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Two Theories of Appraisal: Cook and Duranti

Kristin Yiotis

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Lori Lindberg, Professor

San Jose State University School of Library and Information Science

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Terry Cook (1992) has established a conceptual framework that provides archivists with tools for their record creating activities. These tools assist archivists in analyzing societal functions and institutions for the purpose of appraising them. Appraisal is done in order to determine which institutional activities create records that provide a true image of society. These records, then, get preserved permanently in the archives for the sake of providing future generations with an image of society as it really is but not necessarily as conceived by those producing the records. Cook “shift[s] the focus of appraisal from the record to the societal context in which the record is created” (p. 46). Thus the act of appraisal lies outside and beyond the societal institutional and agencies that may have created the records.

Archives exist in order to establish for posterity a true representation of society because the written records ARE the permanent activities of societal institutions and agencies. By providing proof that these activities happened, the records create an image of society that is permanent and must be preserved for posterity. Because the very development and purpose of writing [institutions], was, by definition, to order and record societal activity, and because the records are, by definition, the recorded activities of a society, then an accumulation of the whole body of records provides a true image of society as a whole. So activities that are put into writing to establish evidence of their occurrence should, according to traditional archivists, be preserved. According to traditional archival theory, archives are, by definition, the whole of the records, and should be preserved as a whole. Jenkinsen (1984) advises that archives are the whole of the records produced in the activities of an organization or agency, and that the role of the archivist is to supply unbroken custody of these records.

Cook (1992) is reacting to the tradition role of the archivists, that of providing custody for the whole body of records, because of the nature of record keeping today (p. 40). So many records are produced that it is impossible to simply save all the records of all the functions and structures of society, like traditional archives did in the past. For Cook, approaching preservation with the aim of preserving the whole body of the records is impossible in today's world of electronic records (p. 43). Archivists are in the position to make decisions about the value of records because they can decide what merits saving. So by his theory, the role of the archivist is not to impartially preserve of the whole of the records, but includes appraisal with the goal of finding those "hot spots" where the image of society is the most "direct" (Cook, p. 58).

In his model, rather than appraise the records themselves, Cook (1992) suggests that archivists appraise the contexts in which records are created (p. 46). Records created in contexts that involve multiple elements of society may provide more evidence and a better image of society to future generations. The goal is to preserve images of society's "most important characteristics and features, ...Taylor's forms and patterns of knowledge" (Cook, p. 51). The archivist analyzes society's functions to figure out how these functions are carried out by society's structures. Cook calls his approach macro-appraisal because the focus of analysis is on society as a whole and not on individual record (micro-appraisal). Focusing on the records themselves, on the "matter," "breaks down in the reality of modern bureaucracies" (Cook, p. 43). Cook wants archivists to focus on the "mind," the "processes...used by institutions to articulate its...collective mind" (p. 42).

This original split of a holistic, Platonic universe that united mind and matter into the subjective mind of the creator and the object itself (matter)--with the major focus on the object--is the Cartesian dichotomy. Postmodernist philosophers, such as Foucault, are refocusing science

on "the mind behind the matter, the intelligence behind the fact, the function behind the structure" (Cook, 1992, p. 44). To refocus on mind rather than matter, archivists ask questions like: "What are the reasons for and the nature of the communications between the citizen and the state? What should be documented? Why were the records created in the first place? How were they used by their original users? What formal functions and mandates of the creator [did] they support? Which record creators have the most importance?" (Cook, p. 47). Cook wants archivists to analyze "reasons for and the nature of the communications between the citizen and the state...[and] larger functions these acts of recording served" (p. 47).

Cook's (1992) view is not that archives preserve the image of society as a snapshot in time, but to accumulate over time, not by preserving the whole of the records, but through an analysis of the functions of a society and the institutions that carry out these functions. The analysis will inform the archivist of those revealing, information laden interactions or points of intersection between societal functions and institutions, and the individuals who come into contact with them. A true image of society is reflected in the activities or the points of contact between the institution (the structures), the individual (the citizen-client), and the purpose (the function) the institution is designed to fulfill. The archivist ranks the institutions according to their capacity "to create records of value in a global way rather than dealing directly...with individual records" (Cook, p. 53) in order to "collect the best series of records" (p. 52).

The second part of Cook's model involves the citizen-state interaction. This interaction involves three dimensions--functions, structures, and clients. Functions are the mores, traditions, purposes, inherent in, and established by, a society that marks one culture from another. This is an abstract concept made concrete through structures. Examples are private property/ownership, marriage/divorce, worship, and commerce/trade. Structures are the social institutions that carry

out the functions. Structures could be government agencies, unions, universities, hospitals, churches, corporations/banks, and families. “The structures of the state...reflect the collective functions of society” (Cook, 1992, p. 50).

