Our Archives, Our Selves: Documentation Strategy and the Re-Appraisal of Professional Identity

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A b s t r a c t

The relatively recent realization that archivists are more often shapers of the past than neutral keepers of the past has its root in the intersection of appraisal theory and professional identity. This paper explores the relationship between the two through an analysis of the literature on archival documentation strategy. Though ultimately unworkable, documentation strategy caught archivists' attention because, as this paper argues, it represented a practical application of a larger identity shift within the profession.

W hen a concept of archives exists among the public, it is a place where history *resides*, rather than where history comes into being. The belief that archives represent an unmediated connection with

the past is not simply a matter of society's faith; the belief that the archivist simply accepts what comes through the repository door and does not apply any "element of his personal judgment" in the process held, and still holds, remarkable sway in the profession.[1] Recently, however, the recognition of the archives as a creation has become almost fashionable. In the mid-1990s, Michel-Rolph Trouillot described archives as the site where some histories are empowered and others "silenced." More recently, Terry Cook described archivists as "active agents in constructing social and historical memory," who choose what to keep and what to throw away and in so doing create the past for future generations. Appraisal, Cook argues, is not simply a process or function, "it is the *only* archival endeavor."[2]

This evolution of the perception of the archivist from keeper of the past to the archivist as shaper of the past is a relatively recent development that can be tied, in large part, to a changing understanding of what and *who* constituted history, particularly through the development of social history and the broader social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. That this broader mandate for societal change filtered into the archival community is perhaps best illustrated by left-leaning scholar Howard Zinn's paper entitled "The Activist Archivist," which he delivered at the Society of American Archivists' 1970 annual meeting. Zinn urged archivists to realize the elite bias of their collections and to actively seek records to document the lives of ordinary people. Soon after the conference, Zinn reiterated these ideas in an article entitled "Secrecy, Archives, and the Public Interest," in which he again exhorted archivists not to "perpetuate the political and economic status quo," but instead to realize that the records they so carefully preserved were "biased towards the important people in our society." If ordinary people, and not society's elite, shaped the past, as Zinn and other historians believed, this bias produced a skewed historical record. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, this skewed record allowed power to remain in the hands of the elite. To solve these problems, Zinn argued, the government had to allow unrestricted access to its records, and archivists had to "take the trouble to compile a whole new world of documentary material about the lives, desires, needs, of ordinary people."[3]

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[1] Hilary Jenkinson, *Manual of Archives Administration*, quoted by Luciana Duranti, "The Concept of Appraisal and Archival Theory," *American Archivist* 57 (1994): 337.

[2] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 26; Terry Cook, "Remembering the Future: Appraisal of Records and the Role of Archives in Constructing Social Memory," in *Archives, Documentation and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, ed. Francis Xavier Blouin and William G. Rosenburg (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 170, 169.

[3] Howard Zinn, "Secrecy, Archives and the Public Interest," *The Midwestern Archivist* 2 (1977): 20, 21, 25 (originally printed in *The Boston University Journal*, Fall 1971).

The lively discussion that followed this presentation did not concern the radical nature of Zinn's politics or the content of the existing historical record; rather, the discussion focused on the "controversial question of the archivist as a 'collector' of documentary materials."[4] Archivists had always seen their role as that of neutral caretakers and custodians of records, not as "activist" collectors who consciously solicited records to shape the content of their collections.[5] Change, however, seemed to be in the air: American society was transformed during the tumult of the 1960s, and by the 1970 SAA annual meeting, this change had filtered into the archival community. In 1972, the SAA Committee for the 1970s resolved to guard against the "elitism in manuscript collecting," as Zinn had advocated.[6] Though archivists continued to debate the nature of these changes, the archival profession slowly became less passive and more active. A new professional identity for archivists emerged, one wherein the archivist recognized a greatly increased responsibility to future generations. In the new conception of the profession, archivists not only collected and preserved materials for future generations, they ensured that their repositories possessed a comprehensive record of society, thereby creating a past for everyone, rather than just for the elite members of society.

