mandate to perform or implement or manage such a function, or part of a function, or perhaps parts of several functions. These functional Offices of Primary Interest, as Richard Brown later called them for Canada, in turn create various programs and activities, both continuing and one-time only, in order to carry out their functional mandates, which in turn lead to specific actions and individual transactions to deliver services to citizens.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Mary Douglas, *How Organizations Think* (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986), especially chapters 6–8.

⁴⁵ The arguments in the next few paragraphs of this theoretical section follow closely my statements in Cook, “Macro-appraisal and Functional Analysis: Documenting Governance Rather Than Government”, *op cit*.

⁴⁶ See especially the analysis in Richard Brown, “Macro-Appraisal Theory and the Context of the Public Records Creator”, *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995): 121–172, which is a fine overview of the theory and implementation of macroappraisal a half decade after its initial conception and government-wide launching.

For the efficient operation or delivery of these transactions, and all related policy and operational processes, information or recordkeeping systems are created and maintained.

But the theoretical model does not end there, or it might fairly be seen as merely a modernized version of Schellenberg's evidential values for documenting government institutions. In following Giddens and Douglas, macroappraisal theory also gives great weight to the individuals, clients, groups, companies, and associations – collectively, the “citizen” – who interacts with these functions and structures, programs and activities. Depending on the latitude and flexibility allowed for this interaction by the particular organizational culture involved with a specific activity, the citizen in turn directly shapes, challenges, and modifies these programs in varying degrees, thus offering again a powerful reflection of societal values through this direct interactive functionality. In Giddens's terms, the citizen challenges and eventually changes the natural or normalized “routines” of society. Of all these functional steps and processes, the record itself is the final evidence within information systems of these acts and transactions, and of these citizen/societal interactions with the state. As will be seen, for this reason, unlike previous appraisal theory, macroappraisal focuses significant appraisal attention on case-level documentation, in paper-based case files or computerized databases.

The above (and simplified) functional decomposition means that the contextual milieu in which records are created is determined by all these factors: macro-functions, functions, sub-functions, structures (and Offices of Primary Interest) and, in turn, their organizational cultures, programs, activities, and transactions, and especially client interactions, as well as by records-creating processes, recordkeeping systems, and different recording media and recording technologies. By focusing archival appraisal research on analysing and evaluating – that is, “appraising” – the importance of manageable numbers of these functions, programs, and activities, and citizen interactions, in the first instance, rather than on appraising billions of records, or tens of thousands of systems, series, and collections of records, the archivist is able to see the whole forest, rather than just a few trees. Seeing the whole context ultimately means that poorer and duplicate records are more easily identified and eliminated, and that the most succinct record in the best medium from the Office of Primary Interest for a particular function is more readily targeted (or “appraised”) for archival preservation. If assessing the value of records traditionally has been called “appraisal,” then assessing this larger functional universe is appropriately termed “macroappraisal.” And if the research by the archivist

into this functional-structural matrix is nuanced and thorough, the resulting records identified as archival will better reflect “societal values,” simply because macroappraisal looks at the processes (and for documentary evidence of them) whereby society forms (and continually re-forms) itself according to its own ever-changing values. In doing so, macroappraisal therefore blends a “top-down” functional decomposition from society’s broad wishes expressed through parliament in the structures of the state with a “bottom up” attentiveness to citizen’s corrective interaction with that state.

Moving from this theoretical model to implementable strategy, therefore, macroappraisal shifts the initial and major focus of appraisal from the record – and any future research values it may contain – to the functional context in which the record is created. Macroappraisal is thus centred on conceptual, virtual, or functional provenance. Using research knowledge gained by the archivist’s functional analysis, including an analysis of the interaction of function and structure, of organizational cultural dynamics, of recordkeeping systems, and of citizen/client involvement and interaction with the institution or function, the archivist now asks, in performing an appraisal, three large sets of questions: (1) what are the most important functions and activities of the creator to be documented (rather than what documentation should be kept?); (2) who – in articulating and implementing these key functions, programs, and transactions of the institution – would have had the primary responsibility to create a document, what type of document would it be, and with whom would that corporate person interact in either its creation or its later operational use?; and (3) how does the citizen interact with this functional universe, and how have citizens generally accepted and supported, or protested and challenged, the related programs and services? Only after these questions are answered through a macroappraisal research methodology can the archivist target realistically the actual records or series of records likely to have greatest potential archival value for the process of what, for distinction from macroappraisal, might be called “microappraisal” (that is, traditional appraisal applying such “criteria” as age, extent, uniqueness, time span, completeness, relatedness to other records, fragility, reliability, manipulability, etc.) at whatever greater level of detail they may warrant or resources may permit. Macroappraisal does not ignore microappraisal, or media-specific characteristics, but only puts them in a more logical place. Of course, well before the microappraisal stage, the answers (based on archivists’ research) to the three larger macro-level questions just mentioned means that large volumes of records can be destroyed

without further investigation at the micro-level, thus saving agencies and archives considerable time, space, work, and money in the appraisal and records disposition process. This strategic focus on the functional context is why macroappraisal asserts, therefore, that the last thing an archivist does in appraising records is to appraise records.

In considering this theoretical model and resulting research strategy just outlined, three misconceptions need to be clarified. It must be emphasized that saying that macroappraisal is a top-down, functions-based approach to appraisal rather than a records-based one is true as a metaphor, but in reality macroappraisal extends well beyond “functional appraisal.” First, macroappraisal focuses not just on function, but as seen on the three-way interaction of function, structure, and citizen, which combined reflect the functioning of the state within civil society, that is to say, its governance. That is its theoretical justification. Second, the methodology used to assess (or appraise) functions is a means to weigh the impact of a program (and thus the importance of its records) on society. The theoretical focus remains societal, that is, to appraise (or identify) those records providing evidence of the greatest impact of the government on society (and on government itself), not to provide evidence of government functions per se as an end in themselves (which would, again, just be updated Schellenberg). And third, because macroappraisal looks at the context above the records, and proceeds from macro-functions down to micro-transactions, it has been called a “top-down” approach, which is true from one perspective, but untrue from another, for it is also especially attentive to documenting the “bottom up” citizen perspective. Moreover, the “top-down” label can imply favouring the views of elite policy-makers at the expense of reactions of citizens at the “bottom,” and nothing could be further from the aims of macroappraisal.

Given these misinterpretations of the macroappraisal program, it is worth emphasizing that its principal focus (at least when the theory and program were designed and launched in their early years) was on civil governance and citizen–state interaction, not just on documenting the functions of government or its elites. Since in macroappraisal records gain “archival value” in so far as they reflect in the most succinct way the functional universe of their creator and its impact on and interaction with society, *and* society’s questioning and interaction in turn with government, then the macroappraisal archivist’s primary focus for appraisal research – and subsequent decision making – should be on those functional interactive processes that are at the

heart of concepts of governance, the nexus of Giddens's constitution (or construction) of civil society. The archivist therein is especially attentive to those "hot spots" where the citizen objects to, or suggests variations from, the official narrative of the state (the structures). It is at these points that the best documentary evidence of "society" will be found. The culmination of that evidence, if chosen on this basis by scores of archivists across time, will gradually reflect in archival holdings a comprehensive "image" of society, that is, the public hopes, aspirations, activities, and frustrations articulated by its citizens at those "hot spots" where the citizen-state interaction is most vigorous.

In the current working world of the automated office and ever-changing relational databases, with the still vast volumes of modern paper records, where keep-destroy decisions either cannot be made at all at the record level or only with the greatest difficulty and imprecision, the National Archives of Canada decided that macroappraisal was not only theoretical desirable, but also a practical necessity in light of such new work-place cultures. Not surprisingly, the orientation of macroappraisal was intentionally consistent with function- and work-process-based business-area analysis, computer system design, and government re-engineering methodologies becoming prevalent in the later 1980s, and brought to archivists' attention especially by David Bearman and Rick Barry.

Turning these theoretical and strategic macroappraisal insights into a practical program occurred in 1990 and 1991. Internal working groups decided, and the National Archivist formally approved as policy, that macroappraisal would be applied at three levels supported by different degrees of functional analysis: (1) across the entire Government of Canada, (2) for each government department or agency, and (3) within each major functional program within each department or agency.

