

ourselves and for the communities we serve. This book is a good place to start the conversation.

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- ¹ Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner, "More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing," *The American Archivist* 68 (Fall/Winter 2005): 208–63.
- ² Randall C. Jimerson, "Archives for All: Professional Responsibility and Social Justice," *The American Archivist* 70 (Fall/Winter 2007): 254.

Using Functional Analysis in Archival Appraisal: A Practical and Effective Alternative to Traditional Appraisal Methodologies

By Marcus C. Robyns. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014. 191 pp.
Softcover. \$55.00. ISBN 978-0-8108-8797-8.

I found the value of this book to be more that of a case study than a work of theory. The author supplies enough biographical information in the preface to reveal the process by which he developed the appraisal system he argues for through his prior career and then his work as archivist of the Central Upper Peninsula and Northern Michigan University Archives. Readers of *The American Archivist* will remember that he and Jason Woolman described this process in a 2011 article that outlines both the use of functional analysis as an appraisal method in a small archives and a suggestion of its use for arrangement as well. Some of the process information and forms used are also available on the NMU Archives website under Records Management.¹

The book is arranged in two parts—a theoretical background section followed by a section on the implementation of the method—plus a set of appendixes providing forms and outlines to support the second part. The theoretical section presents an oversimplified version of what has become at least one canonical view. The work of Muller, Feith, and Fruin and that of Hilary Jenkinson are presented as “custodial” (and a Bad Thing), while Schellenberg is portrayed as a transitional figure who moved archivy into the “postcustodial” age (seen as a Good Thing; although to call Schellenberg postcustodial in actual practice is a serious misunderstanding of what the word means to archivists).² The “Postcustodial” view is said to be underpinned by philosophers Jacques Derrida³

and Anthony Giddens, while its archival restatement is drawn from the work of Hans Booms and Gerald Ham. But the further development of functional analysis in the work of Helen Willa Samuels and the macro-appraisal of Terry Cook represent for the author the full development of these views and the answer that he was looking for to the problems of archiving modern records in educational institutions. After an unsuccessful effort to apply Frank Boles's appraisal method to NMU records, he was persuaded to develop the practices he presents in much of the remainder of the book by what he portrays in the chapter "Functional Analysis on the Far Side of the World" as the ready acceptance of macro-appraisal elsewhere.⁴

Robyns's method for implementing a hybrid practice is based strongly on Helen Willa Samuels's *Varsity Letters* (1998), with Terry Cook's Canadian macro-appraisal method recruited for approval of a top-down approach to an appraisal hypothesis, followed by a test of the hypothesis using micro-appraisal. Robyns is spot on when he argues the importance of getting all those who have the power to help (or hinder) a comprehensive appraisal program, starting at the top, to commit to a policy statement around records in general: this is straight from Gerald Ham's playbook in *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts* (1993). And he follows Barbara Craig's lead in *Archival Appraisal* (2004) by providing an exemplary case study.⁵

It is interesting that the method as implemented at NMU does not in fact depart much, in the end, from Schellenberg or Greene and Daniels-Howell, with a veneer of postmodern discourse to license archival agency. Perhaps his most alarming suggestion—which definitely flies in the face of the detailed research that Terry Cook insisted on to establish the appraisal hypothesis but which Robyns justifies by the plight of the lone arranger—is that undergraduates prepared through workshops conducted by the archivist and constrained by a very explicit and restricted set of data forms (provided in the book) can carry out the research on which the appraisal hypothesis is to be based with the guidance of a contact person recruited from each administrative unit whose records are being appraised.⁶ Once data gathering is completed, for which the author seems to suggest primarily oral interviews with people in the unit, fortified by official university publications for a historical perspective, the lone archivist is charged with working up a report that states the appraisal hypothesis.⁷ After this, micro-appraisal (depending on Boles and Young [1985]⁸ although considerably simplified) is to be carried out to affirm the validity of the appraisal. Unfortunately, the single condensed sample appraisal report provided in an appendix does not give any view of how this process is carried out, or if it includes testing whether the hypothesis might be mistaken.⁹

In the following chapter, the author provides the obligatory nod to electronic records. This chapter suffers from being outdated and lacking practical advice; the

author unaccountably advises the lone arranger to acquire a very muscular IBM server system without any hint of who is going to run it or how digital records preservation is to be done. It is sad that a text on appraisal gives no hint that electronic records have been at the heart of the revolution in both recordkeeping and appraisal because they have forced most archivists to recognize that electronic records are not the same as paper ones. Instead of discussing any of these issues, the book repeats that electronic records should be managed the same as paper. Emblematically, the “Electronic Records Management” page on the NMU Archives website¹⁰ shows a woman using a microfiche reader, not a computer.