This concept was not a complete break with their professional past, though; the move toward professional self-consciousness regarding collecting began with institutional repositories and T. R. Schellenberg's 1956 bulletin, which described the now fundamental appraisal criteria, evidential and informational value. While firmly grounded as a pragmatic response to the problem of more records than resources, Schellenberg's approach was critical for several reasons. Not only did appraisal make the archivist active, rather than passive or neutral, it also, as Frank Boles writes, reaffirmed American archivists' tie to a national tradition of broader historical responsibility, rather than the purely administrative responsibility of European archives. Though Schellenberg only intended to address problems specific to institutional repositories, this new direction in appraisal would have a significant impact on collecting repositories as well.[7]

Schellenberg's appraisal criteria implied a broader identity for all archivists, but it was not until the 1970s that archivists began to explicitly discuss what this

[4] David Delgado, "The 34th Annual Meeting of the Society of American Archivists," *American Archivist* 34 (January 1971): 46.

[5] It should be noted that "activist archivist" denotes a position on appraisal and collecting that aimed to create a more complete record of all members of society, and not political activism.

[6] This group also resolved to commit the Society to broader "social goals of racial justice, equal employment and reasonable access to research materials." Philip P. Mason, "The Society of American Archivists in the Seventies: Report of the Committee for the 1970s," *American Archivist* 35 (April 1972): 205.

[7] Theodore R. Schellenberg, *The Appraisal of Modern Public Records: National Archives Bulletin Number 8* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives, 1956); Frank Boles, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts*, Archival Fundamentals Series II (Chicago: Society of American Archivists), 16, 17.

shift meant. Zinn had urged archivists to consider their professional identity via their collecting activities in 1970, but the discussion *among* archivists officially began with Gerald Ham's oft-quoted 1974 speech "The Archival Edge." The archivist that Ham described held the responsibility of providing a "representative record of human experience in our time" for future generations. But, Ham asked, "why must we do it so badly?" An archivist who attempted more active collecting faced a number of challenges, including first and foremost a "lack of imaginative acquisition guidelines or comprehensive collecting strategies." The changing nature of society exacerbated this problem; different types of records represented society more clearly than traditional personal papers, and technological advances created more records of less usefulness than ever before. While Ham went so far as to advise archivists to go into the field and document, the truly radical claim lay in his description of archivists' role in society: archivists must do more than care for their collections, they must "hold up a mirror to mankind." From this point of view, the archivist was truly an activist.[8]

Archival documentation strategy emerged in the mid-1980s as an answer to the challenge of collecting documents that could create a more comprehensive picture of society, marking a large-scale shift to a broader interpretation of archival appraisal. The strategy was also a response to a world of increasing documentary abundance and informational deficit. The strategy ultimately proved itself impractical in the real world of archives, but the concept remains important because of the discussion and new ideas that flowed from it. Documentation strategy also represented an attempt for archivists to work out the meaning of their new identity as activist archivists. This attempt to apply the notion of activism in the real world is, ultimately, where the significance of documentation strategy lies.

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If previous generations of archivists had understood themselves as keepers of the past, and not shapers of the past, by the mid-1960s the world was changing. Some thought that to be a successful archivist, one must engage in some kind of "dynamic" activity, mainly in the area of collecting. In the ever-changing modern world, archivists needed to obtain records actively, rather than wait for them to appear at their repositories—but what kind of records should archivists gather? The advent of the new social history, which advocated a "bottom-up" approach to history, required a different sort of documentary record from the papers of governors and other elites traditionally collected by manuscript repositories. Zinn's speech at the Society of American Archivists annual meeting in 1970 put an ideological slant on the social history perspective by arguing for a more inclusive historical record, but also by arguing that archivists must free

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[8] Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," *American Archivist* 38 (January 1975): 5, 7, 13.

themselves from the limitations of a "professionalism" that led to the mainte-nance of an unjust status quo in society.[9]