In the third stage where actual appraisal and keep-destroy decisions take place, the strategic focus for macroappraisal, and thus for the related planned approach for records disposition, would now be *comprehensive*, which was defined, for a large government department, as an entire functional or program area (usually a branch or sector), including all headquarters, region, and field office levels, and all their many different series, systems, and collections of records, in all media, as the target for one macroappraisal research and records disposition project. For mid- and small-sized institutions, "comprehensive" ideally would mean that all the records of the institution at every level would be subject to one macroappraisal research process and decision making; in larger institutions, the approach would be incremental over a

period of years, with ten major functions being the subject of ten such large macroappraisal projects.⁴⁷

The first strategic step in the macroappraisal program was to deal with the entire Government of Canada as a functional whole. Following several months of research by a team of archivists, the “Government-Wide Plan for the Disposition of Records” was produced in 1990 (and updated several times since) to rank all the 170 agencies subject to the new *National Archives of Canada Act*.⁴⁸ The agencies were placed into four categories based on their functional importance. If macroappraisal was to proceed in a planned, logical manner, and avoid the past faults of the ad hoc records scheduling system, appraisal and disposition work with government agencies would need to be undertaken in priority order, rather than all at once. Moreover, each major functional program would need to be appraised comprehensively, not in small administrative fragments, and certainly not in response to the latest space crisis. The four categories in the “Government-Wide Plan” were set according to practical factors such as the amount of research and appraisal time needed to cope with the varying complexity of the different institutions and functions in each category; by the detail, number, and especially sequencing of disposition actions (records schedules, direct transfers of older records, media conversions, etc.) relative to the complexity of the institutions included in the category; by the capacity of the institution to do the work; and by the desired timing (year one, year two, etc.) for establishing and then implementing formal disposition plans with each of the agencies. More important, beyond these practical considerations, the categories were assigned by the relative functional importance of the department or agency, using such criteria as the character of the institution within the government as a whole (central policy agency, major and minor “line” operations, appeal or tribunal semi-judiciary, information collector, or common services); the breadth and diversity of its functions, now and over time and across space; its formal leadership within a cross-government functional umbrella and thus its importance for a cluster of inter-agency activities; the number and

⁴⁷ An analysis of the practical implementation of macroappraisal and the planned approach to records disposition, current only to 1993–1994, however, before major changes occurred, but still a useful fuller exposition of some of the issues mentioned here, is Bruce Wilson, “Systematic Appraisal of the Records of the Government of Canada at the National Archives of Canada”, *Archivaria* 38 (Fall 1994), pp. 218–231.

⁴⁸ The original version of the plan may be viewed on the Library and Archives Canada Web site, at http://www.collectionscanada.ca/06/0625/0625020305_e.html (consulted 11 November 2004).

complexity of formal acts of Parliament for which it is responsible; the seniority (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 regionalisation and number of field offices; the existence of major gaps in the archival holdings of the institution; and known or anticipated threats to the records through abandonment, privatisation, or devolution of the sponsoring function. Obviously, a significant part of this planning information was gained through active partnerships with records managers and operational staff in departments.

In ranking institutions by these and similar criteria, there were several key aims, beyond the necessary strategic prioritising of the actual work. The first was to focus on those institutions most central, senior, complex, or powerful in implementing the main functions or mandates or responsibilities of the government, thus reflecting once again the greatest needs of, and impacts on, "society." The second was to spot functional overlapping between institutions and thus avoid duplication of scheduling, appraisal, and acquisition. If addressing the records of one institution first (or more likely one large functional part of one institution) would allow the records of other institutions to be understood and later disposed of much more expeditiously, then the first institution was assigned a higher priority. While macroappraisal thus evidently started in the first couple of years with the largest and most complex institutions, it later proceeded by analysing common functions across smaller agencies and by evaluating central information institutions that collect data from many other agencies. Such common or centralized functions, if appraised early on, would considerably quicken the disposition process and sharpen the appraisal decisions for the series and systems of departments which feed these central information banks or which share common functions across government. And the third and, in many ways, most important aim of such prioritising is to find those "hot spots" where citizen and state clash, where "society" feels it is not having its needs met, where there will be the best recorded evidence of citizen values and civil governance.

After the above analysis has been completed at first the cross-government and then the cross-agency level, a similar third level of functional-structural analysis must be applied, with appropriately adapted criteria, to the internal functional programs (or branches) within each major agency in order to assess their relative importance. This occurred incrementally, as noted, essentially for strategic and political reasons. As no archivist could in one bite digest all the functions,

structures, and records of a major agency within a time frame consistent with delivering timely record disposition authorities to the Archives' clients, some rational partitioning of the whole was required. We in Canada were not initially aware of the PIVOT Project of the National Archives of The Netherlands, until mutual interaction around the 1992 ICA conference in Montreal. Nevertheless, the PIVOT approach of doing a very detailed functional analysis of the entire government, before any actual appraisal and disposition, was rejected in Canada as unworkable in our particular environment.⁴⁹ To maintain the Archives' credibility in launching a dynamic new program under the recent 1987 *National Archives of Canada Act*, especially in light of the poor performance of its previous records disposition regime during the 1980s, senior management at the National Archives decided that several years of additional delay to undertake a massive all-of-government functional research project was simply not politically acceptable. It had to deliver concrete and timely results to its client departments if it were to enjoy their cooperation in the new macroappraisal strategy. Against this important advantage of the incremental approach adopted in Canada, the offsetting disadvantage was that the first few of the ten major macroappraisal and records disposition research projects for one large department, for example, would need revision and integration as the full perspective later came into view. Equally, cross-institutional functions would also need to be revisited and multi-institutional macroappraisal and disposition projects could also only be launched later on, once sufficient research knowledge had been gained from doing a significant number of function-specific or institution-specific macroappraisal projects. Yet these disadvantages were acknowledged from the very start, and the macroappraisal program over its first decade did indeed evolve towards such functional consolidation and multi-institutional perspectives, thus ameliorating the initial disadvantage of incrementalism.

⁴⁹ For summaries in English, see R.C. Hol, "PIVOT's Appraisal of Modern Records: A 'Floody' Tale from the Dutch Experience", *South African Archives Journal* 38 (1996): 5–15; and R.C. Hols, and A.G. de Vries, "PIVOT Down Under: A Report", *Archives and Manuscripts* 26 (2) (May 1998): 78–101. PIVOT embraced detailed researching of government functionality as the basis of appraisal, but not the case-file-level interaction of citizens with the state. In this regard, therefore, PIVOT proceeds both on a different theoretical assumption and with an easier, less detailed research agenda, and for a much smaller government and population, than does macroappraisal in Canada. Nevertheless, PIVOT still took many years and more-than-expected resources to complete its government-wide functional research. See Agnes Jonker's article in this issue of *Archival Science*.

To implement macroappraisal at a practical level, after the above ranking of records creators, their mandated functions, and their constituent large functional programs into the four priority categories in the Government-Wide Plan, the National Archivist personally contacted and obtained, at the level of each agency's deputy minister (in Canada, the Chief Executive Officer) and MGIH Policy's Senior Official (the Chief Information Officer), formal, signed-off concurrence to proceed to plan macroappraisal and disposition projects according to these priorities. As seen, macroappraisal by its very nature requires a planned, systematic, prioritised approach to records disposition, rather than the passive, ad hoc, reactive scheduling of the past. The instrument for putting the records disposition process on this project-management basis was the Multi-Year Plan for the Disposition of Records (MYDP). Negotiated with *each* department and agency, the MYDP was formally signed by the same MGIH Senior Official for managing all records in the agency and by the Director responsible for Records Disposition at the National Archives. The MYDP not only listed the macroappraisal projects in priority order based on the above-cited factors, and any related record management improvement projects and anticipated down-sizings or devolutions, but against the current and next macroappraisal projects was also appended an implementation timetable setting forth the time-frames and resource commitments for both the agency and the Archives. The substantive prioritising and its concomitant functional understandings for the MYDP were supported by an Institutional Profile, a cumulative internal Archives document continually being updated by archivists reflecting their on-going functional-structural-citizen research and analysis for the agencies in their portfolio. The whole MYDP process was designed to end the unplanned approach of the past *and* to generate a sense of formal commitment and resource allocation for this process by departments and by the Archives. Departments could no longer complain about scheduling backlogs, for they were now a formal part of planning the priority and time-frame of all disposition actions.

