

# Macro-Appraisal: From Theory to Practice\*

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## **Introduction: Macro-Appraisal as a Candidate for a Standard of Archival Appraisal**

Standards are becoming a way of life at archives. Technology has transformed the archival reference function at larger institutions and is dictating the development of standards for an incipient electronic archival network.<sup>1</sup> Automation has led to the adoption of the *Rules for Archival Description (RAD)*. The combination of a formal descriptive standard with automated applications is transforming the nature of archival arrangement, description, and intellectual control. Appraisal and selection as well have been subject to major pressures and innovations in the last two decades, again stemming largely from the advent of technology.<sup>2</sup>

This article explores some implications of the new approaches to records appraisal from the perspective of a willing, though somewhat skeptical participant in these changes. While it necessarily addresses appraisal and macro-appraisal techniques at a theoretical level, the purpose is not primarily a theoretical discourse. It is rather an exploration of methodology, an analysis informed by recent, practical experience and some suggestive case studies. What follows is an examination of the extent to which one approach to appraisal, grounded on a firm theoretical foundation, may provide a valuable and workable framework for standardization of professional practice.

The argument consists of four related contentions. First, rightly understood, macro-appraisal, as defined and developed by Terry Cook, is broad enough to accommodate potential rival theories, sufficiently open to preserve best past practice, and sufficiently sound conceptually to permit archives to address the challenges to archival acquisition posed by now unavoidable technological change. Secondly, at its core, the macro-appraisal theory contains ambiguities that serve, ironically, to ensure a creative tension at the methodological level. These ambiguities emerge in resolving what some archival theorists may see as a basic conflict between, on the one hand, the traditional, records-centred focus

of traditional North American appraisal techniques and, on the other, the more recent theory-based realization that a focus instead on context of creation greatly rationalizes the process of identifying the necessary and sufficient archival record. This latter consideration is especially important in view of the growing mass of available material (both records and non-records) that characterizes our information age. Thirdly, at the same time the theory has developed an internal imperative for consistency that threatens the very intellectual ambiguities that, paradoxically, constitute its central strength as a basis for methodological standardization. And finally, we cannot afford to leave appraisal standards to the theorists: this is an important sub-text of the foregoing. We endanger our profession if we rely on theoretical debates to determine the scope and direction of the quest for professional standards for appraisal. The ordinary archival practitioner must engage actively in the intellectual debate if, as we enter the twenty-first century, we are to define a fully adequate appraisal methodology. Ultimately if the appraisal function is flawed then the record is flawed and if the record is flawed, the profession will never achieve its strategic ends – however much archivists may become masters of informatics or other sophisticated theoretical constructs such as post-modern philosophy.

To help direct the discussion, it is useful, however, to focus on one central question: *to what extent can macro-appraisal theory and methodology* – as articulated by archives scholars and practitioners over the last decade (and in particular, Terry Cook) – *provide the sound basis and necessary preconditions for development of standardized appraisal criteria and practice?* From a practitioner's perspective, this question breaks down into four sub-issues. What constraints are imposed by macro-appraisal theory? If macro-appraisal theory is to become an integral part of a standard, what becomes of other appraisal methodologies? Is the macro-appraisal approach a sufficiently clear and sound basis on which to build an entire methodological platform? More fundamentally, is the pursuit of an appraisal standard a double edged sword which, in addition to potential professional fulfillment, entails risks? It may well be. How the risks are minimized and the benefits maximized seems a worthwhile subject of enquiry.

International debate at the theoretical level has produced a plethora of competing models of appraisal, but also an increasing degree of convergence. Appraisal standards were a major theme of the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA) conference in Banff in 1991 and the International Congress on Archives in Montreal in 1992.<sup>3</sup> The seminal work of David Bearman and the Pittsburgh project has stimulated a far-ranging theoretical debate about the implications of information technology for appraisal and the consequent future positioning of the profession.<sup>4</sup> Begun in 1994, a University of British Columbia project to research the requirements necessary for ensuring authentic electronic records has evolved into the Canadian-led international Inter-PARES project. This initiative has explicitly included appraisal criteria and

standards as part of an integrated approach to determining requirements for long term preservation of electronic records as archival documents.<sup>5</sup> It is likely that, given the central positioning of the InterPARES project, the standards it sets will provide the high level criteria that will inform future debate about appraisal standards.

The evolution in the profession towards standardization of appraisal is also clear in trends evident in major archival institutions in Australia, Canada, the United States, and Holland. These institutions are adopting approaches to appraisal that focus on analysis of functional context. An International Organization for Standardization (ISO) initiative is underway to develop an international records management standard,<sup>6</sup> which includes provisions for “appraisal and disposition.” The Australian records management standard, which preceded and prompted the ISO project, incorporated an archival appraisal standard which is to be applied at all points throughout an integrated records *continuum*, from creation to archives.<sup>7</sup> While there have been assurances that the ISO exercise will not stray into the archival sphere, its inevitable result will be the initiation of processes within the profession for reconsidering and defining the meaning of archival appraisal criteria, acquisition strategy, and appraisal methodology.

Some kind of standardization is probable and may well be a positive advance – if the right approach is taken. The main question becomes, what kind of standard is best adopted and what should the relationship of macro-appraisal theory and methodology be to this formulation of, essentially, best practice? Professional freedom is a construct which survives only to the extent that people exercise it. Our profession’s liberal ideology notwithstanding, the choices are always constrained. Acknowledging this, much still remains at stake in defining our choices and understanding clearly what they are.

Open and constructive discussion on standardization is critical among the disparate constituencies in Canada. Either we can take control of the question on the level of a broad professional discourse or we may have the debate orchestrated by a few theorists and archival managers – persons who may unconsciously see justification for outdated “command and control” management in “top-down” macro-appraisal principles (to be explained later in greater detail). This article is an attempt to stake some ground for the working practitioners of archival appraisal before the theorists take us too far down the path with their inexorable analytical logic – often based, it may be said, on assumptions borrowed from other disciplines.

As Kent Haworth has proclaimed for many years, the value of standards is in fostering professional maturity, and not as an end in itself, but as a means to a common goal.<sup>8</sup> Macro-appraisal can become a vehicle for elevated archival standards world-wide. It can, indeed, also become an instrument for elevated professional discourse. It will do so if broadly enough defined to ensure that it becomes a standard for application of *independent research*, thereby empow-

ering the true practitioners of archival appraisal to exercise their craft. For that to happen, we must acknowledge the ambiguities of macro-appraisal theory up front, and learn that they – as much as the intellectual consistency claimed by the theory’s advocates – are part of the inner genius of macro-appraisal. In what follows, some may infer that the argument disputes whether macro-appraisal is, in fact, a coherent theory, but this would be missing the point; it is immaterial whether macro-appraisal, as a theory, is perfectly internally consistent. It has all the makings of an excellent practical standard and, as this, would do far greater service than it ever could serving as just one more among several competing theoretical approaches to appraisal. As Terry Eastwood has observed (even proved); “archives are utilitarian things.”<sup>9</sup> This is to say they are product-based, use-oriented, and predisposed to getting on with the job. In summary, this article advocates a particular interpretation of macro-appraisal, that of a broad, inclusive platform upon which archivists may proceed to develop a sound standard for archival appraisal.

### **I) Macro-Appraisal in Theory Versus Institutional Practice (?)**

So what is macro-appraisal? Essentially, macro-appraisal theory, like all the variants of functional analysis, shifts the focus in appraisal from the actual records (the product of creation) to their context of their creation (the process).<sup>10</sup> Rather than assigning orders of value it instead constructs informed evaluative narratives describing records-creating processes, assesses these processes’ comparative societal significance, and from this, makes judgments as to the relative importance of records-business relationships. It is emphatically a process-oriented focus on *records creators* in contrast to a traditional, product-oriented focus on *records*. As defined by the theorists, macro-appraisal begins initially as an *acquisition strategy* – first evaluating the overall scope, content, nature, and importance of not one, but a whole range of organizations and functions. It seeks thereby to define the appropriate boundaries for a more focused appraisal analysis. By establishing which functions are the most societally important, this process establishes where the records consequently having the greatest archival significance are likely to reside. It does so initially within organizations as a whole, then within their component parts. Only subsequently does the appraisal turn (when socially important functions have been identified) to the records of a particular creator, analyzing them in relation to the functional and structural context established by the societal activity and/or creator that they document. The subsequent hands-on appraisal of the records themselves – that is, “micro-appraisal” – is generally a necessary, but still *secondary* exercise. Micro-appraisal is designed primarily to validate and refine the hypotheses established earlier about the location of an organization’s most important functional activities and most significant records creators.

The methodology is nicely summarized by the late Bruce Wilson in his 1994 report on the new National Archives acquisition strategy:

The approach is structural and functional, analyzing the structure of each institution beginning with the agency as a whole and then proceeding systematically through its component parts – sectors and branches – examining their functions and interactions. Only near the end of the process are records themselves *likely* to be examined, and *then only in small samples*. The bulk of the records will be disposed of on the basis of their context – what is known of the functions and significance of the areas of the institution – rather than direct examination of the actual records.<sup>11</sup>

The approach's intellectual rigour does not make macro-appraisal a hard scientific theory. Indeed, its leading theorists all explicitly reject the simple empiricism associated with the scientific method in favour of a more subtle understanding of context and contextuality's organic nature.<sup>12</sup> Macro-appraisal is, first of all, not truly a scientific method because the application of macro-appraisal is not fully open to testing and measurement, and because secondly, it involves, like any appraisal, a judgement about value (in this case imputed functional value), rather than objective observation of physical properties. Of course macro-appraisal research, like any other research, involves analytical rigour and theoretical precept. Moreover, if it is to mean anything, it must be, and is recorded. Formal reporting (though assessments of relationships and processes, rather than truly objective observations) provides a mechanism for both administrative accountability and long term professional audit. That is, although not empirical science, macro-appraisal theory is, because of its rigour, a quantum leap over most past practice. It is a compelling model or method, even if it falls short of being a panacea for appraisal issues.

It will be immediately apparent that macro-appraisal has three clear advantages. Firstly, it liberates the archivist from the danger that *a priori* assumptions about record values may intrude when constructing acquisition or appraisal strategies. Secondly, it eliminates the risk of undue preoccupations or prejudices regarding future use or users. (As its advocates often point out, macro-appraisal transforms archivists from, in Gerald Ham's imagery, mere "weather vanes"<sup>13</sup> driven and directed by the latest historical fads, into proactive strategists and interpreters of complex meanings.) Finally, a macro-functional approach shifts appraisal from a passive focus on whatever records happen to turn up into a planned, provenance-based focus on records' creational context. In doing so, the theory both affirms and transforms provenance, the central principle of traditional archival thinking, now become a proactive tool for intellectual creativity and action.

Macro-appraisal and its intellectual antecedents have been developed and debated since the late 1980s, yet the theoretical foundations of the approach go back even further, at least a quarter of a century.<sup>14</sup> It is now actively prac-

tised by small cadres of archivists in various jurisdictions in the appraisal of public sector records creators. These curators are now heavily committed to use of electronic records within their mandated activities (thus creating a need to refine appraisal). Often associated with a pro-active, planned approach – appraisal theory, acquisition strategy, and appraisal methodology have been fused, largely under Terry Cook’s leadership, into an approach that is compelling from both an intellectual standpoint and the standpoint of program management.

Yet there is widespread lack of certainty as to whether the method also applies to personal papers and records of private institutions – even among its most partisan theoreticians. And there is an embarrassing lack of acknowledgment that something that purports to be a *theory* of appraisal cannot be a theory if it does not apply to private records creators. There is also widespread lack of consensus among both theorists and practitioners as to the range of analysis or criteria of value that are permissible. How many actually travel the full distance in establishing the “hermeneutic” narratives of creator context advocated by Richard Brown in his effort to make macro-appraisal a wholly coherent and consistent theory?<sup>15</sup> These issues raise fundamental questions left unanswered at the theoretical level: just how closely must practice conform to theory and, more importantly, who decides? For salaried professionals working in utilitarian operational environments (oriented to getting the job done) and often subject to the prerogatives of managers or governing boards, these are questions which are not passed over lightly. It is little wonder that many professionals remain skeptical of a theory that purports to incorporate into one inclusive package the comprehensive principles of an acquisition strategy, appraisal methodology, and the necessary and sufficient criteria of value.

Take the National Archives of Canada. The National Archives has assumed a leadership role in North America, its public sector acquisition program serving as a veritable laboratory of macro-appraisal methodology for over ten years. There are about ninety or so professional archivists who perform the appraisal and selection function. Roughly one third deal with private records creators, and another quarter work as media specialists. Over and above media specialists who deal with government records, there are about thirty-five archivists who appraise government records in textual format (paper, microform, and electronic). Probably no more than a dozen consistently practise macro-appraisal and functional analysis as defined in the literature and internally-produced procedural documents. Operational and environmental impediments often impose compromise on even the most willing participants. Many other archivists apply the methodology in good faith but with either seriously qualified acceptance of the theory or with modifications in actual application. In short, a minority of public records archivists have consciously and successfully implemented the approach in theoretically consistent fashion. Moreover, the

initial stages in developing the approach as an acquisition strategy in the early nineties (through government-wide plans) were characterized by high levels of expediency and pragmatism, which are publicly documented<sup>16</sup> and clearly justified by program results. Results aside for the moment, the pragmatic, incremental character of implementation alone raises a serious question of whether macro-appraisal theory is, by itself, a sound basis for standardization.