Part of the call for a more inclusive history included the need to preserve current records, rather than focusing solely on what was already history. As Gerald Ham argued, archivists faced the challenge of collecting a record that accurately represented human experience for future generations. The conscious collection of a comprehensive record of society placed a heavy respon-sibility on archivists, one that not all were comfortable with. In response to Ham's article, Lester J. Cappon wondered, "has he forsaken the records of a more remote past for those of contemporary history?" Worse yet, was Ham advo-cating that the neutral archivist "become the dominant member in his partner-ship with the historian?" From this perspective, the danger lay in the archivist abandoning the supposed objectivity of the profession, without which archivists become mere political actors subject to the whims of their own time. Other archivists were less concerned with the larger picture of the profession and described their concerns in terms of work duties. Though a measure of activism was necessary, argued David E. Horn in *Georgia Archive*, there was always the dan-ger that "over-involvement" in documentary efforts could result in the desertion of the primary archival duties of helping patrons, preserving documents, and processing collections.[10]

By the 1980s, much of this concern about the existence of archival activism died down. Activism had gained acceptance as an important part of the archival professional identity. Archivists now understood the fruits of activism—for example, oral histories—as relevant, rather than artificial, documentation, but this had not translated into any kind of general policies or actions in the archival community. Archival activism implied new kinds of collecting, but as Andrea Hinding noted in 1981, many archives did not even have collecting policies, which rendered the collecting process a "highly subjective and even random activity," making it impossible for archivists to create comprehensive pictures of the world around them. In addition to this lack of organized responses to col-lecting, the world entered the so-called Information Age, characterized by an unprecedented "paper explosion." The increasing concern about the glut of paper in the modern world became a major component of the practical demands placed on archivists. Some of the problems that such large quantities of paper presented included redundancy of some information, but also the

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[9] W. Kaye Lamb, "The Changing Role of the Archivist," *American Archivist* 29 (January 1966): 4; Zinn, "Secrecy, Archives and the Public Interest," 15.

[10] Lester J. Cappon, "The Archivist as Collector," *American Archivist* 39 (October 1976): 435; David E. Horn, "Today's Activist Archivists," *Georgia Archive* 5 (Winter 1977): 20.

absence of other information, as well as its ephemeral nature. Clearly, without some sort of strategy, archivists could not meet the demands of activism.[11]

A new method for responding to the challenges of abundance and documentary gaps, first discussed at SAA's 1984 meeting and then described in Helen Samuels's 1986 article "Who Controls the Past?" offered a plan of action for activism in the modern world of records. Labeled "documentation strategy," this theoretical framework addressed the responsibility of collecting a "lasting record" in the midst of an increasingly complicated modern society. While only part of the strategic arsenal of collecting policies and projects, documentation strategy represented an acknowledgment of the need for activism, because it was an articulate plan to "assure the documentation of an ongoing issue, activity, or geographic area." The strategy assumed a high level of archival cooperation; at the heart of the process was an interinstitutional planning group that would structure the inquiry into the necessary documentation, formulate the strategy, and place the documentation in the appropriate repository.[12]

A fundamental step in this process involved a consideration of what types of documentation would be necessary to create a full record of the ongoing activity. The radical nature of documentation strategy, though, mandated that the investigation not focus on the world of "available material" but rather on what "should exist." In this process, archivists, at least theoretically, had the opportunity to create a perfect record of an occurrence, something truly remarkable in a profession where subject matter is characterized by fragmentation. Not only did this give archivists the opportunity to "intervene in the records creation process," and guarantee that adequate information was recorded, but the information could be recorded in methods amenable to preservation, and it could be assured that it would actually reach the repository to be preserved. Furthermore, the creation of the information and planned dispersal could put an end to the frustrating problem of related records being stored at different locations.[13]

Samuels intended these broad steps to help make the goal of adequate documentary activity a reality in the archival community, and as such, they represented a fusion of the idealism of archival activism and the practical realities of the profession. Other proponents of the strategy, such as Larry Hackman and Joan Warnow-Blewitt, quickly provided a more detailed account of how archivists could implement documentation strategy. The first step in the process, "documentation area definition and preliminary analysis," involved the

[11] Andrea Hinding, "Toward Documentation: New Collecting Strategies for the 1980s," in *Options for the 80s: Proceedings of the Second National Conference of the Association of College and Research Libraries, Conference Held in Minneapolis, Minn. 1981* (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1981), 534.

[12] Helen Samuels, "Who Controls the Past?" *American Archivist* 49 (Spring 1986): 110, 115.