After this cross-government and whole-of-agency macroappraisal analysis was done, the third – and some would say, real – macroappraisal begins, one for each major functional target as set forth in the MYDP. At this third level, there were four sequential stages. First, working with the Archives' information systems analysts, the departments and agencies prepared a Records Disposition Submission describing comprehensively the sub-functions and programs, and all their related recordkeeping systems and records, for the targeted MYDP function. This document was signed off by the same MGIH Senior Official, who thereby formally requested the destruction

authorization of the National Archivist under the terms of the *National Archives of Canada Act* for all the records described in the submission. Second, the archivist undertook the actual macroappraisal in five steps (to which I will return shortly) based on the received Submission and additional functional-structural-citizen research to flesh out what was already known and recorded in the Institutional Profile, and produced an Archival Appraisal Report. Thirdly, after identifying in the macroappraisal the records to be kept as archives, the archivist negotiated with departmental officials the Terms and Conditions for Transfer of those records having archival value. This involved transfer timetables for the records; conditions to be met regarding labelling, boxing, finding aids, data formats, media conversion, and so on; and any monitoring clauses to protect records in the interim. The fourth and final stage was the Records Disposition Authority signed by the National Archivist, a one-page document linking the previous three: he therein granted under law formal authorization to the department or agency to destroy all records described in and related to the (appended) Records Disposition Submission, when their operational and legal uses were finished (a timing, retention and accountability issue left firmly for the department to decide), providing that all records identified as having archival value in the macroappraisal report were transferred to, or protected for, the National Archives in strict accordance to the (also appended) Terms and Conditions.

Returning to the core macroappraisal by the archivist, the second of the four stages just mentioned, there are five main steps in the macroappraisal methodology:

1. Researching to decide the complexity and relative importance of various sub-functions, sub-sub functions, programs, and activities within the comprehensive functional target that is the object of the macroappraisal and records disposition project;
2. Researching to pinpoint the structural site(s) – the Office(s) of Primary Interest – where these most important functions, sub-functions, etc., take place;
3. Researching to understand the nature and most focused expressions of citizen's interaction with the function or program;
4. Forming a macroappraisal hypothesis of where the best records are, what they *globally and conceptually* should be, and which of the above significant functionalities of governance they are likely to document; and
5. Testing or confirming this hypothesis by appraising functionally select blocks or types of records within the functional program being

appraised, and by analysing the value of other records outside the program covered by the submission where duplication is suspected with the records within the actual program, or where registries or other information systems cross functional or structural boundaries.

Other steps would be added to this core process as the macroappraisal program evolved over the decade ahead, but leaving those aside for now, this step-by-step thought process is, in effect, the archival business process of doing an appraisal to arrive at the keep-destroy recommendation to be made to the National Archivist for his final approval. The Archival Appraisal Report serves as an accountability and audit trail for the appraisal process itself, in the same way that other business processes of government should be conducted in a transparent and accountable way.⁵⁰ In this manner, the appraisal process is *de facto* benchmarked and standards of performance may be developed. So too, as the archival research gradually culminates within the incremental approach, the Archival Appraisal Reports provide the base over time allowing for more multi-institutional initiatives.

This macro-level research in the five steps occurs before actually assessing the archival value of any records or series of records. Naturally, it will involve looking at certain types of records to discover this functional/structural information. It must be emphasized that researching in records and records-classification systems to discern contextual information about records-creator functionality and citizen-state interaction is not the same as looking at records for their potential research value. Consulting published and near-print sources are also part of this research; as are interviews with departmental staff, at senior policy and working operational levels; as is research into departmental functional sources or internal functional decompositions used in developing their operational planning frameworks, financial and human resource coding, business process re-engineering studies and projects, business-area analyses and computer system design reports, and work-flow analysis and charting. This is the archival hermeneutic, to which Richard Brown refers, of “reading records” to understand the nuances of organizational and recordkeeping cultures and their changes over time.⁵¹

⁵⁰ For more information on the increasingly standardized presentation of the macroappraisal research and decision-making processes, see Richard Brown (with Yvette Hackett), “Drafting an Appraisal Report for the Disposition of Government Records” (internal report, National Archives of Canada, 1999).

⁵¹ See, especially, Brown, “Macro-Appraisal Theory and the Context of the Public Records Creator”, pp. 121–172.

In addition to the research and analysis of relevant past appraisals, archivists had by late 1991 two core macroappraisal methodological documents, both approved by the National Archivist, to guide them in their work. The first was the “Appraisal Methodology” which specifies the detailed functional criteria to be used in the first four of the above steps for doing a macroappraisal, expanding the criteria already cited in this essay, and then the step-by-step process to be used in step five of testing the macroappraisal appraisal hypothesis against select groups and series of records, as well as setting forth the more traditional microappraisal criteria to be applied after the core five steps.⁵² The second guiding or framework document was a detailed methodology for sampling and selecting case files since, as asserted repeatedly above, the citizen’s input at the case level is of fundamental importance to macroappraisal in both theory and practice.⁵³ These formed part of multi-day training sessions developed and delivered to all information analysts and macroappraisal archivists.

After the macroappraisal is completed, and the archival records have been identified for acquisition, the archivist then considers any political, access, privacy, retention period, technical, migration, space, cost, preservation, and ethical factors that might turn a “keep” decision under macroappraisal into a “cannot acquire” decision in practical reality, at least for the present time. These practical conditions are negotiated with departments to get the best possible decision advantageous to both parties; it is the results of this negotiation that are embodied in the Terms and Conditions for the Transfer of Records, as noted before, or for their continued long-term retention by

⁵² See Terry Cook, “An Appraisal Methodology: Guidelines for Performing an Archival Appraisal” (internal report, National Archives of Canada, 1991). This methodology was updated (for reasons to be explained in the next section of this essay) by Cook in the year 2000, edited by National Archives’ colleagues, and appears in full, in two parts (A: theoretical, B: methodological), on the Library and Archives Canada Web site, at http://www.collectionscanada.ca/information-management/061101_e.html and http://www.collectionscanada.ca/information-management/061102_e.html (consulted 11 November 2004). Although the “Appraisal Methodology 2000” was significantly updated, it retains the core of the 1991 document, if now stated with more nuance and better examples. I have since further expanded these functional criteria for macroappraisal from 2000 in Cook, “Macro-appraisal and Functional Analysis”, pp. 5–18.

⁵³ See Terry Cook, “The Appraisal of Case Files: Sampling and Selection Guidelines for the Government Archives Division, National Archives of Canada” (internal report, National Archives of Canada, 1991). The essence of this report and its methodologies are summarized in Terry Cook, “‘Many are called but few are chosen’: Appraisal Guidelines for Sampling and Selecting Case Files”, *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991): 25–50.

the creating agency. However, such factors relate to acquisition, not appraisal per se, although a negative acquisition reality may force a rethinking of appraisal to get a second-best keep-destroy choice where acquisition is possible. This underlines that appraisal and acquisition are not a precise science, but rather embody the art of the possible.

The whole macroappraisal approach, as mentioned above in passing, required a completely new business approach for the records management activity of records disposition. To this end, the records disposition practices for the Government of Canada, as led by the National Archives, were placed by 1990–1991 on a planned, coordinated basis; the old ad hoc approach to accepting transfers by doing on-the-spot appraisals, usually in response to some departmental space crises, was formally ended. Transfers of unscheduled records post-dating the Public Records Order of 1966 would no longer be accepted by the National Archives; rather, departments would have to schedule their records in a planned, holistic way under the MYDP process before authority would be granted for their destruction or archival preservation. Improved listing and other controls of dormant records stored in federal records centres were required. Clarification of any destruction delegation from the personal purview of the National Archivist was determined. Follow-up procedures were anticipated to make sure that approved disposition schedules were being interpreted and implemented correctly. The setting of retention periods was also, except for records having archival value, formally clarified as being the entire responsibility and accountability of the creating department or agency, not the National Archives. Records disposition no longer included the Archives approving departments' retention periods. Departments determine the long-term business operational and legal needs of their own records; archivists determine long-term social memory requirements for a small percentage only of those same records that are appraised as having archival value. More generally, the National Archives supported – the word is “facilitate” in the *National Archives of Canada Act* – reliable and accountable systems and well-trained personnel in all departments to manage records better in all media. Whether government agencies themselves learned and internalised the lessons of the Deschênes Commission about accountability through records, and the concomitant importance of having good records management systems, including recordkeeping-system audits, and whether the National Archives did all it could to inform departments of their responsibilities and to promote sound recordkeeping practices, may remain very much in

doubt, as well as outside the scope of this essay, but at least now with macroappraisal the accountabilities of both parties were crystal clear.

From the practical, theoretical, and legislative ferment of the Canadian records world of the 1980s, therefore, the macroappraisal approach was articulated by the National Archives of Canada and launched across the government in 1990–1991. In records disposition and archival appraisal, macroappraisal was radically different – often the opposite – of practices from the 1980s and before. The focus of appraisal was now on functions, work-place processes, and communication patterns of record creators and contemporary users, not on the eventual recorded products emanating from those functions and processes. The focus was on identifying the 1% or 2% of the total record having the best archival value, not on disposing of the 100% of departmental holdings. It embraced multi-media records, rather than textual only; encompassed regional records, not just headquarters' registries; accepted continuum rather than life-cycle strategic positioning; and was active and planned rather than ad hoc and reactive in conception and application. It appraised records comprehensively within their broad functional context, rather than piecemeal office by office, region by region. It emphasized not the potential value of records for later research, but their actual value in reflecting the rich interaction of citizen and state, and in this regard was especially attentive to the marginalized and contrary as well as to the successful and mainstream. It clarified accountabilities for retention periods, information management standards, and information audits, and formally built alliances at several accountability points with the MGIH "Senior Officials." And macroappraisal changed the research agenda for archivists from trying to understand and anticipate historical research trends to exploring the significant context surrounding the creation, citizen–state interaction, and governance functionality of records, now, and across time and space, and gave archivists the concepts, practical criteria, and operational tools to do this new work, and the documentation standards to do it transparently and accountably.