Finally, Robyns reviews critiques aimed at functional analysis. He informs us that macro-appraisal practices do not, as Cook recommended, require the skills of a historian, but those of a general critical thinker. He does take the “theory” side of Frank Burke (1981)¹¹ against John Roberts’s “Much Ado about Shelving” (1987),¹² but he characterizes the (highly theory-based) methods of Luciana Duranti and Terry Eastwood (and Jenkinson by implication) as processes that really only need “a well-trained chimpanzee and an electric fence” (p. 101), an interestingly acerbic attitude for someone who developed his process with the assistance of an intern who went on to earn an MAS at the University of British Columbia. It echoes his attitude elsewhere toward other “academic archivists driven to meet tenure expectations that [sic] likely haven’t processed a collection or provided patron reference assistance in years” (p. xvi)—but who, he mourns, are responsible for most of the professional archival literature that fails to provide practical models (presumably Samuels is exempted from this stricture).

As a fairly dramatic portrayal of the plight of the lone arranger in a small archives who has assistance in the appraisal task only from work-study students, yet who is called on to tackle the creation of a full-fledged records archives for the institution (and the book does focus on institutional records), the book is revelatory, with the gritty feel of backstage archival struggle. For a serious guide to the evolution of archival appraisal theory over the past century, one’s time would be far better spent reading more theoretically informed books, even though the author seems to think the lone arranger will find this a waste of time. And the most potentially valuable chapter of the book for its intended audience, chapter 5 in which Robyns lays out his actual practice, is only twenty-six pages long—just ten pages longer than the 2011 article. The book offers only one worked-out appraisal case, and one wishes for more.

Given the questionable value of the thirty-eight-page theory section, the sixteen pages of the initial chapter of the “Implementation” section (which portrays three applications of functional analysis that may or may not be related), the thirteen pages of the “Electronic Records” chapter, and the online availability of the twelve pages of appendixes A and I, readers will be paying \$55 for the 112 pages that might be of use if they encounter similar cases. This comes to

about forty-nine cents per page. The bibliography contains about 255 entries, yet only 75 are cited in the text. Thirty-five footnoted items plus two relevant articles by the author in *The American Archivist* are not in the bibliography at all, which is, at the least, inconvenient. In general, the making of this book or its fast journey through production led to odd dead ends (e.g., an unaccountable mention of Max Evans on page 25, only explained by the important role Evans played in Robyns and Woolman 2011 article); missing photo captions (that appear in the table of contents but not with the photos themselves); and poor copyediting. (I begin to be resigned to the fact that nobody knows the difference between “principal” and “principle.”) One might feel moved to subtract more value for the errors throughout that seem to have been no fault of the author or the critical readers whom he thanks.

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- ¹ Marcus C. Robyns and Jason Woolman, “Institutional Functional Analysis at Northern Michigan University: A New Process of Appraisal and Management of Archival Records,” *The American Archivist* 74 (Spring/Summer 2011): 241–56. This paper is oddly not cited in the bibliography. The records management portion of the archives website is at “Comprehensive Records Survey Project,” Northern Michigan University, <http://www.nmu.edu/archives/node/230>.
- ² See the definition in Richard Pearce-Moses, *Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*, Society of American Archivists, <http://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/p/postcustodial-theory-of-archives>.
- ³ Derrida’s argument in *Archive Fever* is very far from postcustodial—but Robyns advises the reader that it’s fine not to waste time reading this difficult text because all we need to know is that he says that “all interpretations of the past are subjective” and, thereby, presumably licenses archivists to be subjective as well.
- ⁴ Projects in Australia, the Netherlands, and South Africa are reviewed, and in another chapter and in the bibliography, New Zealand and Great Britain are also mentioned, though they do not appear in the chapter.
- ⁵ Craig’s book is listed in the bibliography but never cited in the text.
- ⁶ In some ways, this seems to take us back to Jenkinson’s contention that records creators ought to decide what is appropriate to keep.
- ⁷ Although by the time the book was published in summer of 2014, some considerable number of these appraisals seem to have been done, no completed example of the hypothesis document is given.
- ⁸ Frank Boles and Julia Young, “Exploring the Black Box: The Appraisal of University Administrative Records,” *The American Archivist* 48 (April 1985): 121–40.
- ⁹ For the lone arranger, this work seems to be curtailed. The language is telling: “For the lone arranger . . . microappraisal is a quality-control mechanism and tool that confirms the appraisal process. . . . The archivist should conduct a microappraisal of at least one record series for each office” (p. 73).
- ¹⁰ Page is available at <https://www.nmu.edu/archives/electronic-records-management>.
- ¹¹ Frank Burke, “The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States,” *The American Archivist* 44 (January 1981): 40–46.
- ¹² John Roberts, “Archival Theory: Much Ado about Shelving,” *The American Archivist* 50 (January 1987): 66–74.