[13] Samuels, "Who Controls the Past?" 120, 122.

gathering of a group of interested individuals and the definition of boundaries. The group would then write a statement of its strategy, addressing what types of records to collect, whom to involve in the process, and how to work with specific records creators. During the implementation phase, the documentation strategy team would work with both repositories and records creators to assure the appropriate creation and collection of records. The remaining steps included communication and revision of this ongoing process.[14]

In case readers felt overwhelmed, Hackman and Warnow-Blewitt sought to reassure them by describing their model as "inclusive," ultimately aimed at "sharing the burden of appraisal and acquisition decisions," rather than increasing the responsibilities of individual archivists. Furthermore, they argued, documentation strategy would ultimately "reduce costs" in a profession characterized by scarce resources. Their case study offered further reassurance that a documentation strategy could be successfully implemented. In fact, the group in question, the American Institute of Physics (AIP), had begun the process in the 1960s without prompting from archivists. In response to concern about the historical record of their profession, scientists at the AIP formed an ad hoc committee to examine the nature of their documentation, which, to their dismay, was decidedly lacking. The committee embarked on an effort to capture or create documentation that would represent a full picture of their profession. The physicists promptly selected the institutions and individuals within their scope and established a "documentation group," which not only monitored progress and worked with archivists, but was also directly involved in the documentary efforts. For Hackman and Warnow-Blewitt, the AIP represented an excellent example of how effective a documentation strategy could be.[15]

Helen Samuels and Philip Alexander also employed a science-related example to illustrate the potential effectiveness of documentation strategy. In their article, "The Roots of 128," Alexander and Samuels described a "hypothetical case study" of a documentation strategy encompassing a geographic area. The documentation of "the Route 128 phenomenon," a group of science-related industries in the Boston area, represented a relatively contained, yet changing and undocumented area for Alexander and Samuels to discuss. In this hypothetical situation, a "prime mover" such as the archivist at MIT, whose repository could benefit from the project, would initiate the documentation strategy and establish an advisory board. As in Hackman and Warnow-Blewitt's model, the group would then establish specific goals, boundaries, and the nature of the

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[14] Larry Hackman and Joan Warnow-Blewitt, "The Documentation Strategy: A Model and Case Study," *American Archivist* 50 (Summer 1987).

[15] Hackman and Warnow-Blewitt, "Documentation Strategy," 20, 35.

documentation. The advisory board would select a "permanent base," and the resulting documentation would be placed in the appropriate repository.[16]

Though only a hypothetical situation, "The Roots of 128" provided an even clearer example of the application of this exciting new theory. If the idea of more comprehensive documentation of society had seemed unattainable, the documentation strategy appeared to offer a clear route to this goal. The assumption underlying documentation strategy was, of course, that every archivist was an activist, indicating that perhaps the understanding of what it meant to be an archivist had changed for good. No longer could archivists remain content with their existing collections or with only collections that ended up on their doorsteps; their roles had expanded to include active documentation of society. While this may have seemed daunting to some, Alexander and Samuels argued, "archivists have a responsibility to at least try their hand at making the right choices."[17]

By 1989, however, documentation strategy remained, as Richard Cox lamented, a "largely untested" concept. The Western New York Project, as described by Cox, represented a test case, but it did not seem to offer much hope for its wide-scale application. Cox examined the attempted application of the documentation strategy concept by six counties in western New York, selected by the New York State Archives and Records Administration, to establish a regional (rather than profession-based like the AIP or Route 128) documentation strategy in 1987 and 1988. The group discovered, however, that this relatively small geographic area "equaled the world in the complexity of documentation." To cope, the working group divided the entirety of human activity into fifteen categories, which those involved ultimately felt were "imprecise" and valued some activities over others.[18] Funding remained a final, and critical, issue. The project members soon learned that "resources to support broad regional documentation analysis were difficult to obtain." Though Cox remained hopeful that archivists could implement documentation strategies on existing budgets, he worried that one institution would ultimately have to assume general responsibility for the project and that documentation strategy might not prove itself cost effective. Due to these unforeseen complications, the group in western New York failed to meet its goal of producing and implementing its strategy.[19]

[16] Philip N. Alexander and Helen Samuels, "The Roots of 128: A Hypothetical Documentation Strategy," *American Archivist* 50 (Fall 1987): 518, 524, 529.