In program evaluations to date, the reality underlying practical experience has led to a peculiar duality – in which the success of the appraisal program is attributed, both internally and externally, to the extent to which implementation mirrors the theory and in which any qualifications regarding program effectiveness are attributed to inevitable compromises imposed by environmental factors or the failure to follow through with procedures that adequately reflect theoretical principles. This is convenient but not convincing. Given observation, experience, and program results, two things are obvious: first, that the macro-appraisal approach at the National Archives has been a success, and second, that what has made the approach work has *not* been theoretical purity. This apparent incongruity may embarrass theorists but it need not worry a profession looking for program-effective methodologies and practices.

Measured by that ultimate test of modern accounting – performance based on results – there is no doubt that the Government Records Program of the National Archives is securing a better archival record.<sup>17</sup> It is doing so despite whatever criteria a potential critic may wish to apply (whether a more dynamic conception of provenance, pertinence, and/or records use, or a better documentary mirror of societal function). And though operational efficiencies and cost savings are devilishly hard to determine, the National Archives is employing the same resources as in the past, or fewer, to achieve this result. Yet, in the ambiguities that emerge between theory and practice at the National Archives lie the germ and confirmation of this article's central thesis.

It would appear that it is not at all true that much of the National Archives' success with application of macro-appraisal has been achieved *despite* program ambiguities. Quite the contrary, in face of tremendous odds, the program has succeeded to a large extent precisely *because* of these very ambiguities, methodological qualifications, and compromises – through conscious experimentation (versus mere ad hocery), skeptical practitioners, and managerial tolerance of heterodox interpretations. Without these qualities the macro-appraisal-inspired acquisition strategy for government records would have been stillborn. It would have perished in face of the massive gulf that lies between theory and the realities of records disposition in the public sector (for example, the difficulties in acquiring information essential to appraisal).

In other words, macro-appraisal provides an excellent basis for standardizing appraisal criteria and methodology not because it is perfectly consistent with an understanding of provenance as “records-creating functional context” (though it largely is). Rather, in aspiring to standardized practice through a

research-based approach, it provides a sufficiently flexible basis on which to construct a standard open to diverse applications and criteria of value. It does so regardless of whether the practitioner adheres fully to the theoretical foundation. A standard is, after all, the result of a consensus arrived at in order to solve recurrent problems. It is a convention to which practitioners adhere for good practical reasons, not as a touchstone of faith or as an intellectual conviction.

Methodological ambiguity regarding appraisal criteria is at the creative core of the macro-appraisal theory; retention of that element is essential in transforming macro-appraisal into an effective vehicle of standardization. The successful transition of macro-appraisal into a standard involves reshaping the theory into a practice that is sufficiently flexible to accommodate the diversity of criteria properly present in micro-level appraisal of records – a depth and level of analysis necessary if archivists are to cope successfully in an age characterized by overabundance of digitally-produced records. That is where we should be going; but where are we now?

## II) The Macro-Myth of Inferred Value

Macro-appraisal theory partly rests on an implicit myth – that there is a direct relationship between the importance of a function and the value of the resulting records and that, accordingly, an unimportant function or records creator will produce no records worth the search. In pursuing that end, macro-appraisal theory is quite rightly preoccupied, in defining the context of creation, with a more sophisticated analysis of institutional processes. However, the theory also has other goals, proposing to use its focus on activities and functions to identify the relative social impacts possessed by respective functions and activities and thereby determine *the most probable sites for creation of archival records*. What emerges at the end of the analysis is a better understanding of the scope and relative influence of the institutions involved in a function, a better grasp of a particular organization's activities, a clearer understanding of which are the most important, and in theory, a better idea of where archival records are likely to reside. *But no direct link to the records is established*. The best short statement of the place of the records themselves within appraisal is perhaps Terry Cook's, that "conceptually or theoretically, as opposed to strategically, the new macro-appraisal approach rejects the traditional archival focus on the content of the records ... We therefore define 'archival value' by how succinctly and precisely that context [of creation] is or is not reflected in the related records."<sup>18</sup> Subsequent micro-appraisal of records content is limited to determining the most succinct and precise formulas for selecting those records which best fit the functionally determined priorities.

The argument sounds fine but we are still operating within a framework in which the value of records is merely inferred (not proved). Beneath the surface

of the logic, there is an unsubstantiated inference, demonstrably wrong from years of experience in archival appraisal. As Terry Eastwood put this, "Archives result from a functional process; however, knowing the features of that process does not tell us what to keep. Knowledge of that kind is relevant, even vital, to the exercise but not determinative of its outcome."<sup>19</sup> Archivists dealing with private institutions or individual creators will see the fallacy the clearest by virtue of the informational value inherent in their acquisitions. But most public sector appraisal archivists have seen an agency's "big functions" prove a relative bust, while record series of seemingly minor import, derived from a subordinate activity or organization, have turned out to be archival crown jewels or otherwise significant as supplementary evidence expressing distinctly different versions of reality from those available elsewhere in other records. Modern registry systems are full of surprises, especially if we look at them only as an afterthought.

Advocates of macro-appraisal may respond that any lack of correspondence between functional importance and archival value is probably a result of faulty functional analysis, or stems from *a priori* assumptions about as yet unresearched functional relationships (assumptions which will be exposed in due course at the micro-appraisal stage). More sophisticated and theoretically consistent applications of macro-appraisal are, of course, not solely interested in assigning relative value to *organizations*: they also seek to identify those functions that most express societal values within the functional/organizational spaces being investigated. These then become the target for documentation through hands-on records appraisal. And certainly, adept applications of functional analysis across or within institutions *can* clarify the relationships and processes from which records are created, and point out the *likely* location of archival targets.<sup>20</sup>

But how, from a methodological standpoint, are the mistakes to be corrected if errors are made through relying on this notion, this implicit myth of inferred value within macro-appraisal – especially where the micro-appraisal is conceived as a secondary, even optional stage?<sup>21</sup> Being a research-based methodology, the only real corrective is more time to research the links. That solution, however, has profound resource implications for any acquisition program. Resolving the problem with more work would give a whole new meaning to a process-oriented as opposed to product-oriented methodology.

In fact, macro-appraisal methodology is as labour-intensive in the long term as more traditional methods, and certainly more demanding intellectually. The sole claims to operational superiority are that macro-appraisal, properly applied, should result in the long run in a more succinct record that also better documents society. Yet a systematic macro-appraisal approach will save money at the back end in processing, storage, and intellectual control but not at the front end in acquisition programming. Implementation of a macro-appraisal approach may also create substantial start-up costs and result in more records

arriving into custody initially. This may mean higher processing and reference costs, perhaps even eliminating absolute savings. Compensating by investing more time in sharpening the focus of the appraisal amounts to throwing more resources at the problem, scarcely a theoretical or methodological solution.

The focus in macro-appraisal on context raises another issue. Even if there was, in fact, a direct relationship between function and archival value, the use of this link in appraisal would lack precision. It remains unclear whether an important function means all the records created by the function are archival, or that most are archival, or merely that the function for certain produces *some* archival records. If the latter is usually the case, a high level functional appraisal is, contrary to theory, not very close to determining much of anything without a further, detailed reading of the texts. Does a detailed functional analysis tell us what records provide a necessary and sufficient archival record or does it merely define a site where we should now concentrate our investigation?

There is a serious methodological gap between the appraisal of functions and the selection of archival records. Cook includes a direct look at the records as the second stage in macro-appraisal methodology. And in fact, micro-appraisal here is not only necessary, as the argument above suggests; it is critical in most cases and it is probably somewhat more important than macro-appraisal in actually identifying which records are archival. Macro-appraisal alone cannot hope to do more than ball-park the functional location of the most important records and contextualize the records creator and records-creating activity. To be sure, the valuations involved might also facilitate the creation of an estimate of how many records in bulk and cost an institution might be willing to take in a given case – a crude cost-benefit analysis which would inform the subsequent micro-appraisal. Micro-appraisal, however, is necessary in providing the specifics – and specificity is what appraisal is all about. The proof of the pudding comes in the detailed selection, which cannot be adequately determined by an analysis of activity. The results arising from appraisal must, in the end, be knowable and measurable.

To be sure, *in extreme instances*, macro-functional appraisal's implications for selection are clearer. When dealing with black and white cases, functional analysis provides obvious synergies evident to even the most hostile critic. For one, the entire nature of the function may be so important relative to volume of records that an archivist takes everything. Or the entire nature of the function may be so demonstrably trivial or marginal that the archivist takes nothing. Alternatively, the archivist may use the functional analysis to define the line within the business processes past which the probable diminishing returns do not warrant further research. In these cases, micro-appraisal might indeed be dispensable, or at most, summary in nature.

For example, how much time is an archivist going to spend determining the value of records originating in the tiny Privy Council Office (PCO)? We know

intuitively that the PCO activity documents the highest level of decision-making in the Government of Canada. Recourse to diplomatic analysis of a few select records may be all that is needed to make a more precise selection from what amounts, in the first place, to a highly focused set of records. An archivist with long experience and armed with traditional methodology may be all that is required to execute the long term disposition program.<sup>22</sup>

Looking at the other extreme, how many person-years of scarce experienced appraisal staff would an archival institution be willing to allot to appraise common financial records across a given jurisdiction when (as was the case at the National Archives) fifty years of appraisal across dozens of jurisdictions has failed to turn up any value except in exceptional circumstances? Once the nature of the function is identified, what more remains? Ironically, macro-appraisal may actually work best in identifying large blocks of records of *no* archival value rather than in defining what *is* archival. This proposition is not as perverse as it may first appear. In identifying important functions, functional appraisal is, on its own, normally an imprecise tool except, as we have seen earlier, in blocking out areas warranting both more research and full-blown application of new tools through micro-appraisal. But if, in so doing, it brings archival targets into better focus for more intensive scrutiny, the functional analysis is also by definition and default identifying those areas where the diminishing returns are going to be had. This property incorporates both a strength and a profound danger.

If an archivist must make hard choices based on limited resources, as we all are fated to do, there is a great temptation to follow this logic closely in developing an acquisition strategy (that is, in choosing which institutions and functions will ever get fully appraised). Ironically, unless the decision is based on a veritable tour de force in functional analysis, the effect is to provide for the disposal of at least some undoubtedly archival records and quite possibly to victimize somebody's documentary heritage. The main point is this: if an archival institution simply infers archival value from functional importance, the strategy is flawed because it remains impossible to choose among functions at the highest level – only, instead, among *records creators* performing a function (and that only tentatively where the functional/structural universe is complex). On the basis of long experience, an archivist will rarely be able to say with much certainty that this or that agency can simply be skipped – at least not without having looked at the records.

Consider, for example, the Official Languages Program of the federal government, which performs functions relating to the larger linguistic profile of Canadian society and is a critical element of national identity. How does an archivist choose among the Treasury Board, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, the Department of Canadian Heritage, Privy Council Office, Public Service Commission, or Parliament in deciding from where the record should be taken? The most that he or she can gain through macro-

appraisal is get a better idea of which entities will have the greatest impact in relation to the various sub-functions, wherein there may be a closer one-to-one relation between entity and function. To be sure, by better understanding the functional context, the archivist will be better able to isolate the archival record of each record creator and have a firmer grasp of overlap, duplication, and of those portions of programs that are most probably worth documenting.<sup>23</sup> But this still does not tell the archivist *which* creators are the source of the best records.

Again, macro-appraisal can be very effective in eliminating records. In the recent National Archives experience with common administrative records – whose value could be shown through functional analysis to be very low and which also generate up to thirty percent of all records created by the Government of Canada – macro-appraisal techniques have proved particularly effective.<sup>24</sup> So powerful was the logic, when applied to this case, that the entire project was reconfigured into creating a series of general authorities which authorized destruction of vast registries full of common administrative records. The few with value or potential were expediently excluded, as separately identified processes or sub-activities, from the general authorities. If appraisal can demonstrate at the functional level that the activity or records creators cannot possibly generate any archival value – even given the scope and complexity of these massive, interrelated functions and the intricacies of cross-institutional records creation and information flow – an archival institution may be able to minimize or even skip labour-intensive micro-appraisals and save millions of dollars. (The scale of operations must be sufficiently big and the functional appraisal conditioned by a clear appreciation and estimate of risk.)

However, in the case of the financial management records of the Government of Canada this seemingly radical application of functional analysis worked only because the functional analysis was *not* executed in a void but had years of disposition experience and documentation behind it. This permitted accumulated knowledge of the records to be read, indirectly, into the analysis of the function. Moreover, the archivist who executed the appraisal had previously reviewed the complete registries of the Treasury Board, the mandated “Office of Primary Interest” (to employ National Archives terminology) for financial management in the federal government. This was a laborious process which used a hybrid of traditional and functional analysis. Throwing out ten per cent or more of the total records of the Government of Canada without ever looking at one sounds radical, but the keep/destroy decision follows a de facto disposition tradition of fifty years in which there has not been a single protest from any potential client. The dependence, for success, of this massive project on past, usually highly traditional appraisal criteria and experience is indicative of the broader experience with introducing macro-appraisal into formal acquisition programs. Such a dependence of archival theory on a com-

bination of past best practice and incremental applications of functionalism has profound implications for how the macro-appraisal approach is best conceptualized and applied. What appears to be a paradigm shift at the level of theory, seems to be, at the application level, more in the nature of some kind of synthesis of conceptual insight and best past practice.