Clients are citizens, members, students, patients, customers, individuals, people in general. Records, then, are the outcome of the interaction of these three components and serve as evidence of this interaction. Records are co-created by the originating institutions based on the designated purposes (functions) of these institutions and the clients/citizens to whom these records apply. For example: a citizen goes to the Justice of the Peace to fill out a contract of marriage; a customer goes to the bank and deposits money (client/structure/function).

Cook (1992) stresses the importance of “the nature of citizen’s interaction with society’s functions and structures” (Cook’s “programme and agency”) (p. 57). He is most interested in circumstances showing citizens’ “direct input to the agency through the expression of opinions and emotions in free prose...especially in...circumstances where the citizen *consciously* interacts with the agency (structure) and programme (function) *and* has influence on the decisions made” (p. 57). He calls this interaction “dialectic” (p. 52) and is interested in aberrations or distortions between the goals of the agencies and the actual outcomes. Case file records, he says, may have “potential permanent value” for focusing in on the clearest image of this dialectic, the potential becoming the actual if citizens’ opinions and activities are reflected in an honest and not stilted manner (Cook, p. 57).

Macro-appraisal theory requires that the three factors--structure, function, client--are combined in the citizen-state interaction for that interaction to document society (Cook, 1992, p. 57). It is here that the image of society is sharpest. Cook also says that not all interactions reflected in individual case files are significant and that the commonplace and routine might not

have permanent value (p. 57). In cases where the image is less clear, because of discrepancies between the goals and outcomes of the institutions, or when the function of society goes array, like the Holocaust, then the case files may have permanent value, with that value being assured if the records express the opinions and activities of the citizens honestly and without distortion (Cook, p. 57). He doesn't say, but one assumes, that it is left to the subjectivity of archivists to ascertain those "opinions and activities of the citizens [that are] honest and without distortion" (p. 57).

Cook sees permanent value in citizen-state interactions in which the voice of the citizen can be heard through voluntary expressions of opinions and emotions in free prose (p. 57). In his analysis, documents showing points of tension between citizens' opinions and the "official" position have potential for permanent preservation. In my opinion this could create an archival record biased toward the vocal 10 percent while the records from the silent 90 percent do not get preserved because they do not display any tension and are therefore less significant.

Duranti also disagrees with Cook. Duranti (1994) says that attributing value using content and context as a basis of judgment is "in contrast with the procedural and formal neutrality of the archival whole" (p. 336). In doing so, the impartiality and authenticity of the archival record is undermined. Duranti accepts Jenkinsen's definition of archives as having four characteristics: impartiality (inherently truthful), authenticity (unbroken custody), naturalness (accumulate naturally), and interrelationship (each document has a unique place and relationship with all other documents) (pp. 334-335).

For Duranti (1994), the idea of attributing value to archival documents is in conflict with each of these characteristics (p. 336). While selection, as a routine management practice, keeps intact the relationship of the whole to its parts by concentrating the archives, attributing value to

the archival documents in order to eliminate some would affect the relationship of whole to its parts (p. 336). Selection and attributing value are different acts, the first being quantitative and second qualitative; selection concentrates by eliminating duplicates and like items, whereas attributing value eliminates items for other reasons.

Jenkinsen, too, believes that archivists should not destroy documents they think useless because that would be a personal judgment and archivists must be impartial (Duranti, 1994, p. 337). Duranti follows the tradition set down by Jenkinson: the archivists' primary duty is to preserve the evidentiary nature of the archives, known as the "moral defense of the archives" (p. 337). She sees a basic conflict of interest between 'creators of archival value...and...protectors of evidence who "ensure that records...are faithfully preserved..."' (Eastwood as quoted in Duranti, p. 342). Archivists would betray their primary responsibility "if [they] did not try to preserve the societal archive in its integrity, with its characteristics intact, and do so impartially...and as objectively as...possible" (Duranti, p 343).

For Duranti, archivists are not documenters, interpreters, or judges of societal deeds (1994, p. 343) because they have "a responsibility to future generations of letting them...judge...society on the basis of the documents it produced" (p. 343). Therefore to her, evidence for oral transactions shouldn't be in the archives. They constitute interpretation and not evidence, possibly because they are not in the original form, even though they are in the original voices, of the creators. Recorded oral histories for instance have been interpreted (edited) by the people making the recording. Who are the creators, those speaking or those recording?

Cook's model at times sounds like an interpretation, a "reading," of archival theory that is postmodernist and sometimes even subversive. He attributes potential value, and therefore permanence, to citizen-state interactions in which the citizen influences the state, such that the

state modifies, changes, or abandons its goals (p. 55). This interpretation does not fit with traditional archival theory to which Duranti adheres. Duranti's (1994) final word on appraisal is "No" (p. 344). If appraisal equals attribution of value, appraisal has no place in archival science "because the idea of value is in conflict with the natures of archives" (Duranti, p. 344).

References

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