[17] Alexander and Samuels, "Roots of 128," 531.

[18] The use of geographic area as an organizational category "eliminated the participation of records creators" because, at least in this initial phase, the focus was on broad categories, rather than specifics.

[19] Richard Cox, "A Documentation Strategy Case Study: Western New York," *American Archivist* 52 (Spring 1989): 193, 195, 198, 199.

Another trial run, "Documenting Metropolitan Milwaukee," began in 1989. Like the Western New York Project, the Milwaukee project encountered a large number of practical difficulties that handicapped it from the beginning. Not only were the complications of documenting a geographic area extremely difficult, as in western New York, but the project also faced the relatively mundane but critical issues of the participants trying to reconcile the conflict of daily work with the demands of the documentation project and the lack of necessary resources. Institutional self-interest also created difficulties, including an unwillingness to take on "low-use" topics that were important to the project, but not to the individual repository. The Milwaukee project proved to be a valuable learning experience rather than a successful documentation project, particularly in terms of the realization that more needed to be done to "reconcile institution priorities. . .with cooperative goals."[20]

Criticisms of documentation strategy focused on the practical complications faced by the strategists in western New York and Milwaukee. In the first place, argued Frank Boles, documentation strategy was rooted in interarchives cooperation—something that archivists continually advocated but rarely did. Second, the level of involvement necessary to implement a documentation strategy assumed "archival prosperity," which did not match up with the reality of "chronically underfunded" institutions. An institution struggling to make ends meet in regard to both time and money had little reason to embark on an ambitious documentation strategy. Other criticisms were even more blunt: in 1991, Terry Abraham noted that despite the positive nature of the broader implications of documentation strategy, "actually creating a documentation strategy seems very difficult and time consuming." Abraham did not, however, entirely dismiss the concept, but rather argued that its power was "as an ideal," rather than as a practical solution, because it addressed a broader view of both documentation and the role of the archivist.[21]

This broader understanding of documentation strategy seemed to be what actually affected the archival community. Despite the protests of some, like Larry Hackman, who reminded archivists that the strategy was multi-institutional, by its very nature, and not meant for a single institution or individual archivist, archivists applied the term in much broader ways than its proponents had originally intended.[22] For example, in a 1989 article, Ellen Garrison argued that

[20] Timothy L. Ericson, " 'To Approximate June Pasture': The Documentation Strategy in the Real World," *Archival Issues* 22 (1997): 12, 17.

[21] Frank Boles, "Mix Two Parts Interest to One Part Information and Appraise Until Done: Understanding Contemporary Record Selection Processes," *American Archivist* 50 (Summer 1987): 364, 365; Terry Abraham, "Collection Policy or Documentation Strategy: Theory and Practice," *American Archivist* 54 (Winter 1991): 51.

[22] Abraham, "Collection Policy," 52; Larry Hackman, Forum, *American Archivist* 52 (Winter 1989): 8.

individual special-subject repositories had actually been "practitioners, although not philosophers" of documentation strategy for some time. Garrison's example, the Center for Popular Music at Middle Tennessee State University, had used several components of the documentation strategy approach since its founding in 1985. These included use of an advisory group consisting of a cross-section of the university's liberal arts faculty (though not records creators), and the director's role in implementing an active collecting program based on knowledge of the subjects rather than archival theory (the director was not, and is not, an archivist). Through this process the Center developed a functioning, if informal, system of documentary efforts. The Center for Popular Music also reflected documentation strategy on a more fundamental level: collecting was driven by a desire to fill gaps in the documentation of popular music, in this instance rock and "vernacular religious music."[23]