While the above cases show that macro-appraisal can be very effective at the extremes of exceptionally high or virtually nil functional value, the approach becomes much more problematic and the conclusions much less clear when addressing the middle ranges where activity has some undeniable societal significance but creates too large a body of records (relative to their functional value) simply to “keep it all.” Much more common than the experience of finding no value in a function at the macro-functional level is the experience of finding high value in at least some activity. Most archival appraisal occurs in this gray zone.

Does a function expressing significant societal value of some kind justify taking one to ten per cent of the records or one hundred per cent? Too often appraisal reports simply argue, on the basis of a very high level of functional generalization, that the agency does important work and that it therefore follows that the Archives should keep all or most of the records. A pattern of such conclusions might imply either superficial research, or projects that are too narrow to truly qualify as functional macro-appraisal in the first place. Yet in many cases such conclusions are in fact justified, the factor justifying these conclusions being the fact *that the archivist has concentrated much more on the various main records series than on the macro-appraisal analysis*. What is occurring too often is a traditional records-focused appraisal exercise which goes through the motions of doing something else. Macro-appraisal, however, cannot be a study in form; it must be a study in research and substance.

Add to the ambiguity of working in the gray zone, the complications of under-funding, inexperienced staff, or too frequent portfolio rotation and there is a very real danger of macro-appraisal becoming a rationale for superficial work, whose character escapes critical review. A sophisticated methodology that puts great credence on broad generalizations with minimal verification becomes a dangerous and misleading tool, where otherwise it becomes a powerful instrument for discerning value.

Now in case the reader misconstrues this critique as an exposé of fatal errors or as outright rejection of the method, let us be clear about the implications of what has here been identified as the implicit myth of inferred archival value – the notion that functional analyses of creational context can determine value. This stage of the argument has demonstrated, in the first place, that the method can only work on the basis of a substantial accumulation of knowledge, the prerequisite to the application of any research-based strategy to appraisal. This has profound professional and operational implications. A substantial base of knowledge is not built up on the basis of five year rotations, or

mastery of some basic theoretical precepts, or adherence to a procedural template based on theory. A career in operational archival research is different from a career in management (where rotation may be appropriate), a career in non-professional technical support (where procedural templates might work), or a career in academia (where theory might reign).

Furthermore, rather than simply reject macro-appraisal, this stage of the argument has sought to demonstrate that macro-appraisal *can* work effectively and accurately, but only when tied to an appraisal of actual records – a micro-appraisal that exploits whatever tools the circumstances require to root out that portion of the records with enduring value which can justifiably be preserved. Nobody can know the nature of those requirements on the basis of *a priori* criteria. As Jean-Stéphane Piché noted at the conclusion of his preliminary functional analysis of real property records in 1994, “this [macro-appraisal] hypothesis remains to be confirmed using methodologies that look at the actual records – to ensure that the nature of the records matches the conclusions of the macro-appraisal functional analysis.”<sup>25</sup> A more or less detailed hypothesis regarding inferred functional value is what we have at the end of the functional macro-appraisal stage of the methodology. Everything else then depends on the micro-appraisal, the hands-on appraisal of the records product.

This stage of the argument leads to a next logical question: What is the scope of the micro-appraisal stage within the macro-appraisal methodology? For some answers, we may now turn more directly to the theoretical musings of Terry Cook and Richard Brown, followed in the next section after that with some concrete examples of how experienced appraisal archivists have incorporated micro-appraisal into their macro-appraisal applications.

### **III) Ambiguity at the Theoretical level; What, In the End, Is the Micro-Appraisal?**

Macro-appraisal has merit as a “soft” appraisal standard, whose inner genius is the very complexity of analytical tools it is capable of encompassing. The ambiguity evident in practical implementation does not arise merely from the practical difficulty of applying a theory to a working environment; it arises from within the theory itself. On the whole, this is a strength: the fact that the ambiguity arises from the inherent complexity of the appraisal exercise supports a variety of appraisal tools being used to address this complexity.<sup>26</sup> Yet, as will be made clear in the argument, the drive for consistency within the theory creates a fundamental barrier to using macro-appraisal in creating a new methodological consensus. This is the basic argument of this article. Though in supporting this contention, that rigidity is misguided, it is not the intention to raise this essay to the level of a discourse on theoretical first principles. Still, it would not be possible to make a very convincing case, were the focus to remain the practice of macro-appraisal as evidenced by a few case studies. It

would be easy to dismiss the ambiguities of specific applications as deriving from mere errors or the inevitable compromises imposed by the real world of records disposition.

To develop the argument, we need go no further than the main commentaries of Terry Cook and Richard Brown on macro-appraisal. The primary questions under review are how these commentators conceptualize the second or micro-appraisal stage of the model, and what the implications of these formulas are for a standardized approach to appraisal. The rationale for recourse to Cook and Brown is obvious. Cook is the originator and the chief defender of the theoretical and methodological purity of the macro-appraisal approach while Brown, one of his most serious collaborators, has deliberately sought to refine its theoretical consistency. Cook has all the more credibility as a theorist for having fashioned the disposition program of the largest archival institution in Canada. The National Archives is a living laboratory translating his homebrew, “Canadian” variant on a larger theoretical discourse into a strategy, program, and methodology which seeks to define new criteria of archival value. In his recent formulation in “What is Past is Prologue,” he defines his conception of appraisal theory and practice succinctly as follows:

The focus must first be on the organic context itself of records-keeping, and thus on analyzing and appraising the importance of government functions, programmes, activities, and transactions – and citizen interactions with them – that cause records to be created. Then the appraisal conclusions so derived are tested before they are finalized by a selective hermeneutic “reading” of the actual record “texts” – but only after the macro-appraisal of functions and business processes has been completed.<sup>27</sup>

For Cook this approach is particularly relevant in an age when the record is becoming increasingly electronic: it permits archivists to cope with the basic reality that “physicality of the record has little importance compared to its multi-relational contexts of creation and contemporary use.”<sup>28</sup> Macro-appraisal also permits archivists to reposition themselves as intellectual and administrative leaders at the front end of the records continuum.<sup>29</sup> The logical extension of this argument, reflected in the theoretical treatments of Peter Scott, Margaret Hedstrom, and David Bearman,<sup>30</sup> is the possibility of adopting the full blown post-custodial model – the concept of a reinvented virtual archives. In this archives, as Cook says, the archivist exercises his or her traditional, provenance-steeped protective role of “comprehending and elucidating contextual linkages” through remote control management of the “‘recordness’ or evidence in the organization(s)’ computerized information systems.”<sup>31</sup> For Cook, the shift in focus amounts to a crucial paradigm shift.

To respond to the challenges, provenance should change from being seen as the [static] notion of linking a record directly to its single office of origin in a hierarchical struc-

ture, to becoming instead a [dynamic] concept focused on these functions and business processes of the creator that caused the record to be created, within and across constantly evolving organizations.<sup>32</sup>

Cook's 1997 article is a gem of theoretical synthesis and bibliographical rigour. Yet, attached to this last observation is the admission (contained in an endnote) that "'post-custodial' assumptions ... can, admittedly, be asserted too blithely as a radical break from the past rather than as a difference in emphasis."<sup>33</sup> This statement must be taken as significant qualification which, as such, substantially complicates the theory and turns macro-appraisal into quite a bit more than a provenance-driven functional approach. Macro-appraisal is, indeed, an amalgam of old and new, or to adapt the words of Cook's evocative title, a merging of the past (prologue) into the present – but in ways that Cook does not always acknowledge. This makes for intellectual ambiguity, not theoretical clarity. The point, however, is not to criticize the theorist for inconsistency, but to point out to his sometimes vociferous critics that his paradigm is potentially very much broader than it may appear. While Cook associates his approach with the underlying assumptions used to justify post-custodial strategies, his macro-appraisal strategy provides a platform capable of supporting many diverse approaches to the central intellectual act of archival appraisal – choosing what to keep.

At the heart of the theory and of the method applied to a given case, is a two step approach: first, the top-down macro-appraisal of function and process but then, as well, a micro-appraisal – a hands-on evaluation of the records to verify hypotheses about archival priorities derived from the function-centred analysis of records creation. But what is micro-appraisal in reality, and when macro-appraisal theory clearly includes a micro-appraisal step, does it really constitute a fundamental shift in conception and methodology?

A key to understanding the theoretical dimension of Cook's conception of the micro-appraisal stage may be found in his treatment of diplomatic analysis in appraisal strategy and macro-appraisal theory. Cook begins with the straightforward proposition that "no one can possibly undertake modern appraisal by performing diplomatic analyses on individual documents." But then complexities appear. The whole aim of his analysis at this critical point is consensus and synthesis, not theoretical consistency – hence a further contention that "it should not become a question of a top-down functional analysis of creators being better or worse than a bottom-up diplomatic analysis of individual documents, *but rather a recognition that both approaches have important insights to offer to a contextualized understanding of the record*, and thus both should be used as interrelated tools by the archivist."<sup>34</sup> And so it follows that "diplomats becomes, ... not unlike Richard Brown's suggested use of an archival hermeneutic, a means to corroborate macro-appraisal analyses and hypotheses."<sup>35</sup> In his work on appraisal of case files and his seminal articula-

tion of macro-appraisal theory in “Mind over Matter” Cook is even more explicit in his openness to more traditional records-oriented approaches at the secondary micro-appraisal stage.<sup>36</sup> As recently as 1999, he again articulated a broad scope for the application of traditional archival criteria at the micro-appraisal stage:

Once the macro-appraisal is complete, and actual series or classes or systems or collections of records are before the archivist for appraisal, traditional appraisal criteria can be applied to the records in question, where greater granularity is necessary or desirable. Such criteria are used to refine further the value of individual records or small groupings or series of records within the theoretical-strategic functional-structural matrix. Political, technical, legal, and preservation issues are also considered at this point. Known research uses may also be considered, at this final stage only, but not driving the process .... Such micro-appraisal criteria involve assessing such factors as age, uniqueness, aesthetics, time span, authenticity, completeness, extent, manipulability, fragility, duplication, monetary value, use, etc.<sup>37</sup>

The micro-appraisal stage is a reading of texts in order to validate, verify, or modify the hypotheses derived from functional appraisal, doing so on the basis of what the texts may reflect about the functional relationships. At the same time, it is a fail-safe through which the archivist is enabled to introduce an appreciation of the records content or any other tools that seem relevant to the particular circumstances and the formulation of his or her appraisal recommendations.

The greatest weakness of Cook as a theorist may be his insistence that he is defining a new appraisal paradigm when, in so many respects, he has instead picked over and grafted existing best practices onto the more recent emphasis on seeing functional, records-creating context as the first or primary consideration in locating archival value. This is the one substantial, but critical innovation within the theory. Cook’s real genius may well be as a synthetic model builder. Indeed, for a theorist, the corpus of Cook’s work is always inextricably tied to the strategic and methodological dimensions of implementation. Appraisal theory, acquisition strategy, and appraisal methodology are, in Cook’s macro-appraisal model, three interdependent pillars holding up a single intellectual structure that cannot be wholly expressed without incorporating all three levels of analysis in one integrated whole.<sup>38</sup>

The problem in fostering professional consensus around this conception has been the tension between the drive to associate functional appraisal theory with post-modern intellectual perspectives, claiming a qualitative leap over most past appraisal practice and criteria – while in the next breath, retaining, amplifying, and recasting, as an intellectually new product, merely much of what has been done in the past. A great deal of what makes Cook’s model of appraisal work so effectively has nothing to do with a new theoretical para-

digm of how appraisal should be executed, using post-modern insights, in an electronic age. Of the ten standard characteristics of macro-appraisal that Cook himself isolates, nine are strategic and methodological, and are unconnected directly to the core reorientation away from records “product” towards functional activity and creational contexts. They have to do with corporate planning, good management, a pro-active acquisition strategy, a recognition that it is more effective to appraise all records comprehensively at the front end in the records continuum (if and when this can be managed), and a celebration of appraisal as a necessarily research-based exercise, one that must be fully documented. This is not theory (as Cook would acknowledge). This is best professional practice completely compatible with recourse to traditional taxonomic orders of value which, according to Cook himself, are in turn compatible with functional analysis at the micro-appraisal stage. But other than abandoning the dead weight of certain bad past practice, what makes any of this so new at the theoretical level?

The new element within the theory is the recognition that modern archivists need a functionally contextualized framework in which to execute appraisal. For archivists drowning in a sea of paper and of electronic metadata, this method provides insights regarding the best archival targets. Yet at times Cook eschews taxonomic orders of value without explaining the criteria by which we move from macro-functional archival implications to concrete selection of records – then reintroduces the full scope of traditional values at the micro-appraisal stage, including known research uses.