Evolution of Macroappraisal as Theory and Practice, 1991–2000

No archival concept should be clung to as a universal principle, and especially so macroappraisal with its self-definitional claim to be dynamically responsive to the ever-evolving citizen–state interactions of Giddens's model. This final section, then, will sketch, in turn, the reception of macroappraisal as theory and program in the archival

community and at home at the National Archives of Canada; and the changes made in response to known weaknesses or opportunities to reinforce its strengths.

Macroappraisal as articulated by the National Archives of Canada has been welcomed by many external commentators and institutions. David Bearman, the profession's leading theorist by 1992 for electronic records archiving, characterized macroappraisal as an "archival earthquake," one with a "steel-framed theoretical structure ... grounded in the richest concept of evidential significance ever offered to North American archivists."⁵⁴ Steve Stuckey, Director of Records Evaluation and Disposal at the then-Australian Archives, called macroappraisal a "ground-breaking exposition ... with a solid and I might suggest unimpeachable view of how we might approach the daunting task of appraising the mountain of information."⁵⁵ From South Africa, Clive Kirkwood at the National Archives there concluded that, "theoretically and methodologically, macroappraisal provides a coherent and logical approach, which dispenses with the relative arbitrariness of 'potential use' as the criterion of archival value."⁵⁶ Helen Samuels, in her award-winning *Varsity Letters*, articulates a functional analysis methodology for appraising institutional records that she sees in full harmony with macroappraisal, agreeing explicitly with its central assumption that "the focus of appraisal should shift from the actual record to the conceptual context of its creation, from the physical to the intellectual, from matter to mind."⁵⁷ In building their impressive Minnesota Method for appraising the private business records of the entire state, which model combines the best elements of collection policy and documentation strategy with macroappraisal, Mark Greene and Todd Daniels-Howell emphasize the latter's priority-setting and functional analysis. Moreover, the functional appraisal criteria used to assess the value of various state businesses are remarkably similar to those employed by macroappraisal for a

⁵⁴ David Bearman, review of Cook, *Archival Appraisal of Records Containing Personal Information*, in *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992): 217–218.

⁵⁵ Steve Stuckey, review of Cook, *Archival Appraisal of Records Containing Personal Information*, in *Archives and Manuscripts* 20 (November 1992): 250–252.

⁵⁶ Clive Kirkwood, "The National Archives' Appraisal Programme", *South African Archives Journal* 40 (1998): 43–44.

⁵⁷ Helen Willa Samuels, *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (Metuchen NJ and London: Scarecrow Press, 1992), p. 3.

national government.⁵⁸ In theorizing the Australian continuum model, Frank Upward graciously acknowledges the inspiration of the virtual mind-over-matter assumptions and Anthony Giddens's social theory of the Canadian macroappraisal theorists. The functional analysis thinking of Canadian macroappraisal and Australian continuum theory, as well as much electronic records theory, is in turn reflected in the central DIRKS methodology of the Australian Records Management Standard AS 4390, and its international successor, ISO 15489.⁵⁹ The influence of macroappraisal has also lasted well beyond this initial reception: Richard Cox declares in his most recent book on appraisal that "archivists must adopt a mind-over-matter approach to analysing archival documentation."⁶⁰ With such positive regard, as well as much publicity and workshopping of the Canadian model, macroappraisal thinking has been adapted for use in several countries, or their internal states and provinces, in municipal governments, and in business corporations, and is in demand for seminars and institutes internationally. This is not to say that the Canadian model has been, or should be,

⁵⁸ Mark A. Greene and Todd J. Daniels-Howell, "Documentation with an Attitude: A Pragmatist's Guide to the Selection and Acquisition of Modern Business Records", in James M. O'Toole, ed., *The Records of American Business* (Chicago, Society of American Archivists, 1997), pp. 161–229, especially Figure 1 on 172 and Figure 2 on 181 and supporting text. Another prominent theorist of institutional functional analysis is Bruce Bruemmer; see his "Avoiding Accidents of Evidence: Functional Analysis in the Appraisal of Business Records", in O'Toole, *Records of American Business*, pp. 137–160. This work, like Samuels's book, underlines that in American usage "institutional functional analysis" and macroappraisal are often perceived synonymously. While there are many similarities and supportive methodologies, macroappraisal puts much more emphasis on the citizen or, in these business-centred applications, the customer or client.

⁵⁹ See Frank Upward, "Structuring the Records Continuum. Part One: Post-Custodial Principles and Properties", *Archives and Manuscripts* 24 (November 1996), pp. 268–285; and "Structuring the Records Continuum. Part Two: Structuration Theory and Recordkeeping", *Archives and Manuscripts* 25 (May 1997): 10–35. For a practical manifestation of function-based methodology and records disposition, within continuum thinking, see Catherine Robinson, "Records Control and Disposal Using Functional Analysis", *Archives and Manuscripts* 25 (November 1997): 288–303. I am not suggesting a direct cause-and-effect relationship between Australians being exposed to macroappraisal thinking in continuum theory or its functional decomposition methodology, and the later adoption of AS 4390, but macroappraisal was certainly in the local mix of ideas leading to it. For a sympathetic yet critical analysis of some aspects of Australian continuum thinking and appraisal, see Terry Cook, "Beyond the Screen: The Records Continuum and Archival Cultural Heritage", in Lucy Burrows, ed., *Beyond the Screen: Capturing Corporate and Social Memory* (Melbourne: Australian Society of Archivists, 2000), pp. 8–21.

⁶⁰ Richard Cox, *No Innocent Deposits: Forming Archives by Rethinking Appraisal* (Lanham MA and Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2004), p. 100.

adopted directly, but suggests merely that it has proven to be a fruitful approach for possible adaptation elsewhere to fit local circumstances, available resources, and indigenous archival and records management practices.⁶¹

It is fair to balance such praise with criticism, for the widespread currency of macroappraisal in the past decade does not mean that its theory or practice has escaped external criticism. Some of these views have helped to generate clarifications in operational practice or theoretical restatements of the macroappraisal program at the National Archives of Canada, whereas others are misreadings of macroappraisal's intent. The suggestion has been made that macroappraisal is really only a more nuanced version of Schellenberg's evidential values, with the archivist's research now an updated form of traditional administrative history.⁶² While much credit is due to Schellenberg for including an analysis of government functionality as part of his evidential values, macroappraisal differs fundamentally in that it views government structures as less rigidly Weberian in their hierarchies, and more fluidly influenced by informal work-place culture. Macroappraisal is also attentive to the hermeneutic reading of bureaucratic functionality and communication patterns, and, especially, to focusing much less on the elite 2–10% of policy makers at the top of Schellenberg's administrative pyramid and more on the case-level transactions of citizens at its bottom. Because macroappraisal seeks to "document" the citizen–state interaction, it has also been criticized for "selecting content" (the citizen as theme) rather than respecting

⁶¹ For a good example of such comparative analysis, see John Roberts, "One Size Fits All? The Portability of Macro-Appraisal by a Comparative Analysis of Canada, South Africa, and New Zealand", *Archivaria* 52 (Fall 2001): 47–68. That the Canadian model is not fully portable to different environments is not surprising nor recommended; the point here is that Roberts's essay, among others that could be cited, seriously engages macroappraisal and thus demonstrates its influence on international archival thinking.