By the late 1980s and 1990s, the definition of documentation strategy had expanded beyond the processes described by Samuels, Hackman, and Warnow-Blewitt to become a broader term for conscious documentary efforts conducted by archivists as an embodiment of archival activism. Meanwhile, Helen Samuels redeveloped the details of the original conceptual framework to suit individual institutions, in contrast to the multi-institutional documentation strategy. Samuels outlined this new approach, which she called "institutional functional analysis," in her 1992 book, *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities.* This analysis urged archivists to think of documentation in terms of the larger picture of the institution's roles instead of focusing on the output of the institution's administrative hierarchy. While Samuels intended functional analysis as a conceptual tool for individual institutions rather than a concrete, coordinated plan of action like documentation strategy, the fundamental concepts of functional analysis were the same as those of documentation strategy. As Samuels argued, both concepts rested on the premise that "analysis and planning must precede collecting," as well as the realization that "nonofficial" records provided as much, if not more, information than official records.[24]

Samuels suggested that archivists could selectively apply the concept as they were able, but this level of detail still left some feeling wary about applying such all-encompassing frameworks. In a review of *Varsity Letters*, Randall Jimerson worried that, despite its merits, functional analysis might seem "overwhelming" to archivists "struggling merely to provide basic services." The sense that average, overworked archivists did not have the time or means to implement any

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[23] Ellen Garrison, "The Very Model of a Modern Major General: Documentation Strategy and the Center for Popular Music," *Provenance* 7 (Fall 1989): 23, 28.

[24] Helen Samuels, *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1992; Lanham Md: Scarecrow Press, 1998); Helen Samuels, "Improving Our Disposition: Documentation Strategy," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–1992): 127, 133.

form of documentary activism was perhaps furthered by Samuels's description of the underlying rationale for documentation strategy and functional analysis. The primary issue of both the strategy and analysis lay in the implication of "a larger, more active role for archivists," giving them the responsibility of creating a comprehensive record for society or an institution.[25]

Another expansion, or "evolution," in the words of Richard Cox, of documentation strategy was macro-appraisal. Developed by the National Archives of Canada in the early 1990s, macro-appraisal resembles documentation strategy in that it involved a reorientation of the concept of value. Like documentation strategy, macro-appraisal sought the determination of value not through administrative hierarchy or historiographical trends but through the creation of a broader record of "society's values." Terry Cook describes this as a process of focusing on "governance, not just of governments governing." This emphasis on the conscious creation of a more complete picture of society illustrates one of the ways in which archival activism expanded, via documentation strategy, into the larger world of archival theory.[26]

These new frameworks may have prolonged the life of the documentation strategy concept, even though by the late 1990s most archivists agreed that the strategy had failed as a practical application. In 1998, Jennifer Marshall published the results of interviews with sixteen archivists regarding the current perceptions of documentation strategy. She found that most recognized the importance of the ideal that documentation strategy represented: one respondent stated that the strategy "has gotten archivists rethinking how they do things and has been especially useful with its ability to engage nonarchivists." Others noted that its value lay in the encouragement of cooperation rather than competition among archivists. Despite these positive views, Marshall's interviewees did not think that documentation strategy was useful as a practical strategy; one argued "archivists have more urgent priorities, such as delivering services to clients."

For Marshall, these perspectives indicated that while archivists were not applying the original version of documentation strategy, they were "applying what they perceive as the most positive aspects" of documentation strategy, primarily in thinking more critically about their collecting activities and in an increased willingness to cooperate with other archives. This apparent rejection of the practical details of documentation strategy, however, overlooked the acceptance of the underlying principles; at issue was not whether archivists *should* actively seek comprehensive documentation, simply that they were not

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[25] Randall C. Jimerson, Review of *Varsity Letters*, *American Archivist* 57 (Winter 1994): 145; Samuels, "Improving Our Disposition: Documentation Strategy," 137.

[26] Richard Cox, "The Archival Documentation Strategy, A Brief Intellectual History, 1984–1994, and Practical Description," *Janus* 2 (1995): 79; Cook, "Remembering the Future," 175, 173.

capable of implementing large-scale documentation strategies given current resources and responsibilities. This finding indicates an acceptance of active documentation in the archival community, even if archivists do not carry strategies out in any systematic way.[27]