Using this hybrid (or amalgam) cloaked as a new theoretical paradigm, Cook transforms functional appraisal into a coherent, disciplined, and seamless approach that serves at once as an acquisition strategy, a detailed step-by-step appraisal methodology, and a radical new emphasis on functional context as the only effective framework for determining the location of archival records. Within the compass of these new departures, Cook provides the mechanism to salvage and rejuvenate the various strengths of older appraisal criteria and to accommodate diverse assumptions about the nature of appraisal. But Cook never really resolves the relationship among his synthesis’ conflicting components. At some points he seems very open and pragmatic. At others he seems attracted to Richard Brown’s more structured hermeneutic reading, whereby the sole purpose of the micro-appraisal stage is to verify the validity of functional analyses as applied to creator contexts.

While *posing* as a paradigm shifter, Cook has instead created a de facto *methodological* platform, one that amounts to an uneasy synthesis of elements. It is an uneasy synthesis largely because its creator acknowledges the implications arising from only a select *portion* of his methodology, and because by definition, theory must be internally coherent. To emphasize the full extent of the synthesis is to undercut the theoretical consistency to which Cook aspires. The whole animating spirit of Cook’s work has been to ground

appraisal practice in a sound theoretical framework, something never achieved in the seminal work of TR. Schellenberg.<sup>39</sup> Schellenberg's North American pragmatism left appraisal practice and program administration vulnerable in the face of the transformation of the record by automated technology and left methodological coherence in question through lack of theoretical depth. Cook wants to ground his approach in a sound theoretical framework to avoid the error that Schellenberg made in imbedding analysis of current research interests within the concept of informational value (a choice made all the more tragic by being entirely unnecessary). Yet, Cook's theory, like Schellenberg's method, has always been informed by an acute awareness of the constraints of the real world of government and his understanding of the consequences of bad past practice.

None of this is to suggest that Cook's theory is incoherent internally, or otherwise flawed. The ambiguity at the centre of macro-appraisal theory is an essential strength, not a weakness, for in macro-appraisal theory a critical gap emerges between the majesty of its core insight, its contextualized functional analysis of records creation, and the mechanisms by which it is possible to choose which records are actually kept. Cook has not papered over this gap; he has used the best of our past appraisal tradition to build a sound methodological bridge. The result is a true synthesis. This seems entirely appropriate when the exercise, like archival appraisal, is essentially a utilitarian endeavour, ringed about by institutional constraints and intellectually focused on a judgment of value that defies both scientific and post-modern mind-sets.

The hidden genius in macro-appraisal – its intrinsic intellectual ambiguity – gives it an essential intellectual openness as a methodology. It is this inherent openness within the theory that makes it such a serious candidate as a platform for a universal standard. Before exploring that argument more fully, however, it is useful to switch the focus from Cook's effort at creating a new synthesis to the achievements by his collaborator, Richard Brown, in invigorating macro-appraisal with a more rigorous theoretical consistency.<sup>40</sup> This is the particular genius of Brown's work that we shall explore. The upshot of his labour is indeed a perfect theoretical consistency, but it results in a variant of the theory that proves, for that very reason, to be less eligible as a practical basis for standardizing appraisal methodology.

Brown's explorations of appraisal theory since his first article on the subject in 1991 contain much valuable amplification of Cook's ideas. Therein, Brown offers at least three major clarifications that enhance a layman's understanding of macro-appraisal theory.

First of all, Brown argues that to properly understand creator context an analysis of the records should take place up-front at the very outset of an acquisition strategy and not be left until late in the process, to a separate micro-appraisal that may be too detached to prevent gross distortions and errors.<sup>41</sup> In insisting on the importance of considering the texts produced by

records creators in defining functional context,<sup>42</sup> Brown acknowledges “the conceptual problem at the heart of macro-appraisal” wherein it distinguishes between and separates functional analysis of the records creator and a reading of texts within the records themselves. This, he asserts, results in potential loss of “purposes, meanings and messages implicitly encoded in public records [which are] worthy of [our] attention.”<sup>43</sup> He goes on to assert even more categorically that “any final conclusions reached concerning creator context without reading records are demonstrably narrow, precarious, and potentially invalid.”<sup>44</sup>

Secondly, by the time of his second article, in 1995, Brown came to newly appreciate the theoretical tentativeness of the accomplishments to date of the macro-appraisal school. Brown warned against what amount to prototypes and experimental models becoming immutable templates that could predetermine and distort future acquisition strategy.<sup>45</sup> Of course, no template for any part of an acquisition program could possibly remain immutable. This factor implied that something altogether more flexible than a template was required to apply valid appraisal or implement an effective acquisition program. Indeed, the concluding remarks of Brown’s 1995 article became not a rationale for a particular theoretical model, but rather an impassioned defence of a vigorous research-based approach. According to Brown, “Difficult, though [the] utility [of a research-based approach] may be to quantify, measure, or assess from a project management approach to archival records appraisal..., there is something irretrievably lost from an archival-historical perspective by denying time to the study of context in text (records).”<sup>46</sup>

Finally, these perspectives led Brown to seek to situate within the mainstream of the archival discipline his, essentially, post-modern philosophical emphasis on a *hermeneutic* reading at the micro-appraisal stage. He did so in arguing for a comparatively broad understanding of archival records, contending that “an archive is not only accountable for the preservation of administrative memory, but also for the compleat [sic] memory of the *communitas* as reflected in the mirror of its entire records past.”<sup>47</sup> At the same time, the whole weight of his argument was a pointed critique of past appraisal practice, which also conditions his strategy. To cut loose from the *a priori* Weberian assumptions about bureaucratic behaviour that he felt are inherent in the traditional application of evidential and informational criteria to government records, Brown instead proposed a holistic, hermeneutic reading of “the physical and intellectual environment in which public records are created and encoded.” This focused on an interpretation of inner meanings – the reasons why society and institutions behave in a given way (their intentions). This was intended to bring out alternative features of government texts which are commonly passed over through traditional assumptions about appraisal.<sup>48</sup>

Whereas Cook constructs a bridge between past and prologue at the micro-appraisal stage, thereby reconnecting the keep/destroy decision with the

macro-functional contextual analysis, Richard Brown very early on sensed the intellectual fragility of Cook's creation. Between the reliance on macro-appraisal, that defined provenance and value in functional terms, and the implementation of micro-appraisal, with all its diverse, traditional, and mutually contradictory methods and criteria (as well as implicit records focus), Brown sees the danger of potential inconsistency unraveling into methodological incoherence. How he has essentially responded has been to recast the theoretical formulations of Cook's two-step strategy, creating a perfect theoretical and methodological consistency using the post-modern approaches of Michel Foucault and a select number of other students of social and intellectual history. Under these influences, micro-appraisal becomes a reading of texts (records), its intention being to confirm that the creational context has been fully and adequately identified and analyzed. It is systematically structured to test, verify, and if necessary, modify macro-appraisal hypotheses regarding functionally-derived archival value. It does so following one methodologically consistent approach in which micro-appraisal is fully integrated into macro-appraisal.

Brown portrays the focus by theorists such as Hans Booms and Terry Cook on function rather than bureaucratic hierarchy as a nascent application of social theory to records-creating environments and the practice of archival appraisal. Initially, for Brown, the logical extension of this application is the hermeneutic reading defined following the philosophical perspectives of Michel Foucault. According to Brown,

Behind any completed system, organization, or structure, is an immense density of functional or processive relations that is coincidentally transcribed into texts; a narrative discourse of knowledge, language, assumptions, rules, and principles which specify and characterize system-structure. To translate this hypothesis into archival terminology, records creators are simultaneously the product of structural or systematic evolutionary development, and of a modality of discursive representation embodied in the narrative texts of their recorded dialogue.<sup>49</sup>

Now, that is a mouthful, but we need not be intimidated. The central argument translates into plain archival practice much more clearly than first seems to be the case. For Brown, macro-appraisal theory and a coherent acquisition strategy are synonymous (that is, theory *is* practice). Arising from merger of theory and practice is "an appraisal strategy for records conducted at the collective rather than at the item level, at the tier of the records creator, rather than at the syntactic stratum of records substance .... It emphasizes the archival value of a site or location or environment of records creation, as opposed to the archival value of the records themselves; it assigns primacy of importance to the evidential context in which records are created, rather than to the value of the information which the documents contain."<sup>50</sup> That really is a very nice

formulation of what Cook is on about. If we deliberately simplify the terminology, “hermeneutic reading,” to mean, in practical terms, using on-site records appraisal to confirm or re-evaluate macro-functional appraisals of records creators’ activity by reference, as evidence, to the narratives contained in the records – there finding documentation of accountability and insights into societal relationships – then we have basically figured out this, his central and most valuable construction.

Brown himself provides a straight-forward summation in a footnote to his 1995 essay wherein he writes, “What I am suggesting in this essay, is that the reading of metatexts (texts about texts) must be supplemented by a reading of the texts (records) produced as a result of functional and processive creator activity, in order to arrive at a more sensitive archival rendering of creator context.”<sup>51</sup> While this formulation contains nothing like a broader admission that the records as a whole should be appraised for orders of value, Brown has transformed the two-step methodology into an organic whole which employs a traditional appraisal of the record itself as the means to a hermeneutic reading of “evidential context.” Admittedly, in his mind this defines a shift in emphasis away from Cook’s original distinction between a macro-level focus on metatexts and a micro-level focus on records (this latter primarily verifying and supplementing previous metatext-born hypotheses), but the formulation goes a long way to make both his concepts and arguments, as well as Cook’s, accessible to most archival practitioners. (At one level, it is what Cook had already implied and may have meant to say all along.) While Brown’s post-modern formulation can be at times opaque, there is no truer champion than Brown of the central innovative core of the macro-appraisal approach, a fundamental internally and philosophically-consistent shift towards a focus on creator context. Brown’s version of macro-appraisal is a consistent interpretation of Cook’s original conception. Cook himself has incorporated most of Brown’s refinements (and distinct terminology) into his own writing.

Theoretical consistency, however, entails costs. In the first place, many would claim that these formulations merely amount to what archivists have always done or, at best, tried to do within the inevitable operational limitations. Jim Suderman quietly voices the obvious when he notes that “archivists have probably always utilized the functional context as well as the provenancial and records contexts for appraisal.”<sup>52</sup> To give Brown his due, however, most past appraisal was hopelessly inadequate when it came to documenting the complete functional and evidential context. Even more rarely did archivists make any attempt during hands-on appraisal to read texts back onto analyses of contexts of creation in order to better discern sites of archival value. Yet in certain respects, Brown, like Cook, is simply elaborating, in a highly sophisticated and rigorous way, on best practice – not defining a wholly new paradigm for appraisal. If the best evidence of and most sympathetic readings of creator context come from the records, then the main focus of appraisal

research remains exactly where traditionalists always thought it was – in the records – and not, as Cook has insisted for ten years, on a detached assessment of the context of creation.

Let us explore a little further how this integration of functional analysis and the examination of records in order to discover the key evidential contexts works. Archivists are asked to accept Brown's proposition that "to comprehend fully the dimensions of human experience, the interactive context of human affairs assumes a greater degree of importance as a source of historical knowledge than an empirically based analysis and scientific observation of natural events."<sup>53</sup> Here, by "interactive context of human affairs," Brown means context in a post-modernist sense, including the notion that the understanding of this context is socially, culturally, and historically conditioned in complex ways. Archivists are now to understand that macro-appraisal methodology is an approach which "contrives to peel away the subjective-informational value of documents to concentrate on the objective-evidential qualities implicit in the context of their creation; it endeavours to test the archival-historical value of records inherent in their production, composition, formation, and organization [macro-appraisal] against the capacity of their information content to yield such value [micro-appraisal]."<sup>54</sup> Yet there are serious implications for where this positions archival studies as an intellectual discipline in the twenty-first century. There are major dangers in writing the empirical method off or setting it up in false opposition, as a lower order of knowledge, to the insights of historicism. Post-modernist theory has no monopoly on historicism and may (as it almost certainly does) distort the whole concept. In practice, moreover, the paradigm shift threatens to mutate into a codified business systems analysis that transforms the standard for documenting rationales for keep/destroy decisions into a taxing and top-heavy template. This will become operationally impractical by virtue of the sheer weight of detail necessary to construct the required narratives.

Brown's conception is undoubtedly systematic and consistent. However, in applying macro-appraisal to acquisition strategy and addressing the question of the criteria by which bureaucratic configurations should be ranked in order of archival priority, he has fused multiple and formerly more flexible top-down steps into a single philosophically-consistent, but much narrower top-down framework. This is one within which the informational value in records can easily be deligitimized and in which any observable relationship regarding context of creation that is not revealed within the records' narrative discourse becomes secondary in importance and suspect. Even more seriously, disciples of methodological consistency may be inhibited from coming to any conclusion, no matter how obvious, if this required stepping outside the rigorous hermeneutic reading of meaning as defined by post-modern conceptualization.