⁶² See Elizabeth Diamond, "The Archivist as Forensic Scientist: Seeing Ourselves in a Different Way", *Archivaria* 38 (Fall 1994): 139–154. Within his own sympathetic reading of macroappraisal, Verne Harris initially saw parallels with Schellenberg's evidential values, in that both employ top-down functional analysis as their "core characteristic." As I have suggested above, that top-down functionality is a (partial) method and early metaphor for macroappraisal, not its core in theory, values, or overall method. See Verne Harris, "Exploratory Thoughts on Current State Archives Service Appraisal Policy and the Conceptual Foundations of Macro-Appraisal", *Archives News* [South Africa] 37 (February 1995), pp. 6–10, 19. For some American readers who have missed this point, I should add that, while I have criticized the applicability of Schellenberg's assumptions and methodologies to our era, I have also liberally praised him as *the* pioneer of modern appraisal thinking; see my "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898", pp. 26–29.

context; in reality, the central mantra of macroappraisal is an enriched and deeper documenting of the functional context of governance, a virtual or process-based provenance.⁶³ Similarly, macroappraisal has been misread as imposing the historian's agenda on archival work, as well as for interpreting records for their Schellenbergian informational values. While macroappraisal makes no apology for the archivist assuming in appraisal a necessarily subjective and mediating role based on research into record contexts, macroappraisal as launched in Canada was strongly and deliberately anti-Schellenbergian in its theoretical formulation.⁶⁴ Those Americans who still favour "use" as the determinant of appraisal value have articulated a neo-Schellenbergian pragmatism in light of macroappraisal, but such utilitarianism does not address, it seems to me, the many theoretical and practical difficulties outlined earlier in this essay against use-based value determination.⁶⁵ Some point out that while macroappraisal applies well to modern institutional records, it is not suitable for thematic or geography-based archival repositories; that point is fair enough, and macroappraisal claims no more. It is one set of concepts and tools in the archivist's kit; different and complementary tools would be needed for such thematic collecting, for personal or private archives, and for oral cultures, and perhaps for some aspects of visual media records.⁶⁶ Finally, some appraisal critics – as well as implicitly (from a quite different set of assumptions) some electronic records theorists – assert that a fundamental "value" of re-

⁶³ Angelika Menne-Haritz, "Appraisal or Documentation: Can We Appraise Archives by Selecting Content?", *American Archivist* 57 (Summer 1994), pp. 528–43.

⁶⁴ On this misunderstanding, see Terry Eastwood, "Nailing a Little Jelly to the Wall of Archival Studies", *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993): 232–252; and my response: Terry Cook, "'Another Brick in the Wall': Terry Eastwood's Masonry and Archival Walls, History, and Archival Appraisal", *Archivaria* 37 (Spring 1994): 96–103.

⁶⁵ The best example is Mark Greene, "'The Surest Proof': A Utilitarian Approach to Appraisal", *Archivaria* 45 (Spring 1998): 127–169, which reworks his Minnesota Method. While I have only praise for Greene's imaginative (and pragmatic) borrowing of the best from documentation strategy, macroappraisal, and functional analysis, his updated justification of the core Schellenbergian formulations is still not convincing: use of archives of course adds value to the archives that are so used, but that does not negate the methodological (and accountability) obstacles of how to predict such use long in advance of it occurring, nor Ham's charge of circular or weathervane-driven appraisal decision making, nor missing the marginalized off the edge of the use radar. A far less satisfactory and very reactive piece, riddled with inconsistencies and seemingly unaware of its author's own institution's and its digital medium's, critique of Schellenbergian appraisal, is Linda Henry, "Schellenberg in Cyberspace", *American Archivist* 61 (Fall 1998): 309–327.

⁶⁶ Greene and Daniels-Howell, "Documentation with an Attitude: A Pragmatist's Guide", p. 168.

cords is their authenticity as evidence. That fundamental tenet of archival theory (as opposed to appraisal theory) is certainly not disputed by macroappraisal. Quite the contrary. But the “value” of records being authentic and reliable as evidence applies to *all* records, for whatever purposes the creator makes the record, and has nothing to do with deciding which 1% or 2% or 5% of all those authentic records shall be appraised and acquired as archival memory.⁶⁷ Perhaps this essay will have helped to clarify some of these misunderstandings about macroappraisal.

Other critics have been more positive, endorsing, even celebrating, macroappraisal while suggesting that it should be extended theoretically in new directions. Victoria Lemieux broadens macroappraisal’s analysis of organizational culture by suggesting the importance of understanding how different managerial styles influence organizational thinking and recordkeeping practices, and that appropriate appraisal strategies need to be tailored for each such contextual environment.⁶⁸ Mark Greene and Todd Daniels-Howell accept macroappraisal’s priority setting based on function, activity, and societal impact, but boldly go a step further, indicating after their macroappraisal research not just the likely sites of valuable records, but what kinds of records should be acquired from each Minnesota business, depending into which macroappraisal priority category the institution fell.⁶⁹ Peter Botticelli observes that in networked organizations, especially short-term, informal, decentralized, virtual organizations linked by

⁶⁷ The classic statement of the dichotomy of archival-integrity versus appraisal-values theory is by Jenkinson, of course, but also one renewed in the past decade: see Luciana Duranti, “The Concept of Appraisal and Archival Theory”, *American Archivist* 57 (Spring 1994): 328–344; Heather MacNeil, “Archival Theory and Practice: Between Two Paradigms”, *Archivaria* 37 (Spring 1994): 6–20; and Reto Tschann, “A Comparison of Jenkinson and Schellenberg on Appraisal”, *American Archivist* 65 (Fall–Winter 2002): 176–195. Quite separate from the appraisal assumptions of this neo-Jenkinsonian voice from the University of British Columbia, perhaps the best example of the focus of electronic records theorists on evidence and authenticity, and appraisal, is Richard J. Cox, “The End of Collecting: Towards a New Purpose for Archival Appraisal”, *Archival Science* 2.3–4 (2002), pp. 287–309. For a suggested reconciliation of the critical importance of both archival theory and appraisal theory, each with its honoured place within the profession’s modern theory and practice, see Terry Cook, “Archives, Evidence, and Memory: Thoughts on a Divided Tradition”, *Archival Issues* 22 (1997): 177–182.

⁶⁸ Victoria Lemieux, “Applying Mintzberg’s Theories on Organizational Configuration to Archival Appraisal”, *Archivaria* 46 (Fall 1998): 32–85.

⁶⁹ Greene and Daniels-Howell, “Documentation with an Attitude: A Pragmatist’s Guide”, pp. 188–190. The Multi-Institutional Disposition Authorities of the National Archives of Canada have now followed this example, at least analogously, if not with quite the same sweeping finality.

computer technology, such as project teams and work groups, macro-appraisal must adjust its functional-structural matrix to embed the macroappraisal analysis (and acquisition targets) right into work processes, rather than relying on planned disposition which assumes a more stable operational environment.⁷⁰ Finally, Verne Harris, in welcoming the overall framework of macroappraisal for its use of critical theory to focus on the citizen, urges archivists to explore more fully the need to document the “other,” the marginalized, the victims, those who fall below most active citizen–state interactions, and to recognize even more the subjective engagement of the appraisal archivist as a shaper of future stories as well as an accountable scholar.⁷¹

At home at the National Archives of Canada, macroappraisal was well received. National Archivist Jean-Pierre Wallot, whose twelve years in office included six on each side of the 1991 launching of macro-appraisal, strongly endorsed the program. He took seriously his legislated role of authorizing records destruction, personally reading each of the extensive, research-filled Archival Appraisal Reports, and pronounced himself much more comfortable authorizing the destruction of records under the new regime than before.⁷² Veteran appraisal archivists in the program also expressed firm support for the new approach in dealing with complex, modern organizations and their multi-media, regionalized records.⁷³ Using macroappraisal, new values were found for records previously seen as routine when appraised now as part of a

⁷⁰ Peter Botticelli, “Records Appraisal in Network Organizations”, *Archivaria* 49 (Spring 2000): 161–191. In the interest of openness, I should note that Botticelli wrote the paper that became this article for my class at the University of Michigan’s School of Information.

⁷¹ Among many essays with these views, see Verne Harris, “Introductory Essay: Refiguring the Archive”, pp. 1–5, and “Postmodernism and Archival Appraisal – Seven Theses”, pp. 48–50, both in *South African Archives Journal* 40 (1998).

⁷² See his comments before Canadian, American, and international audiences, respectively, in Jean-Pierre Wallot, “Building a Living Memory for the History of Our Present: New Perspectives on Archival Appraisal”, *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* (new series), 2 (1991): 263–282; “Free Trade in Archival Ideas: The Canadian Perspective on North American Archival Development”, *American Archivist* 57 (Spring 1994): 380–399; and “Le macroévaluation aux Archives nationales du Canada”, Joannis Booms and Joannis Favier, eds., *Miscellanea in honorem Caroli Kecskeméti* (Brussels: Archives et Bibliothèques de Belgique), pp. 1559–1571.

