

2022

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Recommended Citation

Mandarino, Grant G. (2022) "Review of “All Shook Up”: The Archival Legacy of Terry Cook," *Journal of Western Archives*: Vol. 13: Iss. 1, Article 10.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/westernarchives/vol13/iss1/10>

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Review of "*All Shook Up*" *The Archival Legacy of Terry Cook*

Edited by Tom Nesmith, Greg Bak, and Joan M. Schwartz. Chicago: Society of American Archivists; in collaboration with Association of Canadian Archivists, 2020. 538 pp. Softcover. \$39.00. ISBN: 978-1-945246-30-2

For anyone who has come up through a graduate-level MLIS program in the last decade or so, the writings of Terry Cook will be familiar, and rightly so. Before his unfortunate death in 2014 he contributed to nearly all the most significant innovations in archival theory and was especially cogent in outlining the post-custodial practice that now defines our profession. "*All Shook Up*" contains thirteen of Cook's most influential publications, arranged chronologically and interspersed with reflections from friends and colleagues that speak to the immensity of Cook's impact as an archivist, teacher, mentor, and friend. The collection thus provides readers the opportunity to gauge the "legacy" of this impact as well as see for themselves how Cook set about reassessing the fundamentals of archivy over the course of his long and distinguished career. No doubt many will have come across one or more of the pieces in journals or as course readings, but it is as a set that his position as one of the major archival theorists of the twentieth century becomes clear. For this reason alone, "*All Shook Up*" should be read and widely discussed by members of the archival community.

The earliest selections chronicle the evolution of Cook's "macroappraisal" approach to archival appraisal, for which he is best known today. Cook crafted this approach while working at the National Archives of Canada (NAC), first as an archivist and then as director (1993 to 1998). "What Is Past Is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift" (1997), one of the longer and most instructive of the pieces in the collection, provides an intellectual genealogy for macroappraisal. Therein Cook defines it as a "context-based, provenance-centered framework rather than a content-based, historical-documentalist one" better equipped to handle the overwhelming amount of material facing late twentieth-century archivists employed in larger, and especially government-sponsored, repositories (242). "In this Canadian approach," he goes on to write,

the older archival focus on the subject content of records, and on having that content directly reflect public opinion or users' needs or historical trends, has been replaced by a new focus on the larger or 'macro' context of the records, as revealed through their creators' functions, programmes, activities, and transactions, that is, through the context and process of the records' own creation" (ibid.).

Implemented by the NAC in 1991, macroappraisal soon gained international recognition and has remained, albeit with significant updates and adjustments, a touchstone for major corporate and government archives.

The conceptual reorientation of provenance at the basis of macroappraisal dovetails with a broader paradigm shift in archival practice that Cook details and champions in several other pieces. Writing in a 1992 article entitled “The Concept of the Archival Fonds in the Post-Custodial Era: Theory, Problems and Solutions,” Cook argues that “the custodial era is giving way to a post-custodial one where the curatorship of physical objects will define the profession much less than will an understanding of the conceptual interrelationships among creating structures, their animating functions, information systems and the resulting records” (161). Incorporation of new media types and an increased reliance upon digital interfaces and electronic records has played a crucial role in this shift and these trends are discussed at length throughout the collection. But just as important, according to Cook, was the emergence of a new mentality he identified as “postmodernism.”

It is in his 2001 article “Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives” that Cook tackles this notoriously conflicted and confusing concept, although its first appearance in his writing dates to the mid-1990s. Generally approving of contemporary theory’s suspicion of scientific objectivity and neutral perspectives, Cook presents postmodernism as “an opening, not a closing, a chance to welcome a wider discussion about what archivists do and why, rather than remaining defensively inside the archival cloister” (318). More specifically, he adds,

I would characterize archival postmodernism as focusing on the context behind the content; on the power relationships that shape the documentary heritage; and on the document’s structure, its resident and subsequent information systems, and its narrative and business-process conventions as being more important than its informational content (321).

It is clear from this definition, and the article, that Cook saw in the tenets of “postmodernism” a further justification for his macroappraisal approach, and it was from this point of view that he evaluated its relevance for the field—in fact, read sequentially this collection demonstrates the extent to which macroappraisal served as a dominant focus for Cook, the lens through which he approached all archival topics. Self-conscious reflexivity and a dedication to broader, more flexible contextualization are the maxims of “postmodernism” Cook seems to have been most drawn to. Yet it remains unclear why these insights are uniquely identified as being “postmodern,” when they could just as easily (and justifiably) be linked to intellectual trends in the humanities and social sciences dating back to the New Left and rising feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Although Cook cursorily addresses the differences in theoretical orientation that distinguish the work of Jacques Derrida from Michel Foucault, the two “postmodernists” who have most directly interrogated archives and archival practice, he refrains from delving into these differences too deeply and utilizes an overly generalized conception of “postmodern” as a descriptor,

often dissociated from its historical specificity (not to mention its imbrication in the dynamics of late twentieth century neoliberalism). It is still unclear exactly what "postmodernism" means or entails in the field of archives, and while Cook is more conscientious than others, his clumping of theorists into a singular "postmodernist" designation muddies more than it reveals.

More curious is Cook's neglect of Frankfurt School-era critical theory and its later acolytes, often associated with "postmodernism" (incorrectly, in my view), and those working in the Cultural Studies tradition, past and present. These sources mount similar critiques of reigning institutions and modes of thought that Cook found so persuasive in "postmodernism" but likewise speak to themes of political economy, inequality, racial oppression, and social justice in a way that figures like Derrida do not, which may be why more recent, critical archival theorists have begun to gravitate to their work. In the final piece of the collection, "Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community: Four Shifting Archival Paradigms" from 2013, Cook does consider the ramifications of alternative models of archival practice like those embodied by community archives, a hot topic at present in archival literature, but yet again from the perspective of his "top-down," macroappraisal approach. One wonders what he would have made of developments that have occurred in the last decade, as the boundaries of libraries, archives, and museums (LAMs) have continued to deteriorate and a renewed focus on accessibility and materiality has arisen.

In conclusion, the editors of this volume are to be saluted for putting together such an informative, well-organized, and comprehensive *festschrift* for Cook, and it will doubtless serve to cement his stature in the field. The contributions from Cook's colleagues and interlocutors, a who's who of international leaders in archival theory, are most welcome, for they provide background for each of the thirteen selections and help the reader to make sense of their focus. They likewise foreground Cook's personal history and professional journey. Of note in this regard is the opening account by Tom Nesmith, "A Portrait of the Archivist as a Young Man," which traces Cook's intellectual development over the course of his career and pays special attention to how his "red Toryism" informed the development of Cook's archival thought. I, for one, discovered myself re-thinking several of Cook's formulations after reading Nesmith's introduction and others' contributions, as I suspect other readers will so too. It is not easy to compile the thought of such a prolific writer and wide-ranging intellectual as Terry Cook. This book achieves the task admirably.

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