These observations may seem a narrow reading of Brown's text,<sup>55</sup> and to be

fair, Brown explored the rationale for a focus through micro-appraisal on the record qua record quite sympathetically in his 1991 article<sup>56</sup> and again in 1995. In 1995 he explicitly incorporated, as legitimate, the discovery and incorporation of contextualized informational value within his micro-hermeneutic readings (though using other terminology). But both times he emphasized his core argument about micro-appraisal unequivocally, “lest,” in the words of the 1991 article,

there be any temptation to confuse the identification of records creators from records (context-dependent fonds) with the notion of traditional, “bottom-up” records-centred appraisal. My principal purpose here is to recognize and establish the need to study patterns and formations of narrative discourse implicit in certain records as a source of context for records creators ... and decidedly not to encourage a full-circle readmission of the “reading” of the entire mass of available documentation in order to make item-related appraisal and selection decisions by virtue of previously apprehended conceptions of archival value or to draw subjective conclusions on the archival significance of records as potential historical sources of national heritage at the documentary level.<sup>57</sup>

Brown is absolutely clear on this point and in that clarity he is implicitly contradicting Cook’s own broad formulation of the micro-appraisal step. Both in his theoretical treatments and his behaviour as a manager administering an acquisition program, Cook has taken very open and tolerant interpretations of functional and micro-appraisal criteria and applications. Top-down and bottom-up approaches coexist and complement one another in the body of National Archives appraisal reports. Within a broad approach to appraisal, hermeneutic readings can never be more than one legitimate means of inquiry and verification for use within micro-appraisal and cannot be the sole acceptable tool. If the profession seeks to build a flexible, utilitarian, and practical standard on a base of complete theoretical consistency, the result will be unnecessary complexity and rigidity.

Such an approach does more to create artificial barriers than elevate professional standards. There is nothing in the post-modern formulations of macro-appraisal that provides checks and balances that are intellectually adequate to ensure that hermeneutic readings are truly creating a better archival selection. Post-modern formulations are no more verifiable for purposes of accountability than more conventional and less consistent methodological strategies. Review officers in larger institutions are already insulated enough from the records, without being denied an even minimal glimpse of their content as a basis for assessing the complex contextual narratives proposed by Brown. As Brown himself implies, true intellectual freedom, necessary for line professionals to execute independent research, is more important to an effective acquisition strategy than mere theoretical rigour or operational efficiency. Brown and Cook have basically lived by that ethos. Yet, ironically, the drive

for theoretical consistency transforms their brainchild into a mechanism of intellectual constraint instead of empowerment

By interpreting macro-appraisal methodology in this systematic fashion, theory can easily be distorted by a relentless management-driven “acquisition strategy” through which large archival institutions can end up approaching acquisition with a rigid set of targets and priorities – even applications of appraisal criteria dictated top-down within the bureaucracy in classic Weberian, “mono-hierarchical” fashion. For a research-based theoretical approach to appraisal, this constitutes an inherent danger, for it reintroduces the possibility that *a priori* assumptions may dictate subsequent findings or even repress dissenting perspectives. The double irony here is that this result is the very thing that Brown is explicitly out to prevent.

In a further irony, there is a risk that intellectual independence will be lost as a result of the effort to construct an appraisal theory based on post-modernism. Post-modernism was the most pervasive philosophical fad in graduate history programs across Europe and North America in the 1980s and 1990s. Since 1995, Brown has widened his post-modern conceptual base from a narrow reliance on the philosophy of history advocated by Michel Foucault to the broader theoretical base provided by Hayden White, and Anthony Giddens.<sup>58</sup> But this shift is limited in its implications for archival theory. Thanks to post-modernism, our net gain as a distinct profession and intellectual discipline is that we seek to escape obeisance to fads in research and research methodologies when appraising archival value, only to instead fall under a more fundamental spell created by complex philosophical constructions. These fashion our underlying theoretical and methodological assumptions into a rigidly consistent theory of appraisal. The net effect is to transform Gerald Ham’s weather vanes into theory-powered wind turbines. We become more impressive as professionals and a discipline by having the ability to engage in academic discourse, but in our application of appraisal methods we may become subject to prevailing winds over which we have no control and which may well be a distraction from our prime objective.

From the perspective of professionalization, the safest place for Brown’s hermeneutic approach to appraisal is as one among others within micro-appraisal’s methodological tool kit – in turn situated within the broader macro-appraisal standard that remains implicit in Cook’s original synthesis. Brown’s conception – constructed in collaboration with his friend and intellectual collaborator, Brien Brothman<sup>59</sup> – has provided an intellectually rigorous application of acquisition strategy and macro-appraisal theory that deserves serious consideration by every student and practitioner in the field. Brown’s challenge to archivists to “be aware and take account of anti-structural temporal moments of virtual organizational action”<sup>60</sup> is an intriguing and highly stimulating proposition. Yet, if Michel Foucault’s approach to social reality, as well as other purely post-modern approaches, are to take

over the discipline, let it be done through open competition and on a level playing field where real theoretical and operational strengths are fully tested over time.

The sub-text of this analysis, then, is not that Brown's approach is flawed, but that, as a theory, the more intellectually consistent and single minded the macro-appraisal product becomes, the greater the attendant risks. Internal consistency is not necessarily the most important element within an appraisal standard. The choice between Brown and Cook on the one hand and on the other, a stereotyped Schellenberg<sup>61</sup> associated with "traditional" or taxonomic appraisal criteria is a case of false alternatives. The continued reliance on this false alternative in formulating the macro-appraisal paradigm is acting as a barrier both to professional consensus and the development of a credible appraisal standard. For there is no internal contradiction between the functional macro-appraisal and a pluralistic approach to micro-appraisal criteria; there is a methodological ambiguity that bespeaks of the inherent complexity of appraisal in the modern world.

In an age of records virtuality and abundance, macro-appraisal provides the most effective means available to bridge the gap between modern requirements for rigour and strategic perspective and the core act of appraisal which is, in the end (in an age that denigrates value judgements), the application of such judgements in assessing which records to keep. Rightly understood, macro-appraisal is the best vehicle we have to execute acquisition strategy and archival appraisal. This is the case whether the perspective of the institution or archivist is post-modern Foucaultian, traditional Schellenbergian, or neo-Jenkinsonian and whether their focus is on government, corporate, institutional, or personal records. Properly applied, macro-appraisal offers a broad platform that will enhance work, communication, and understanding within our profession and outside our institutions with clients, donors, partners, and other intellectual disciplines.

This review of the two chief theorists of macro-appraisal in Canada has sought to demonstrate that the hybrid nature of Cook's conception and its methodological ambiguity are what makes his model work so effectively as an operational program. This may be further demonstrated, first through a brief consideration of case studies regarding appraisal published by the National Archives of Canada archivist Catherine Bailey, and secondly through an analysis comparing two different appraisals of the financial management function undertaken in two separate jurisdictions, the Canadian and Ontario governments.

#### **IV) Alternative Constructions of Actual Practice**

Catherine Bailey has been a leader among those archivists who have attempted to implement the complete revised acquisition program of the National Archives since the program's inception circa 1991. Her entire work

in appraisal has been an effort to apply Cook's macro-appraisal theory in rigorous and consistent fashion. Their two articles in *Archivaria* 43 on appraisal are complementary treatments that at once reveal two distinct perspectives and one unifying intellectual construct. While Cook has been macro-appraisal's leading theorist, Bailey has used her prodigious capacity for appraisal-related research to test the theory and strengthen it with practical insights. Her credentials for orthodoxy in the macro-appraisal camp are unquestionable. In her 1997 article Bailey summarizes perfectly what Cook is advocating: "In a nutshell, the focus of appraisal needs to shift from determining the value of actual records for [predetermined or *a priori*] research purposes to assessing the functional-structural circumstances of their context of creation, or [in other words] their [functional] provenance."<sup>62</sup> This formulation captures the essential emphasis of the new paradigm.

However, this is a paradigm that must always define itself in relation to a flawed tradition – in fact almost always in relation to a stereotype or a straw man. Macro-appraisal theory attributes to more traditional approaches both a set of preconceptions as to their actual research agendas and a narrow preoccupation with detailed assessments of records contents – as if any modern archivist, in analyzing series, ever examines many records down to the item level. It also ignores the fact that few archivists, given their subject expertise, could ever escape having *some* informed conceptions of value and assumes that any such conceptions, based on research and experience, will inherently corrupt appraisal judgements. Nevertheless, if in correcting past errors the driving force is really to be the functional-structural circumstances of records creation rather than the records, micro-appraisal is still the way to translate this analysis into concrete recommendations about which records to keep. For Bailey, as with Brown and Cook, the attempt to implement macro-appraisal theory eventually comes down to this integral second stage of the method.

Most of her 1997 article is composed of four *discrete* case studies, each involving the execution of a micro-appraisal in the context of a broader macro-functional analysis that preceded it. All four case studies related to health agencies and each included a macro-functional analysis as a first step.<sup>63</sup> Bailey cast what she did in the four micro-appraisals as progressively more consistent efforts to use hands-on appraisal of the records to verify the macro-functional hypothesis rather than attribute value to records. Yet, when she described the execution of the micro-appraisal, she shifted gears quite distinctly.

After applying the macro-appraisal model to identify and isolate the key areas where the best archival records are *likely* to be found, the actual records themselves are then assessed, in a process which Cook refers to as "micro-appraisal." It is at this point that many of the more "traditional" factors commonly associated with North American appraisal practices are found – what time span do the records cover, how complete or authentic are they, how much is there, and what legislative requirements affect them.

Practical considerations of conservation, space availability, or processing costs are also weighed and may have an impact on the final appraisal decision.<sup>64</sup>

By any objective reading, this is no hermeneutic verification through texts. The approach to micro-appraisal is a bit of everything that we associate with traditional appraisal methodology, including Schellenberg at his best (stripped of future research uses), with a pinch of primitive cost-benefit analysis peeking out of a macro-functional theoretical construct.

While Bailey portrays the work in her case studies as a steady progression away from a “hybrid” approach that combines aspects of macro-appraisal and traditional analysis of evidential/informational value, there are two other ways of characterizing her approach. The first of these rests on the fact that this is one archivist whose findings are cumulatively refined through successive studies of interrelated offices and agencies. Her appraisals may thus be seen as a form of incremental functionalism, in which broader functional analysis defines ever more consistently the framework of each succeeding appraisal. This, then, is one way of looking at Bailey’s work.

Yet each appraisal was still undertaken on the basis of hybrid appraisal methodologies and a deep knowledge base. Functional analysis that presupposes and is dependent on prior traditional assessments of informational and evidential value is not macro-appraisal, at least according to the theory. The other interpretation is thus more pointed and telling. While in each succeeding micro-appraisal Bailey increasingly adopts the rubric of functionalism to define her appraisal parameters and criteria, Schellenbergian taxonomic values remain lurking throughout her text. Bailey ensures that she knows her records cold from hands-on experience before she really makes up her mind about anything. This is a complete contradiction of the notion that micro-appraisal is a mere subordinate step that incorporates a highly selective reading for the limited purpose of verifying the previous identification, through functional analysis, of sites creating archival records. Bailey’s leadership in developing ever more detailed and comprehensive functional analysis has continued unabated since 1997. Her work is state of the art; yet neither she nor any of her colleagues has been able to translate macro-appraisal analysis into a function-based formulation for the actual identification of archival records – which is to say that micro-appraisal must remain something much more than a mere verification of previous analyses of creator context.

This interpretation does not invalidate her application of macro-appraisal theory. The author of this present article was applying much the same approach at exactly the same time to central agencies such as Treasury Board, the Public Service Commission, and the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. In each case, appraisal of a central agency function provided greater contextual understanding of larger functional relationships. These in turn became the basis for more sweeping functional hypotheses and conclu-

sions. But the process was incremental, beginning first, somewhere with records. Work on the Commissioner of Official Languages in 1995 produced a deliberately structured and executed functional appraisal<sup>65</sup> with the appraisal report reorganized to reflect explicitly the two stage methodology, a clear application of macro-appraisal theory. Yet this application of theory was executed on the basis of four months of previous research the year before into Treasury Board registry files derived from the same function.

The far more sound technique, and the technique that makes macro-appraisal approachable for the new archivist or archivist unaccustomed to the technique, is the incremental approach. It builds the functional approach on a solid foundation in traditional empirical appraisal criteria and a firm base of knowledge acquired directly from the records. There will always be theorists who will push us further down paths in appreciation of new analyses of functional value defined through study of creational contexts. Some archivists will find ways to apply even more radical and imaginative approaches to particular circumstances. Yet, as a standard, macro-appraisal will require a broad and open interpretation if it is to be operationally effective.

Catherine Bailey's work confirms the value of the flexibility and creativity inherent in a broadly conceived application of micro-appraisal. Two contrasting sets of investigations into the government financial management function, to which we turn next, provide a further practical demonstration of the fact that a functional approach to understanding contexts of creation is a necessary but incomplete basis on which to build an effective appraisal methodology. Appraisal is and always will remain more than an appreciation of creational context, no matter how sophisticated.

#### ***Appraising the Financial Management Function: The Application of Functional Analysis in Two Parallel Studies***

This next stage of the argument will be an analysis comparing two separate approaches to appraisal, both of which applied functional analysis to essentially similar situations. The first model is provided by the author's work at the National Archives of Canada, first, in appraising the Treasury Board of Canada's expenditure and program management functions, followed by the broader financial management function across the Federal Government. These appraisals were undertaken in two separate projects (hereafter referred to collectively as the NA study). The second model is the work of Jim Suderman, of the Archives of Ontario, who has performed a similar task in regard to the Government of Ontario's expenditure management system. This is hereafter termed the AO study.<sup>66</sup>

In summary of the two studies' conclusions, the first stage of the NA study in 1993-94 opted to keep, as the best archival record, a substantial portion of records created by the federal Treasury Board. (The Treasury Board, as the

government body mandated to coordinate the financial management function, is the Office of Primary Interest.) In 1998, in the second, separate project, which looked beyond the Treasury Board to all government departments, the NA study recommended the destruction, through a single multi-institutional disposition authority, of all departmental-level records related directly to the expenditure management function. In contrast, the AO study recommended a decentralized approach that largely wrote off the central agency record and left the ultimate decision about the expenditure management record at the ministerial level (in the Ontario government, departments are ministries) to be executed case by case through institution-specific records schedules. Despite recourse within both sets of inquiries to applications of functional analysis to justify and guide their choices, the two sets of appraisal recommendations were virtual polar opposites.