⁷³ Some of the most complex multi-media macroappraisal projects are analysed, with examples, by Catherine Bailey, “From the Top Down: The Practice of Macro-Appraisal”, *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997): 89–128; and Brian P.N. Beaven, “Macro-Appraisal: From Theory to Practice”, *Archivaria* 48 (Fall 1998): pp. 154–198. The criticisms of macroappraisal voiced by these perceptive authors will be mentioned shortly.

larger function, such as protecting the environment.⁷⁴ Records of obvious value to every country's archives, such as the national census database, were shown to have far more nuance (editing citizen's returns and computing and adding missing values or returns, for example) than thought before, because under macroappraisal the census was not treated as a recorded product, but as a record-making process.⁷⁵ Cross-government functions relating to real estate, buildings, and property were now seen as a whole, and massive duplication of appraisal (and records management disposition) work thereby avoided.⁷⁶ Assessing the citizen's interaction within a very complex multi-staged process like immigration, from first application overseas to final granting of citizenship in Canada or deportation, with all the possible appeals and tribunals in numerous bureaucratic levels and the courts across the country, revealed the value of macroappraisal in focusing this work comprehensively on the function rather than the scattered series of records.⁷⁷ Sensitivity to records extracted or sampled from major databases to create policy analysis datasets or longitudinal files, with significant value as evidence of actual decision making, was also much facilitated by macroappraisal.⁷⁸ These results are only taken from the published findings by program staff; several more case studies are now in press, and both are supported by the many unpublished macroappraisal reports on file at the National Archives.

Of course these macroappraisal archivists so close to the work also identified significant issues that led, sometimes when combined with the external criticisms as well, to changes in macroappraisal as it evolved during the 1990s. The conclusions of macroappraisal were based on analysing function and work processes and citizen interactions; traditional records management classification systems were organized by name or subject, which left mid-level clerical staff in

⁷⁴ See Candace Loewen, "From Human Neglect to Planetary Survival: New Approaches to the Appraisal of Environmental Records", *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–1992): 87–103.

⁷⁵ Jean-Stéphane Piché and Sheila Powell, "Counting Archives In: The Appraisal of the 1991 Census of Canada", *Archivaria* 45 (Spring 1998): 27–43.

⁷⁶ Jean-Stéphane Piché, "Macro-Appraisal and Duplication of Information: Federal Real Property Management Records", *Archivaria* 39 (Spring 1995): 39–50.

⁷⁷ Sheila Powell, "Archival Reappraisal: The Immigration Case Files", *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–1992): 104–116; and Ellen Scheinberg, "Case File Theory: Does It Work in Practice?" *Archivaria* 38 (Fall 1994): 45–60.

⁷⁸ Dan Moore, "Too Many Records, Too Little Time, Too Few Resources: The Need for a Researched Based Planned Approach to the Acquisition of Government Records", *La mission de l'archiviste dans la société*, GIRA (groupe interdisciplinaire de recherche en archivistique) (Montreal: GIRA, 1994), pp. 161–180.

departments to interpret the keep-destroy decisions. The relatively few unusual, controversial, and precedent-setting case files best documenting citizen interactions with the state were not always easily identified within registry systems containing hundreds of thousands or millions of files by some sort of special colour coding, numerical or alphabetical designation, or physical segregation, even though good records management practice requires that they should be. In both cases, archivists therefore had to undertake extra efforts to draft “translation” instructions or implementation guidelines for the Terms and Conditions to link the archivist’s functional conclusions and the recordkeeping subject-based reality, at least until records management systems shifted (as increasingly they are, following new standards) from subject- to work-process-based classification systems. This criticism of macroappraisal is real, but represents a necessary transitional compromise, not a permanent disadvantage. In short, macroappraisal’s functional orientation, like business process re-engineering and computer system design, was certainly ahead of the wave, and thus has to reach backwards, in some cases for up to a generation, to incorporate records management approaches that have not yet modernized, so that the desired archival records could be identified and transferred.⁷⁹

One advantage of macroappraisal is that the appraisal decisions are tied to function and activity, rather than administrative structures; the former are much more stable within governments over time whereas the latter are subject to continual reorganization, mergers, and downsizing. The national government of Canada has always had the function admitting immigrants to the country, and programs for qualifying, assisting, and monitoring their integration into society or, where warranted, their deportation. But these functions have been exercised by a large number of changing branches or bureaus, with an even larger number of shifting parent departments or cabinet portfolios. With macroappraisal, despite all this structural movement, the functional appraisal conclusions stay much more stable, and only have to be adopted, rather than redone, by the new organization through renegotiating the Agreement for the Transfer of Archival Records of its predecessor, so that the disposition accountability is

⁷⁹ Encouraging such a transition in recordkeeping practices was certainly part of the macroappraisal program, although not its formal responsibility; for an example of such work by a program staff member, see Paul Sabourin, “Constructing a Function-Based Records Classification System: Business Activity Structure Classification System”, *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001): 137–154.

clearly reassigned. The same holds true for any cross-media conversions from paper to microform or digital formats.

After completing their research and analysis using the macroappraisal criteria and methodology, some archivists felt that limiting their archival designations only to records in the Offices of Primary Interest was unduly restrictive. Macroappraisal was perhaps initially too rigidly adhering to its theoretical base. This, too, was a valid point. It was agreed, therefore, in the new Appraisal Methodology in 2000,⁸⁰ that *after* the formal macroappraisal methodology was completed and its archival records identified, archivists would be permitted to identify, in a supplementary way, any additional records, *all very narrowly defined*, that may have symbolic, aesthetic, intrinsic, or informational value, or which the Government of Canada is required by law to retain over the long term. Informational value, in this sense, is not driven primarily by Schellenberg's anticipated research use, but by discovery of a unique body of records having nation-level significance (such as a biographical series on Canada's Olympic athletes) where the information is not available in coherent form elsewhere. These designations are easier to make, of course, against the broad-universe comprehensive research and coverage of the macroappraisal methodology.

The macroappraisal program certainly incorporated electronic records in its multi-media approach. It soon became clear that there was a need for a formal policy for leaving certain categories of such records in the long-term care of institutions, but under the monitoring control of the National Archives. The electronic recordkeeping systems (or parts of them) in these cases had been appraised as having archival value, and the data were not threatened with alteration or deletion. The usual candidates were large scientific and bibliographic systems with cumulative datasets, or complex active systems well cared for by extensive data-management operations far beyond what the Archives could afford, or by proprietary software that the Archives could not acquire. This "leave out" policy for electronic records was formally approved in 1993 by the National Archivist and became one of the macroappraisal tools.⁸¹

Accordingly, the Terms and Conditions for the Transfer of Archival Records itself, as a core foundational document of the macroappraisal

⁸⁰ See note 52 above for explanation and citation reference.

⁸¹ For the text of the actual policy that I wrote, and its monitoring terms and conditions, together with some background from professional literature debates, see Terry Cook, "Leaving Archival Electronic Records in Institutions: Policy and Monitoring Arrangements at the National Archives of Canada", *Archives and Museum Informatics* 9 (2) (1995): 141–149.

approach, underwent major change over the first decade, to recognize the need for much more specific language and standardized guidelines across all media and for different types of computer applications especially, and to accommodate all the internal changes just mentioned in the previous four paragraphs. Model, standardized terms based on best practices grew in length in a manual for archivists by some four times between 1993 and 1998. More of the actual acquisition-transfer work, including boxing records in archival containers and preparing finding aids, and formatting electronic records to Archives standards, were now formally negotiated through the Terms and Conditions process, with the result that much custodial work previously done by the Archives was off-loaded to transferring departments. Issues of privacy, access, transfer and formatting costs, loans of records, and legal accountability matters were increasingly included. The Records Disposition Authority, and its Agreement for the Transfer of Archival Records and the Terms and Conditions for the Transfer of Archival Records, thus acquired a greater legal status within departments over the first decade of the program. Rather than being signed off quickly by the MGIH Senior Official for information management in the client department, with whose employers it had been negotiated, the Terms and Conditions were often sent for formal approval to senior operational managers, lawyers, auditors, and access to information (FOI) and privacy coordinators. While this certainly extended the approval process, the National Archives heartily welcomed this widespread senior-level engagement with, and commitment to, the records disposition process.

As foreseen in the original Government-Wide Plan for the Disposition of Records, and mentioned above, the incremental function-by-function approach to macroappraisal would allow, as research knowledge was gained, for some culminating cross-government disposition authorities. First called “generic” appraisal authorities, examples from the mid-1990s included the records in ministers’ offices, records in senior officials’ offices, input hard-copy records in digital scanning applications, “transitory records,” and publicity and art posters used in the communication function. To these formal generic authorities applying to all government institutions subject to the *National Archives of Canada Act*, cross-government or “generic” appraisal criteria were also developed to help archivists assess the records more readily and consistently for “their” departments, including criteria for records of scientific research and intelligence gathering, in addition to the detailed sampling and selection criteria for case files already mentioned. These “generic” authorities were more eloquently renamed Multi-Institutional Disposition Authorities (MIDAs) by

1997, and were soon extended to cover, following intensive research and analysis, all the common administrative functions of government. The future direction of the program, when I left it in 1998, was intended to develop more MIDAs as appraisal research and functional knowledge about government increasingly culminated.