Though Marshall's survey indicates an awareness of documentation strategy, in both its positive and negative aspects, the actual level of archival activism brought about by documentation strategy is rather difficult to assess, as no one has conducted a large-scale survey of archivists specifically regarding their opinions and implementation of active documentation projects. Activism can be assessed, however, through a survey carried out by Cynthia K. Sauer in 2001. Sauer notes that just 65.4 percent of archivists interviewed had written collection policies, a critical manifestation of awareness of the need for an active selection process. Sauer also notes that many have informal cooperative agreements with other repositories, even if that just means that donors are occasionally referred to more appropriate archives. Cooperation, even on an informal level, indicates the implementation of some level of activism.[28] Others have noted that influences outside of the archival profession are just as important, if not more important, than the determination of archivists. Robert Horton, for example, argues that "the availability of adequate documentation may enable research but does not inspire it." It takes interest from the outside world, in Horton's case, the social history–inspired interest in rural history, to make all this potential documentation worthwhile.[29]

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The practical issues of documentation strategy may have limited its implementation, but it is worth noting that the general rejection of documentation strategy has rested on its workability, rather than on its appropriateness as part of the archival enterprise. The palpable sense of excitement in the literature during the early years of its existence illustrates well this acceptance of the underlying concept of documentation strategy. The search for real-world examples, like Hackman and Warnow-Blewitt's examination of the American Institute of Physics; the creation of hypothetical case studies as in "The Roots of 128"; and the attempts to apply the concept in western New York and Milwaukee; as well the flurry of questions, criticisms, and observations indicate

[27] Jennifer Marshall, "Documentation Strategy in the Twenty-First Century?: Rethinking Institutional Priorities and Professional Limitations," *Archival Issues* 23 (1998): 68.

[28] Cynthia K. Sauer, "Doing the Best We Can? The Use of Collection Development Policies and Cooperative Collecting Activities at Manuscript Repositories," *American Archivist* 64 (Fall/Winter 2001): 361.

[29] Robert Horton, "Cultivating Our Garden: Archives, Community and Documentation," *Archival Issues* 26 (2001): 29.

that documentation strategy struck a chord with potential activist archivists. The fact that documentation strategy continues to appear in appraisal manuals, "How-To-Do-It" texts, and in student research papers shows that while the process may be mostly a memory, it has become a memory that helps define who archivists are.[30]

The legacy of documentation strategy lies in a broader interpretation for the role of records in society, and the part that archivists play in shaping that role. If the values of archival activism and documentation have been absorbed, the logical conclusion is a vision of the archivist as creator of the past—a heavy responsibility and perhaps an unrealistic vision of objectivity. Some, like Elizabeth Kaplan, have reminded us that efforts to be comprehensive and consciously shape the record can still be suspect. Efforts to be "inclusive" have the potential for the "applications of new biases" rather than the creation of a broad and neutral picture of society. Identity, like the elitism of collecting argued against in the 1970s, could just as easily turn into an obstacle to archivists' responsibility to accurately document society.[31]

Despite the dangers inherent in following such concepts to their logical conclusions, documentation strategy had, as Richard Cox argued, a profound effect on appraisal because it described records in such a wide context. This brave new world of responsibilities and possibilities helped archivists to "re-think archival appraisal as well as the societal mission of the archivist." A broader interpretation of appraisal meant that it was no longer merely a vague set of ideals that stood between an archivist and a potential acquisition; it was a vague set of ideals that represented what Barbara Craig called "the single most important function performed by an archivist." Its importance lay in this responsibility to the world, as appraisal was ultimately a "social action," something archivists did *for* the public, in both the present and the future. While this responsibility has never been too far removed from archivists' understanding of their profession, in the past thirty years, archivists have actively discussed their profession from this perspective and sought ways to implement their ideals. This represents, at the very least, a move to the forefront of the profession's consciousness and a concrete manifestation of an identity shift within the profession.[32]

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[30] See F. Gerald Ham, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts*, Archival Fundamentals Series (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1993); Frank Boles, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts;* and Gregory Hunter, *Developing and Maintaining Practical Archives: A How-To-Do-It Manual* (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2003).

[31] Elizabeth Kaplan, "We Are What We Collect, We Collect What We Are: Archives and the Construction of Identity," *American Archivist* 63 (Spring/Summer 2000): 146, 147.

[32] Cox, "Archival Documentation Strategy," 89; Barbara Craig, "The Acts of the Appraisers: The Context, the Plan and the Record," *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992): 176, 177.