While the main interest in this present analysis is to explore the paradox presented by the methodological commonality and divergent recommendations of the two studies, it is necessary to acknowledge the differences in scope, emphasis, and execution between the two projects in order to avoid distortion.

Suderman executed his appraisal as one coherent, comprehensive project looking at a single, specific multi-provenancial function – expenditure management – which included not only government ministries and Management Board but also the expenditure allocation activity of the Cabinet Office. The NA study was executed using an entirely different project structure. Not only was it undertaken, as previously noted, as two distinct enquiries: the first project, in 1993, focused on a single records creator, the Program Branch of Treasury Board – this appraisal also involving (unlike the AO's) related aspects of program evaluation, which are also exercised by the Treasury Board. This stage of the NA study was "quasi-functional" in that, in keeping with macro-appraisal theory, it identified Treasury Board records as having value on the basis of a nonetheless very high level analysis of functional relationships. But it was also, significantly, hybrid in character, incorporating a traditional hands-on, file-by-file, series-by-series micro-appraisal of records content in relation to evidential and informational value to make the final selection. It was not until five years later that the second NA project expanded the appraisal of expenditure management records to encompass the broader functional context, that of common financial management activity across the whole Government of Canada.

In contrast to the NA study, in the AO study, diplomatic analysis of records content was clearly a central feature, incorporated directly into the body of the appraisal to provide focus in evaluating supporting documentation and locating the authoritative record within its context of creation. This was a more integrated, less hybrid approach. By comparison, when the 1998 appraisal of federal financial management supplemented its functional analysis of a com-

mon administrative function it did so with a reading, not of current records, but of sixty years of text on past disposition and appraisal practice across several jurisdictions. It then used these supplementary readings ruthlessly as a surrogate for a micro-appraisal verification of departmental record content. On this basis, it dispensed with a detailed file-by-file review of the records of individual departments.

These distinctions notwithstanding, there remains a striking paradox. A single methodology produced two virtually opposite conclusions in regard to similar types of records documenting largely the same, overlapping functions, in turn undertaken by records creators similarly placed within government and having parallel mandates. Even if the Archives of Ontario did not ultimately adopt Suderman's recommendations, what do these incongruities suggest about macro-appraisal as a candidate for an archival standard?

Let us look a little closer at how Suderman executed his study and what he concluded. The expenditure management function – the mechanism whereby the government reconciles individual ministerial budgets, expenditure plans, and program review with its overall fiscal planning – was handled as a self-contained functional universe, in which the appraisal archivist analyzed the internal processes and the resulting body of interministerial information. On this basis, the AO study concluded that beyond publications and Cabinet documents it was unnecessary to secure more than a limited selection of policy development files from the Management Board's central registry files system since the core expenditure management record is found in ministerial records series documenting submission development. The AO study concluded that the records would be best appraised on a case-by-case basis by the archivists responsible for each ministry, using their specialized knowledge and employing comprehensive top-down functional appraisals applied to each separate fonds creator.

The approach has obvious methodological soundness. The Management Board record replicates the ministerial record, but shorn of its immediate provenancial context. By disposing of the central agency record, and leaving retention of the individual ministerial record up to portfolio archivists, the AO study has ensured that where expenditure management records enhance the overall understanding of a given creator's functions, those records with archival value will be preserved. Where records are not necessary to adequate documentation of ministerial activity and programs, portfolio archivists may recommend destruction. Duplicate documentation is thus eliminated and the most succinct series having archival value are preserved.<sup>67</sup>

Unlike the AO approach, functional appraisal within the NA study was compromised somewhat by operational priorities. These imposed a piecemeal approach, focusing initially on Treasury Board as the central coordinating agency without the benefit of a complete macro-appraisal of the function government-wide and without the opportunity to verify macro-appraisal hypothe-

ses with micro-appraisal analyses (or even a sampling) of the various records of the associated institutional players: the departments and Privy Council Office. Again, the analysis of function in 1993 focused on what Treasury Board did. The appraisal was executed as one stage of a multi-year disposition plan applied to the multiple sub-functions for which the Treasury Board is responsible as a de facto board of management for the Government of Canada. Luckily, appraisal of the Program Branch (as the organizational component administering the expenditure management sub-function was then known) was the fifth in the series.<sup>68</sup> The timing permitted the archivist to acquire substantial contextual understanding of the records creator through the macro-appraisal research undertaken in previous appraisals, all of which included hands-on assessments of actual records. These analyses in turn provided tremendous insights into how the system of central agency co-ordination had been changing radically in underlying philosophy since 1969. In effect, the NA study, through use of these prior studies, was groping towards a primitive hermeneutic reading of texts to define functional context while simultaneously trying to formulate a macro-functional appreciation of Treasury Board activity – thereby producing a growth in functional understanding in incremental steps. This hybrid methodology was similar in character to Catherine Bailey's work on health records and that of half a dozen other colleagues simultaneously experimenting with techniques of functional appraisal, the differences being largely a matter of details of construction.

Not surprisingly, the NA study uncovered a functional context and information universe remarkably parallel to that described by Suderman three years later in his published account of the Ontario system. The creation and flow of documentation from department to central agency to cabinet to legislative body to published final output showed huge amounts of redundancy in both jurisdictions. The NA study, however, came to opposite conclusions as to where the archival records resided.<sup>69</sup> Underlying the recommendation that a substantial portion of the central agency record be taken was the basic argument that thereby the National Archives secured from a single source (the Treasury Board), a record that provided the most succinct snapshot available of the decision-making process, together with a comprehensive and standardized evaluation of program performance across all federal agencies. This alternative construction of archival value – notably, again like the AO's, *based on functional analysis* – still left unresolved what to do, finally, with the expenditure management records of individual departments, though it left in place the provisions of the *General Records Disposal Schedules*. These had, for thirty years, authorized destruction of all Departmental records related to estimates and expenditure management.

Only in 1998 did the NA study follow up with a more complete functional assessment, examining the broader financial management function of the government as a whole. In this study, the archivist verified that in regards to

expenditure management, as well as the more mundane aspects of financial management (accounting and control, budgeting, budgetary control, financial reporting), it was safe to authorize the destruction of all departmental records – excluding only certain pockets which had strayed over into operational program management activities. In the federal government, this distinction works. By employing this strategy, the NA study thereby confirmed the destruction of something approaching ten per cent or more of all records created by the Government of Canada. In this application of macro-appraisal methodology, the archival record remained the central agency record that the AO study had largely spurned. The appraisal report observed by way of summary that “the departmental record is what it is by virtue of the macro-procedures of a single accounting entity in which central agencies establish the standards that make the documents archivally valuable; the record does not arise because of unique autonomous activity on the part of the fonds level (departmental) creator.”<sup>70</sup> The appraisal report formally documented the sites of potential archival records and why most departmental financial management records had no value. It also concluded a half-century archival quest to identify the central accounting records of enduring value – records that had never, as it turned out, existed in the first place.

Now, it is possible to infer from the preceding analysis that one of the two approaches – the Archives of Ontario’s or National Archives’ – must surely have been wrong from a theoretical or methodological standpoint. But such an inference would miss the point. Both studies made serious efforts to identify archival value on the basis of function and the activity of records creators operating in a single information universe defined by their activity. Both presented sufficient evidence and argument to justify their recommendations. Both exhibited a solid understanding of the functions and activities with which they were dealing. Both were highly selective. In parallel universes, they simply interpreted the application of the theory in different ways. Is there any resolution to this paradox? Are we condemned, when pursuing macro-appraisal methodology, to such contradictory and seemingly problematic appraisal results?

Here is one possible solution. The NA study has argued that by relying on the Treasury Board record, we secure a comprehensive government-wide profile of the financial management function of all entities in the federal government, also enhanced by the commentaries produced internally by the central agency on process and individual agency behaviour. This record is eminently superior both to the published sources, on account of the detail available, and by virtue of the value added through the commentaries of Treasury Board officers, the expenditure management record preserved by individual departmental records creators. By opting for this appraisal logic the NA study is sacrificing the possible textual richness that such departmental records *may* provide in the case of a specific department, where the nature of the expendi-

ture management record may greatly enhance contextual understanding of core operational programs. The argument and evidence suggests strongly, however, that such enhanced value will be marginal and rare by virtue of the nature of the function.

To follow the AO study is to retain perfect provenancial purity at the ministerial level but, were the Archives of Ontario to have actually followed the recommended strategy, it would have been condemned to a huge subsequent investment in further appraisal – no doubt justified by the results, but still resources expended to evaluate records resulting from a single function. Following this approach, each archivist would have been required to obtain at least some contextual knowledge of the arcane expenditure management process in order to execute the decentralized multi-provenancial strategy.

The upshot of Suderman's approach would have been a huge amount of labour-intensive research work that would not have been finished until the financial management records for all agencies were fully appraised. In contrast, by following the NA option, the National Archives has avoided the need to execute an appraisal (or part of an appraisal) for each departmental entity. In the federal government at the time of the appraisal of the Program Branch in 1993 there were upwards of 270 agencies subject to expenditure management procedures.<sup>71</sup>

The two applications of macro-appraisal are equally valid and defensible on theoretical and methodological grounds. If anything (for the purposes of the argument), Suderman has a certain advantage from the standpoint of pure theory and methodological refinement (his more sophisticated application of diplomatics, for example). And yet the NA study has huge advantages in terms of conserving intellectual and financial resources, certainly through costs savings, immediacy of results, and the simplicity with which disposition is applied to all federal institutions.<sup>72</sup>

Note, however, that in following this logic, the criteria underlying the analysis have shifted. As well as supplementing the detailed micro-appraisal of the central agency records and a hermeneutic reading of disposition and appraisal texts related to the financial management function over the last sixty years, the NA study is also bolstered through use of primitive cost-benefit criteria and a pragmatic weighing of risk and resources. This conclusion has nothing to do with the level of inner coherence present within the two approaches to top-down macro-appraisal. Surely this is the key consideration that this comparative analysis of the two applications of macro-appraisal methodology demonstrates, *that the merits or demerits of a particular application may have nothing to do with the consistency with which theory is applied.*

The inference is clear; the comparative analysis demonstrates yet again that, ultimately, the formulation of coherent archival appraisal is not and cannot be confined to macro-appraisal criteria or theoretical assumptions about inferred value. Macro-functional appraisal theory and methodology provide a neces-

sary but incomplete basis for a coherent archival strategy and the construction of comprehensive appraisal criteria. To return to this article's main theme, macro-appraisal provides the basis for an appraisal standard, but not the whole standard. To make macro-appraisal work effectively we must have recourse to other tools and be able to cope imaginatively with the innumerable constraints that impinge upon the appraisal enterprise. In the case of the NA study, the supplementary tool was a sort of cost-benefit analysis combined with some risk analysis, similar in some respects to the "utilitarian" or quasi-use-based criteria developed by Mark Greene and others for what became known as the "Minnesota method."<sup>73</sup> In other circumstances, these tools may be diplomatic insights (used by Suderman) or hermeneutic readings that more clearly identify the key record through exposure of crucial, often unanticipated relationships. Or it may be the realization reached through a simple hands-on records appraisal by an intelligent curator in a small institution that a particular manuscript collection fills a gap in the holdings or enhances the value of related fonds. Archivists dealing with private manuscripts understand implicitly that the informational value provided by a relatively obscure records creator may well still have its place in an archives. There are many legitimate ways to skin a cat. To turn appraisal methodology or acquisition strategy into a strict formula or template entails greater risks than leaving it as a broadly-based, truly independent research methodology. That is the essential point illustrated by this comparative analysis.

#### **V) Conclusion: The Advantages of Doubt Over Certainty**

To address the basic questions with which we began, this critical reading of macro-appraisal theory and practice suggests the following preliminary conclusions. Yes, macro-appraisal can provide the basis for the development of enhanced standards for appraisal. But macro-appraisal must be interpreted broadly in order to serve this role and provide the common platform required to facilitate a continuing professional dialogue and provide the breadth and scope necessary in a standard applied to an activity necessarily amounting to an exercise in independent research. Essentially, for it to become a platform for a standard regarding archival methodology, macro-appraisal is best conceived as a two-stage intellectual process that enforces at least some minimal focus on context of creation, followed by application of diverse conceptions of value to the targeted records. Allowing the standard to have breadth and scope has the huge advantage of engaging the profession as a whole in a common intellectual endeavour. No doubt there would be much left to debate, but by virtue of a shared set of reference points, we should have the basis for an enhanced professional dialogue that addresses the real systemic operational dilemma in acquisition programs – choosing what to keep.