As for the substance of macroappraisal theory, and its core strategy and methodology, these too evolved, although the basic functional-societal values approach were not altered. But a revised Appraisal Methodology, as mentioned, was produced in 2000 which enunciated macroappraisal theory much more explicitly, added more details to the functional appraisal criteria, set broad documentation goals that the macroappraisal would serve, specified more clearly the Office of Primary Interest concept, and incorporated the changes just mentioned concerning legal, intrinsic, and limited informational value as supplemental appraisal methods.⁸² The Archival Appraisal Report, also as noted above, was standardized in 1999 with uniform sections by name and substance, for two reasons. The first was to serve as a more effective instrument of accountability by presenting a consistent face to and between the Archives' departmental clients. The second was to facilitate automating the reports into an information system that would culminate and cross-reference the incremental, on-going appraisal research.⁸³ And the overall Government-Wide Plan for the Disposition of Records was redone in 1994 (following a massive reorganization of the entire federal government in 1993 by a new prime minister) and again in 1997 (after three years of extensive downsizing under "Program Review" had fundamentally altered the shape and size of government). The ranking criteria in 1994 and 1997 were mainly those used in 1991, with a recognition that a thorough reworking of large macro-macro government-wide functions should shape the next version.⁸⁴ One disappointing dimension of the macroappraisal program was that managers and staff in the separate audio-and-visual media division(s) were slow to develop post-Schellenberg appraisal criteria or to engage fully in the macroappraisal process, despite some resource exchanges. While some good

⁸² See, again, note 52 above.

⁸³ See, again, note 50 above.

⁸⁴ Most of my reflections in these pages about the changes in the macroappraisal program, and plans for its suggested further evolution, come from a "recasting" or re-engineering initiative in December 1997, a staff retreat I designed to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of macroappraisal to that point, and chart new directions based on the collective learned experience: see Terry Cook, "A Report on Recasting the Records Appraisal and Disposition Programme at the National Archives of Canada" (internal report, National Archives of Canada, February 1998).

steps were made, clearly this is an issue still requiring more intellectual work on appraisal criteria and on media-blind program integration, and one that is hindered by media-specific organizational stovepipes within the National Archives.⁸⁵ Conversely, the integration under macroappraisal of the records of the paper and electronic mainstream of government administration was much more successful, as too was a new regional archival records program in ensuring that records outside Ottawa were integrated in all phases of the macroappraisal process.⁸⁶

The macroappraisal program developed three automated systems for doing its business during the 1990s that are essential for controlling a complex appraisal and planned disposition operation in any large modern archives. The first system (RDACS) contained the substance of the archivists' macroappraisal functional-structural research, hyperlinked in numerous ways. This system gradually eliminated the need for a separate Institutional Profile. This system not only contained a wealth of information for archivists doing later appraisals that had been codified from their predecessors' now-standardized appraisal reports, but also served as a pool of knowledge useful for archival description, specialized reference and outreach, for program accountability, and for transferring departments' own use through planned sharing with clients via the internet.⁸⁷ The second system (RDMIS) was a customized project management tool built in-house

⁸⁵ In addition to the MIDA already mentioned on the use of art posters in government communications, Jim Burant has incorporated some macroappraisal thinking for two visual media in his "Guidelines on Appraisal: Art and Photography" (internal report, National Archives of Canada, September 2002), which updates an earlier November 1997 version. For the possibilities of valuing visual media in terms of their functional context as much as their informational content, see Joan M. Schwartz (then of the National Archives of Canada), "'We make our tools and our tools make us': Lessons from Photographs for the Practice, Politics, and Poetics of Diplomacy", *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995): 40–74.

⁸⁶ For information on regional records, and their context within macroappraisal by one of its archivists, see Paulette Dozois, "Beyond Ottawa's Reach: The Federal Acquisition of Regional Government Records", *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–1992): 57–65. By the early 1990s, permanent regional archives offices had been established by the National Archives of Canada in Vancouver and Winnipeg, and the archivists in them worked (analogously to the media archivists in Ottawa) as part of a team headed by the lead macroappraisal archivist on any appraisal projects for government functions having regional dimensions. This all reflected mid-1980s policy changes that regional records would stay in the regions.

⁸⁷ For a fine analysis by one of the macroappraisal program's archivists on the enriched value of sharing of archivists' research-based contextual knowledge across archival functions from this kind of system, of which he was one of the key builders, see Jean-Stéphane Piché, "Doing What's Possible with What We've Got: Using the World Wide Web to Integrate Archival Functions", *American Archivist* 61 (Spring 1998): 106–123. See also Normand Fortier's article in this issue of *Archival Science*.

to control the several hundred active steps each year for all current Multi-Year Disposition Plans: by each phase of each project; by the lead archivist, information analysts, media archivists, managers, and numerous departmental officials; and by due date and resource expenditure sorted by project, phase, and person. It was the primary tool by which the director of the records disposition program was himself held accountable to and by the National Archivist. And the third system (STAR) codified all transfer details specified in the Terms and Conditions for all disposition authorities, old and on-going. Using follow-up dates from the Terms and Conditions, and bring-forward notices for archivists (and their managers) to contact departments, the system was intended to ensure that the designated records having archival value were actually transferred to the Archives according to the Agreement, or, if the records were being left under the custody of departments, that their storage and handling conditions were monitored by the Archives according to a regular cycle and pre-set specifications.

The amount of research time to do macroappraisal is always raised as a concern by senior archival managers in other jurisdictions when they are contemplating adapting macroappraisal. There is no definitive answer, of course, and the issue remains problematic within the new Library and Archives Canada. Archivists complain that there is never enough time to do the job as thoroughly as they would like, and they often felt uncomfortable with the level of risk management involved in doing a good but not perfect job. Conversely, the hard reality is that resources are always limited, clients expect (and deserve) a regular flow of disposition authorities for their records, and the job is immensely complex. Moreover, archivists at the National Archives of Canada are also multi-functional; in addition to the macroappraisal work and all related acquisition activity with their client departments, they also do arrangement and description, and specialized reference and public programming, for their portfolio of departments. Thus archivists in my era of the 1990s spent only about one-third of their time on appraisal, disposition, and acquisition, and two-thirds on the other archival functions, as well as special assignments and personal leave. Using these resources, and allowing three to four months of full-time-equivalent time to research each macroappraisal project for a major function in a category-one (most complex) institution, and about half that time for smaller institutions, the program in each of its first seven years completed on average between

40 and 50 macroappraisal projects.⁸⁸ As noted, this research and appraisal analysis had positive spin-offs in providing essential knowledge for other archival functions, like description and reference.

There are three additional considerations regarding the controversial question of resources. In terms of what went before, there are no comparative data about how much time it would take to do a Schellenbergian value-through-use appraisal really well, that is, by immersing oneself in reading widely and deeply all relevant historical (and related) scholarship (which is now of course much more complex and voluminous), following closely historiographical debates and controversies, and tailoring one's appraisal and acquisition accordingly. If Schellenbergian archivists were held as accountable for their appraisal decision making at the same standard of research documentation, transparency, and accountability as they are under macroappraisal, rather than (as Booms accused) of falling back on intuition and experience, the resources required would be enormous, and the results still highly problematic. Second, and back to my opening supposition: if in appraisal one is co-creating the archive for the future, in effect making history by exercising power over memory and forgetting through the keeping and destroying of records, should not sufficient resources be shifted to make those goals accomplishable and defensible? It is best to leave the question as rhetorical! Finally, on resources and program management, a more negative experience from the National Archives needs to be recounted. Without a function-dedicated senior manager with control over fixed (and at least adequate) resources, the momentum of a macroappraisal and records disposition program, such as this essay has described, will be significantly jeopardized. That happened by the turn of the century: the program lost its sole dedicated executive-level manager, lost its direct access to the National Archivist, and stopped using the STAR system to ensure that acquisitions indeed flowed from appraisal authorities. These setbacks occurred when the macroappraisal program was merged into a larger multi-functional unit that siphoned off resources to serve other priorities and acquired a new set of senior managers above it. As a result, the number of authorities completed fell by two-thirds in the worst year from the previous years' average of 40 or more. Fortunately, the lesson seems clear that a firm business case needs to be made and supported for any such

⁸⁸ Because of the large scale of the macroappraisal research projects, some 40–45 were completed per year in the 1991–1998 period, as contrasted to some 400 or more of the much smaller, piecemeal, ad hoc disposition instruments issued under the old regime in the 1980s.

large strategic program, and macroappraisal is now being rejuvenated, from this temporary dip, with many new features.⁸⁹

The macroappraisal program was also challenged in the 1990s from unforeseen external factors, and thus faced the practical need to tailor the planned approach to records disposition to encompass new realities with client departments. Of all the government departments and agencies subject to Multi-Year Disposition Plans, some 60% cooperated well in meeting the program's goals, timetables, and projects; another 20% did so more slowly and with much remedial work required; and the final 20% did not engage in the process at all beyond lip service. The reasons for slowness or non-cooperation were sometimes mutually agreed upon: a new recordkeeping system merging several legacy ones meant sensibly delaying until this change was completed, a new information manager in a department or a major reorganization made deferring action wise in some cases, a lack of resources made it necessary in others. But sometimes conflicting internal priorities in agencies or ineffectual departmental records managers undermined the planned approach to disposition. Faced with this reality, the National Archivist personally made the strategic decision that we would work with those departments willing to work with us, and "park" the rest (with no authority granted, of course, for destruction of any of their unscheduled records); given the available resources, there was more than enough work to do with the 60% or 80% of cooperative agencies. This naturally has some negative impact on the "coverage" of the whole government by the macroappraisal process, but it was a reality that could not be avoided at the time.