While there are risks – both in addressing the basic question of a standard

for archival appraisal and in contemplating macro-appraisal as the methodological platform for such a standard – there are obvious and sound reasons to go ahead. In the first place, a professional standard can redress the imbalances within our use of already inadequate resources and unite diverse practitioners in a common endeavour. More fundamentally, the broader theoretical debate about records appraisal that has taken place in recent years has not, alone, provided the focus that the archival discipline requires in the face of the real and pressing challenges posed by an age of records overabundance. As just one more competing theory undisciplined by the need to conform to the disparate professional needs that a standards-setting process would enforce, macro-appraisal is open to widely different interpretations and applications, some of which seem positively dangerous. Meanwhile the profession has not adequately explored the relative merits, pertinence, and compatibility of other criteria and methods (use-based appraisal, the application of cost benefit analysis, diplomatics, traditional taxonomic values). Nor has it addressed the inherent ambiguity of a method that defines value on the basis of records-creating contexts without defining subsequent mechanisms to shift the focus of analysis to the records. By transforming macro-appraisal into a methodological standard, we will focus our search for best practice. We will permit a real dialogue focused on the needs and utilitarian goals of our discipline and be better able to get on with the job of coping with the residual mountain of paper from the twentieth century and the digital universe that confronts us in the next. If we cut through the theoretical debate, it is clear that much that is attributed, rightly, to bad past practice has nothing to do with invalid theoretical conceptions or poor methodological assumptions – it has to do with a complete lack of adequate standards and practices, which have left us disconnected as a profession.

By dealing with macro-appraisal as a standard for *methodology*, we do not constrain the issues or criteria that might be discussed at the theoretical level. By establishing a standardized approach through discussion in an open forum, we will ensure that it will accommodate the various legitimate perspectives of past, current, and future practitioners. By ensuring that macro-appraisal is broadly defined and transparently conceived, we better guarantee that undesirable, for example, political, parochial, and a priori criteria are gradually weeded out and we permit true competition in the development of acquisition strategy and appraisal methods. We will ensure adequate flexibility and intellectual freedom for archives practitioners. This is more than a vain hope; it is a realistic and worthwhile professional goal.

Applications of macro-appraisal as an appraisal strategy do not occur in a void. They inevitably depend on and are conditioned by past acquisition experience. The reading of texts in this sense (as past acquisition experience) is a prerequisite for the theory to work. Yet, what is a reading of past disposition experience in relation to a function if it is not an indirect reading of the texts in

another sense, the records themselves? Macro-appraisal theory does not acknowledge this, but to work as an effective appraisal or acquisition application, it implicitly *starts* with the records, not the function – just where our predecessors also began. Richard Brown understands this but fails to follow up on its theoretical implications. On the other hand, Cook does not fully acknowledge the importance of examining the records up-front in order to properly effect the functional macro-appraisal but implicitly takes the imperative to analyze records into account better than Brown by leaving the scope, nature, and purposes of micro-appraisal ambiguous in his theoretical writings.

Macro-appraisal arises as much out of a revulsion for bad past practice as it does from the imperative to identify a new intellectual paradigm for appraisal in face of the challenges of electronic records. Just one example of poor practice is the failure of several generations of archivists at the National Archives to adequately document explanations of their selections, resulting in a huge intellectual loss. The problem was not the application of “taxonomic” appraisal criteria as part of a product-centred approach, or even a resort to derivative assumptions based on current research interests: the problem was in not writing down assumptions and findings, and lax management in not planning for and requiring this most important of all archival functions. Thus, past generations of archivists’ knowledge of functional context is completely lost, buried in unsubstantiated summary statements of evidential and informational value. Imagine the value that might have been preserved from past appraisals had archivists systematically documented the assumptions behind their various notations on the thereby annotated file classification lists that served as appraisal documentation. The problem with past practice was never the lists, the criteria, or a product-orientation; it was the failure to preserve and record the intellectual context which informed the appraisal. I do not think that we can avoid our collective professional responsibilities by focussing on the limitations within Schellenberg as methodology and I do not think the purpose of theory should be to avoid acknowledging frankly where the responsibility for the limitations in past appraisal lies – the mediocre professional standards practised by both line portfolio archivists and their managers. What macro-appraisal theory has done in this context is remind us that if we aspire to the status of an intellectual discipline, we must apply it with rigour. But that is not a matter of theory or scientific method; it is a question of professional standards – and one might add, common sense.

From another perspective this analysis can be summed up in the simple aphorism that “theory is *not* practice.” In other words, it is the appraisal archivist’s conscientiousness and integrity as an independent researcher operating within broad professional standards – not his or her theoretical sophistication – that guarantees the validity of the keep/destroy decision. Based on this writer’s ten years experience appraising central agencies of the Government of Canada in some twenty-six separate appraisals, the application of macro-

appraisal techniques inevitably depends on and is conditioned by an understanding of past acquisition experience and the accumulated store of knowledge available regarding the *records*. If we do not acknowledge that appraisal is and will always remain an exercise of judgement as to the value of records – not merely a reading or analysis of relationships – we will never come to terms intellectually with what we are doing. To come to any coherent conclusions we, as practitioners need both, the focus on process (that is, creational contexts) and the quasi-traditional focus on the records product.

Despite its problematic features – perhaps because of them – the theoretical, methodological, and programmatic discipline of macro-functional appraisal warrants more than a passing glance by the profession; it deserves a pragmatic commitment to explore its potential as a vehicle for a higher level of professional discourse and increased intellectual rigour, and as the basis for a true measurement of results. In the broad sense, this writer has become a somewhat skeptical adherent to the theory and much of the method of macro-appraisal as articulated by Terry Cook. Whatever its failings, the body of the author's appraisal work since 1993 has amounted to an effort to apply a macro-appraisal approach in the spirit of Catherine Bailey's call to "test its principles rigorously, indeed to the breaking point."<sup>74</sup> It is worth pushing the theory to its limits in our appraisal practice, for it is through defining the limits that we will be enabled to formulate a true professional standard. If in the process of experimenting with and testing the theory, we find a common means to communicate and compare our findings which permits ever greater levels of generalization about theory (regarding strategies, proved patterns of selection criteria) and which hence permit us as a profession to perform the societal appraisal function more effectively, the result will have been worth the effort.

At the heart of the new appraisal paradigm – designed to accommodate our discipline to our age's technological imperative – is records appraisal, a quaint old procedure for exercising judgement to preserve both a record of the commonalities within our broader shared experiences and a witness to that which makes us different in an age of global homogenization. Into the appraisal of the record this exercise of judgment brings a consideration of national distinctiveness, regional identity, cultural or social diversity, minority experience, and the many nuances of meaning by which individuals reconcile, accept, and understand social and cultural values – their recorded personal experience then going on to become a force moving their diverse respective communities through the shared meaning that the archival record captures. Somehow I doubt that the capture of this rich legacy of meaning will ever be accomplished through reliance on a template – any template.

In our quest for an appraisal standard, archivists need to ensure that the standard remains a true archival laboratory, a house of many rooms for many experiments using many methods. T. R. Schellenberg captured this imperative when he observed that "diverse judgments ... may well assure a more ade-

quate social documentation.”<sup>75</sup> That is the real foundation of a theoretically sound, empirical, and research-based appraisal standard. This is not science, but it is a legitimate line of intellectual inquiry that can withstand the tests of logical coherence. Hopefully in the process of constructing such a standard we will remember that the end of all this professional endeavour is the best record, not the best theoretical commentary on how to find it. Appraisal is not the private prerogative of theorists and managers: it belongs to all professional practitioners acting in their capacity as independent researchers. Theory, indeed, is not practice. May each enrich the other for many years to come.

### Notes

- \* I wish to thank all my many present and former colleagues of the Government Archives and Records Disposition Division of the National Archives of Canada for their collaboration, criticism, and inspiration over the years. I have spared them all (save one) a pre-reading of this text and I therefore, have nobody but myself to blame for any errors. The views expressed herein are my own, and do not reflect those of the National Archives of Canada or its management. In preparing this paper, I took great comfort in the aphorism of Norman Mailer when he observed, “Once a man’s 50, he’s only entitled to make large and serious mistakes.” It perhaps needs to be said that this paper would never have been written without the inspiration and professional leadership provided by Terry Cook in the ten years since I became an archivist. I thank him for his criticisms of the extract from this paper that I presented to the joint Conference of Association of Canadian Archivists and the Archives Association of Ontario in London in June 1999. Don Macleod offered invaluable criticisms and editorial improvements.
- 1 Ian E. Wilson, “Towards a Vision of Archival Services,” *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990–91), pp. 91–100.
  - 2 See Terry Cook’s extensive bibliographic notes on this subject in his article, “What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift,” *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997), pp. 7–63. The key writers from whom I have gained my understanding of the development of post-Schellenberg appraisal theory and methodology are F. Gerald Ham, Richard Cox, Helen Samuels, Frank Boles, David Bearman, Kenneth Thibodeau and, in Canada, Terry Cook, Richard Brown, Barbara L. Craig, Terry Eastwood, Luciana Duranti, and Heather MacNeil.
  - 3 The focus for much of this discussion was the second plenary session, “The Profession of the Archivist in the Information Age.” The main contributions were by Hervé Bastien, Richard J. Cox, Sue Gavrel, and P. Manamperi. See Hervé Bastien, “Standardizing the Appraisal and Selection Process,” Richard J. Cox, “Standardizing Archival Practices: A Tool for the Information Age,” Sue Gavrel, “Information Technology Standards: Tools for the Archivist,” and P. Manamperi, “Ramp Studies: Their Present and Future Direction as a Tool to Foster the Standardization of Practices on the International Level,” *Archivum* XXXIX (Proceedings of the 12th International Congress on Archives, Montreal, September, 1992).
  - 4 For the current purpose, I refer only to Bearman’s seminal article, written in collaboration with Margaret Hedstrom, “Reinventing Archives for Electronic Records: Alternative Delivery Systems,” in Margaret Hedstrom, ed., *Electronic Records Management Program Strategies: Archives and Museum Informatics Technical Report* 18 (Pittsburgh, 1993), and his original formulation in David Bearman and Richard H. Lytle, “The Power of the Principle of Provenance,” *Archivaria* 21 (Winter 1985–86), pp. 14–27. The body of Bearman’s discourse on the need to ensure “recordness” in electronic records systems through applying the principle of provenance and the implications that electronic records requirements have for archival prac-

- tice at the theoretical level are fundamental to the whole contemporary discussion of appraisal theory and practice, regardless of whether a student agrees with his argument for the future repositioning of the profession.
- 5 Heather MacNeil, "Overview of the InterPARES Project" paper presented in a plenary session of the joint conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists and the Archives Association of Ontario, London, Ontario, 5 June 1999. "Appraisal criteria and Methods of Selection of Authentic Electronic Records" is one of the four major research areas of the project. There are five explicit questions to be addressed: What is the influence of digital technology on appraisal? When should electronic records be appraised? Should they be appraised more than once and if so, when? Who should be responsible for appraisal? What are the criteria, methods, and strategies that satisfy the conceptual requirements pertaining to the assurance of authenticity?
  - 6 International Organization for Standardization, Technical Committee 46: Information and Documentation, Sub-committee 11: Archives/records management, otherwise expressed in the acronym, ISO/TC 46/SC11.
  - 7 I am indebted to Terry Cook for reminding me of this aspect of the Australian initiative at the advanced training "Institute" on archival appraisal held in London, Ontario in June 1999. The emphasis of the current ISO project is on achieving consensus on records management and leaving archival appraisal for later, but it is significant that the original Australian initiative incorporated archival appraisal.
  - 8 The most recent articulation of this theme occurred at the Joint AAO/ACA Conference in London, Ontario in June 1999 in a paper presented under the rubric of "Standards for Canadian Archival Practice: Current and Future Issues," but defence of rigorous professional standards has informed Haworth's leadership throughout the development and adoption of the *Rules for Archival Description*.
  - 9 Terry Eastwood, "Towards a Social Theory of Appraisal," in Barbara L. Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination. Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor* (Ottawa, 1992). Also see Eastwood, "How Goes It with Appraisal?" *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), pp. 111–21.
  - 10 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 A. Taylor* (Ottawa, 1992), pp. 38–70.
  - 11 Bruce Wilson, "Systematic Appraisal of the Records of the Government of Canada at the National Archives of Canada," *Archivaria* 38 (Fall 1994), p. 220, emphasis added. Cook's version is found in Cook, "Mind Over Matter," p. 47.
  - 12 This understanding is often associated with post-modern approaches to the philosophy of history. Cook, "Mind Over Matter," pp. 43–46. Richard Brown is even more rigorous in placing macro-appraisal theory within the context of post-modern theories of knowledge and in distinguishing appraisal from empiricism. See Brown, "Records Acquisition Strategy and its Theoretical Foundation: The Case for a Concept of Archival Hermeneutics," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–92), pp. 34–56.
  - 13 F. Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," *American Archivist* 38 (January 1975), p. 8.
  - 14 Hans Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage: Issues in the Appraisal of Archival Sources," in Hermina Joldersma and Richard Klumpenhower, eds. and trans., *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987), pp. 69–107; F. Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," *American Archivist* 38 (January 1975), pp. 5–13; idem, "Archival Strategies for the Postcustodial Era," *American Archivist* 44 (Summer 1981), pp. 207–16; Helen Samuels, "Who Controls the Past," *American Archivist* 49 (Spring 1986), pp. 109–24; David Bearman, and Richard H. Lytle, "The Power of the Principle of Provenance," *Archivaria* 21 (Winter 1985–86), pp. 14–27; Richard Cox and Helen Samuels, "The Archivist's First Responsibility: A Research Agenda to Improve the Identification and Retention of Records of Enduring Value," *American Archivist* 51 (Winter and Spring 1988), pp. 28–46.