Beyond such normal bureaucratic tensions in achieving cooperation in any records management program, another major unplanned event affected macroappraisal. In common with neo-conservative trends in other nations, Canada faced radical downsizings of all levels of government during the 1990s. Under "Program Review" from 1994 to 1998, the Government of Canada cut well over 20% of its employees and its operational programs, the latter by one of three means: complete abandonment; devolution of the function to the provinces or the private sector; or merger with other federal agencies to achieve hoped-for efficiencies. This affected the macroappraisal program in three ways. First, like almost everyone else, it lost some 20% of its own resources. Because of program efficiencies and the new internal information systems mentioned above, this did not initially lower production, but it certainly increased stress and motivated the need to recast or re-engineer the

⁸⁹ See other articles in this issue of *Archival Science*.

program to produce more effective disposition products requiring fewer resources, such as more cross-government MIDAs.⁹⁰ Second, not all areas of the government were downsized in equal proportion; our allies in the records management community suffered much deeper cuts, sometimes as high as 50%, and this obviously affected the capacity of departments to work as partners in the planned approach to records disposition. Third, for those programs merged with other departments, or abandoned, or devolved to other jurisdictions, the National Archives developed with the Treasury Board of Canada a set of cross-government Program Review guidelines for records disposition. For mergers, the Terms and Conditions covering functions and records of predecessor agencies only needed to be respected and renegotiated with the successor agency. But with devolution or abandonment, records for the federal period were required to be protected and only loaned to the new jurisdictions; if judged under macroappraisal then (or later) to have archival value, they had to be returned unaltered to the control of the National Archives of Canada when their operational use ends. Program Review did divert some 20% of the macroappraisal program's resources to cope with these emergencies (which necessitated resurrecting some of the "emergency" ad hoc characteristics of the old 1980s approaches), but that still left 80% of the resources available to carry on with the new planned approach to records disposition.⁹¹

To allow the much-downsized records management community to continue to engage in the planned approach to disposition, the Multi-Year Disposition Plan was transformed during the mid-1990s from a detailed planning tool with numerous precise action steps to become a broader statement of intended goals and schedules, covering the next 12–18 months, renegotiated annually, rather than a long-range document covering many macroappraisal projects over many years for a large department. Time was better spent doing the work rather than planning it! Similarly, the burden of preparing a very detailed Records Disposition Submission, describing all records in all media, was much lightened, and became instead a broader description of program functionalities, with signed intent to make any necessary recordkeeping

⁹⁰ On this result, see again Cook, "A Report on Recasting the Records Appraisal and Disposition Programme at the National Archives of Canada", op cit.

⁹¹ For all these details and more, see Terry Cook, "Downsizing Government and the Disposition of Records", with detailed desk procedures attached (internal report, National Archives of Canada, February 1996). For the program's policy when officials announced abandoning electronic recordkeeping systems, see Candace Loewen, "Appraising Records of Large Systems in Emergency Situations" (internal report, National Archives of Canada, June 1996).

system metadata available to the archivist on request when testing the macroappraisal hypothesis, rather than being supplied up front. Still, the nature of the Submission, and the role of archivists, analysts, and departmental officials in building it, was not satisfactory when I left the program, and was a priority target to be addressed in re-engineering the program. And despite major improvements witnessed in the evolution of the Terms and Conditions for Transferring or Monitoring Archival Records, as noted above, a better guideline for applying (or translating) the functional conclusions of macroappraisal to the realities of recordkeeping systems in departments was also identified as a requirement in any program re-engineering.

One thing not required of the macroappraisal program, however, or indeed any other appraisal regime, is to answer a question that is often put to it, including occasionally by a National Archivist or an Auditor General! How do you know we are getting the right records? Are the records truly the best representative documentation from out of the entire information universe? Such “coverage” questions are unanswerable, because the whole can never be known – no more so under macroappraisal than under Schellenberg or Jenkinson. Archivists should stop beating themselves up on this score. Appraisal is not a science, let alone a measurable one; not for nothing have two National Archivists of Canada referred to appraisal (and related destruction) as a “fine art.”⁹² What *can* be measured, and what archivists can be held accountable for, by managers, clients, auditors, sponsors, the public, and future generations, is four things. First, is the archivist’s value-determination appraisal theory logical, coherent, and inclusive of that portion of Ham’s “broad spectrum of human experience” found within the archival institution’s mandate? Second, is the theory so articulated likely to pinpoint in a defensible way the broadest and most succinct range of records consistent with those available resources? Third, are the articulated appraisal strategies, methodologies, and criteria internally logical and consistent with the theory? And finally, is there in place and robustly operational the appropriate and accountable infrastructure for doing the business of appraisal, consisting of desk procedures and policies, appraisal models and criteria for staff guidance, supporting information and recordkeeping systems, training, work products and files, and appraisal-

⁹² Lamb, “The Fine Art of Destruction”, and Ian Wilson (with the assistance of Richard Brown), “The Fine Art of Destruction Revisited”, *Archivaria* 49 (Spring 2000): 124–139.

acquisition follow-up? That much an appraisal regime can and must do; the rest is art and the passion of the appraisal archivist.⁹³

Thirty-three years ago, in 1972, Hans Booms challenged the archival profession to document society: actively, strategically, thoughtfully. With devastating effect, he showed that past appraisal theories left the archivist naked, an emperor with no clothes, selecting archives by intuition or apathy, privileging thereby powerful creators or influential users. Appraisal methodologies hung on such theoretical assumptions are undefendable, and thus unaccountable. Before Ham extolled documenting “the broad spectrum of human experience,” Booms argued that the goal of appraisal “can only be to document the totality of public life....” The inevitable subjectivity and significant impact of undertaking appraisal might well be intimidating, but setting out on such a “journey requires only that the traveller possess the insight and the will to draw the necessary conclusions and to act on them.”⁹⁴

Macroappraisal at the National Archives of Canada is one such journey by wilful travellers! Macroappraisal has now been successfully implemented there for over a decade, not perfectly, sometimes side-tracked, but continually being refreshed and updated, yet with its core theories and methodologies intact. It is not the only such appraisal journey possible for archivists, nor the only one articulated in archival literature, nor may it be entirely appropriate for all kinds of institutions or recording media or societal communication patterns. Yet such variations and our postmodern age do not justify, Verne Harris rightly observes, a relativist “anything goes” approach to appraisal, for three reasons. First, what stories are told, and how well they are told, matters, deeply, to society, now and in the future. Second, appraisal archivists are “scholars, not romancers, and as such they are bound to hang their narratives, their stories, around the analytical framework established by policies, programs, theories and methodologies.” Finally, such an appraisal “framework is indispensable to any exercise of accountability.”⁹⁵

Macroappraisal offers such a framework. Perhaps its fundamental aim, then, and its subsequent theory, strategy, methodology, and work processes, may inspire other archivists faced with documenting the broad spectrum of human experience, in so far as it is reflected in

⁹³ On this passion, even the feverish “ecstasy of memory”, see the evocative assertions by Harris, in “Introductory Essay: Refiguring the Archive”, and “Postmodernism and Archival Appraisal”, *op cit*.

⁹⁴ Booms, “Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage”, pp. 106–107.

⁹⁵ Harris, “Postmodernism and Archival Appraisal”, p. 49.

the citizen–state interactions of our pluralistic societies. Perhaps, too, as an example of archival history, macroappraisal as a case study offers some broader lessons about the ever-evolving, always-mutating character of archival theory and practice across time and space. Perhaps as well, it shows that the mind of the archivist really does matter.

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