- 15 Richard Brown, "Macro-Appraisal Theory and the Context of the Public Records Creator," *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995), p. 152 and note 53.
- 16 Wilson, "Systematic Appraisal," pp. 218–31. While this treatment could be described as a somewhat idealized account, it is on the whole an accurate and comprehensive analysis of the program in its first three years of activity, incorporating a fair sense of the ambiguities and limits imposed by actual implementation.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 223.
- 18 Terry Cook, "Macroappraisal: The New Theory and Strategy For Records Disposition at the National Archives of Canada," Records Disposition Division, National Archives of Canada, paper originally presented to the Society of American Archivists (revised typescript, September 1995), p. 4.
- 19 Eastwood, "How Goes It with Appraisal?" p. 112. Eastwood fails, however, to explore fully the implications of his observation or the interconnections between an approach to appraisal based on function and an appraisal based on "use," on which he expounds in detail.
- 20 Jean-Stéphane Piché, "Macro-Appraisal and Duplication of Information: Federal Real Property Management Records," *Archivaria* 39 (Spring 1995), pp. 39–50.
- 21 Bruce Wilson's formulation quoted earlier confirms that micro-appraisal is, in fact, considered both optional and subordinate within the larger micro-appraisal methodology.
- 22 The two archivists responsible for the Privy Council Office over the last twenty years estimate informally that the proportion of PCO hardcopy records having archival value is approximately seventy-five per cent but that the estimate is considerably lower for electronic systems. These figures exclude common administrative records. (Interviews with James Whalen and David Smith, March-April 1999.)
- 23 Notwithstanding popular notions of government inefficiency, the case for duplication and functional overlap may have been greatly overstated by macro-appraisal theorists. Cross-institutional functional analyses conducted by the National Archives since 1991 have coincided, ironically, with the rationalization of the post-war liberal welfare state bureaucracy around the world. The principles and criteria for accountability that have been created through the reformed expenditure management system mean that government departments themselves produce high level macro-appraisals of their activities, updated annually. We archivists belatedly (and ironically) discovered the virtues of an appraisal methodology promising huge operational efficiencies for archival acquisition just when government reforms rationalized most of the real duplication out of the system.
- 24 Government of Canada, National Archives of Canada, *Multi-Institutional Disposition Authorities and Supporting Documents*, 1st edition (1998), published for internal circulation within the Government of Canada. The appraisal of the financial management function is reviewed in some detail in Section 4 of this paper.
- 25 Piché, "Macro-Appraisal," p. 48.
- 26 In the interests of brevity, may I refer the reader to articles cited elsewhere in the notes by Brien Brothman, Richard Brown, Terry Cook, Richard Cox, Barbara Craig, Luciana Duranti, Terry Eastwood, Mark Greene, Gerald Ham, Chris Hurley, Heather MacNeil, and Helen Samuels.
- 27 Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," p. 32.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- 30 The prolific David Bearman is obviously the key theorist in this regard. His published work is extensive but the article written in collaboration with Margaret Hedstrom, "Reinventing Archives for Electronic Records: Alternative Service Delivery Options," in Margaret Hedstrom, ed., *Electronic Records Management Program Strategies* (Pittsburgh, 1993), pp. 82–98, is representative. Hedstrom is accessible through the same work. Peter Scott's main early contribution to archival thinking is the Australian Series System which is predicated

on the notion that adopting the concept of the records continuum is fundamental to the paradigm shift and professional repositioning necessary to cope with the electronic record. Electronic records media demonstrate clearly the methodological advantages of giving functional context of creation precedence over records content and physicality. For the formative work of Peter Scott, see *Archives and Manuscripts*, various articles, 1979–1981. For the more recent Australian theoretical amplifications on functional context of creation see Chris Hurley, “Ambient Functions: Abandoned Children to Zoos,” *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995), pp. 21–39.

- 31 Cook, “Mind Over Matter,” p. 42.
- 32 *Ibid.*, pp. 47–48.
- 33 *Ibid.*, Endnote 83.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 37. Emphasis added.
- 35 *Ibid.*, Endnote 55.
- 36 Terry Cook, “The Appraisal of Case Files: Sampling and Selection Criteria for the Government Archives Division, National Archives of Canada,” internal report (January 1991); *idem*, *The Archival Appraisal of Records Containing Personal Information: A RAMP Study with Guidelines* (Paris, 1991); Government Archives Division, National Archives of Canada, “An Appraisal Methodology: Guidelines for Performing an Archival Appraisal” (typescript, December 1991); Cook, “Mind over Matter,” pp. 58–59.
- 37 This quotation is taken from Cook’s recent and as yet unpublished paper entitled “Archival Appraisal and Collection: Issues, Challenges, New Approaches,” special lecture delivered to University of Maryland and NARA Staff at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland, 21 April 1999, pp. 28–29. I am indebted to Terry Cook for providing a general distribution of this text to archivists engaged in appraisal of government records at National Archives of Canada. For the record, when Cook uses “political” as a criteria of value, what he means is interference by senior administrators outside or inside the archival institution or by interest groups with sufficient influence to distort the acquisition decisions that would have otherwise resulted from the institution’s acquisition strategy and adoption of archivists’ recommendations, based on their unbiased application of macro-appraisal criteria. This criteria is a curiously inconsistent element to be associated with an appraisal theory but its merits (and demerits) as something to be considered in relation to professional conduct and standards is beyond the scope of this essay.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- 39 T. R. Schellenberg, “The Appraisal of Modern Public Records,” *National Archives Bulletin* 8 (Washington, 1956); *idem*, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago, 1956); and *idem*, *Modern Archives: The Management of Archives* (New York, 1965).
- 40 Richard Brown, “Records Acquisition and Its Theoretical Foundation: The Case for a Concept of Archival Hermeneutics,” *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–92), pp. 34–56, and *idem*, “Macro-Appraisal Theory and the Context of the Public Records Creator,” *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995), pp. 121–72.
- 41 Brown, “Macro-Appraisal Theory,” pp. 124–25.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 140.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 142.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 143.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 129.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 159.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 150.
- 48 Brown, “Records Acquisition,” p. 52.
- 49 *Ibid.*, pp. 43–44.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- 51 Brown, “Macro-Appraisal Theory,” p. 169, endnote 36.

- 52 Jim Suderman, "Appraising Records of the Expenditure Management Function: An Exercise in Functional Analysis," *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997), p. 138.
- 53 Brown, "Records Acquisition," p. 39.
- 54 *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40.
- 55 The portrayal of Brown's conception of macro-appraisal in contrast to Cook's is, of course, simplified in order to develop the central argument in a sufficiently succinct fashion. The insistence on methodological consistency between the macro and micro levels is implicit in the work of both authors. In part Brown comes off as being more consistent because he deliberately focuses on theory, with a commentary on its implications for acquisition strategy, while Cook almost always incorporates theory, strategy, *and* method (as well as the scope of appraisal) in all his treatments. Yet, this having been said, Brown is clearly out to create consistency; while Cook wants consistency but, in seeking to build synthesis, often offers a broad version of the micro-appraisal application.
- 56 Brown, "Records Acquisition," pp. 44–51.
- 57 *Ibid.*, pp. 51–52. The parallel formulation in his 1995 article, "Macro-Appraisal Theory," is found on page 140.
- 58 For the full scope of the literature by these authors, consult Brown's bibliographic footnotes in his two *Archivaria* articles. The three principal monographs are Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York, 1972); Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge, 1984); and Haydon White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, 1987).
- 59 Brien Brothman, "Orders of Value: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991), pp. 78–100.
- 60 Brown, "Macro-Appraisal Theory," p. 151.
- 61 Schellenberg, *Appraisal of Modern Public Records*, and *idem*, *Modern Archives*. A rereading of the texts shows that his evidential order of value is entirely divorced and independent of future research considerations. Of course, as the macro-appraisal theorists claim, presentist user-based considerations still hopelessly encumber his concept of informational value. Theoretically, of course, they need not. Schellenberg's two commentaries on appraisal were never meant to be theory. They were written by a senior archival administrator seeking to give practical guidance to line archivists confronting the wall of records of the Federal administration in Washington. Schellenberg merely admitted up-front what macro-appraisal theorists admit through the back door via "political" considerations that are outside the parameters of pure theory. Why theorists continue to assail this exemplary public administrator, though basically as a symbol, is difficult to understand. Terry Eastwood has long since observed the obvious, that Schellenberg's manuals were the work of a methodologist, not a theorist. Terry Eastwood, "Nailing a Little Jelly to the Wall of Archival Studies," *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993), note 4, pp. 245–46. For a defence of Schellenberg and the American tradition of pragmatism in appraisal methodology see Frank Boles and Mark A. Greene, "Et Tu Schellenberg? Thoughts on the Dagger of American Appraisal Theory," *American Archivist* 59 (Summer 1996), pp. 298–310; and Linda J. Henry, "Schellenberg in Cyberspace," *American Archivist* 61 (Fall 1998) pp. 309–27.
- 62 Catherine Bailey, "From the Top Down: The Practice of Macro-Appraisal," *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997), p. 94.
- 63 *Ibid.*, pp. 90–96.
- 64 *Ibid.*, p. 96.
- 65 Authority 95/026, Brian P.N. Beaven, "Archival Appraisal Report on the Records of the Office of Commissioner of Official Languages," unpublished report, submitted and approved, 1995, National Archives of Canada.
- 66 Suderman, "Appraising Records," pp 129–42. The designations of NA study and AO study are

not meant to suggest that the two approaches compared in this case study represent discernable institutional patterns. It is meant only to objectify an analysis in which the author is a principal author of one of the two studies. The management of the Archives of Ontario did not ultimately accept the archival recommendations developed by Suderman. The analysis here is a case study of appraisal practice – not of management prerogative in determining disposition policy.

- 67 The whole theoretically based application of the functional method also coincidentally conforms to the internal administrative structure of the Archives of Ontario (AO), which does not distinguish between private and public records but instead relies on the same archivist to apply his or her knowledge regarding the documentation of broad social functions (e.g., education, arts and culture, transportation, industry, social welfare) to the acquisition and management of both private and public sources. At the ministerial level, where these broad social functions are addressed, comprehensive, coherent documentation may thus become perhaps more paramount. This institutional culture contrasts with the situation that the present author faced at the National Archives.
- 68 The previous principal appraisals related to Treasury Board which I authored relate to Crown Corporations Directorate (authority 1990/009), Comptroller General of Canada (1991/009), Administrative Policy Branch (1992/015, an amendment to 88/005), and the Personnel Policy Branch (1993/031).
- 69 Working in an institutional environment in which the Treasury Board *fonds* was regarded within the National Archives at one and the same time (and often by the same managers) as being both almost wholly redundant and contrarily a valuable tool by which the National Archives could effectively and efficiently capture succinct and accurate profiles of all government programs, the author came to the seemingly convenient conclusion that the central agency record was indeed valuable. He recommended retention of almost half of the Program Branch registry. The high level of ambivalence regarding the Treasury Board *fonds* in fact provided great freedom in this particular case. The author recommended the retention of almost half of the registry because he could find no rationale for taking any less, much as he tried. The review officers had virtually no suggestions to make contrary to my proposed selection.
- 70 Brian P.N. Beaven, "Archival Appraisal Report on Common Administrative Records Associated with the Financial Management and Comptrollership Functions of the Government of Canada," unpublished report, submitted June 1998, approved under the signature of the National Archivist, January 2000.
- 71 While there are currently 103 agencies subject to the *National Archives of Canada Act*, this should not confuse the issue. The larger figure reflects all government agencies that existed before the program review of 1993–1998 and includes both those institutions governed by the *Act* and those not covered.
- 72 The final irony in the contrasting two appraisal methodologies and the acquisition strategy of their respective institutions is that, while the Archives of Ontario did not follow Suderman's recommendations and therefore conformed to National Archives disposition practice regarding expenditure management records, the management of the National Archives rejected small portions of the present author's recommendations in his 1998 report. The National Archives instead opted for a strategy akin to Suderman's institution-specific approach for the disposition of internal audit final report files.
- 73 Mark Greene, "'The Surest Proof': A Utilitarian Approach to Appraisal," *Archivaria* 45 (Spring 1998), pp. 127–69. It should be pointed out that the utilitarian approach demonstrated in this article is not a pure "use-based" appraisal criterion and methodology. It is a sophisticated cost-benefit methodology incorporating multiple considerations applicable to certain kinds of bulky private institutional record series that have already been analyzed in terms of their functional context using a macro-functional appraisal framework adapted to private institutional records collections. Greene explicitly acknowledges this functional contextualization

at the beginning of his analysis (p. 132). In fact, Greene's approach is more distinct in its acute awareness of the legitimacy and importance of resource constraints and costs as appraisal issues and criteria than it is in regarding use- or research-orientation in its measure of benefit.

74 Bailey, "From the Top Down," p. 123.

75 Schellenberg, *Modern Archives*, p. 149.