Archive

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Abstract

In the contemporary society, archive is a common metaphor of memory and permanence and it can refer to a collection of old files and web pages at the same time as it has a specific, rather different meaning in the context of the keeping of formal archives. This chapter brings together formal and informal understandings of archive and explicates how understanding of this particular cultural technique and a practice of collecting, preserving and making materials available helps us to unravel something very fundamental of the underpinnings of the aspirations to digitise and keep digital artefacts in the contemporary society.

Introduction

In colloquial discourse, almost everything can be an archive. Most blogs have "archives" of older posts, an archive of a website is the space where all obsolete files and pages are moved to, a shoebox of old photographs and a folder of old emails or sound files can be an 'archive'. The internet itself has been dubbed as the archive of the archives (Allen-Robertson 2013). The conceptual intricacies are not eased by the fact that the notion of archive has captured the imagination of a large number of theorists using 'archive' as a metaphor of memory, keeping, longevity, and permanence.

Even if the gamut of the colloquial and metaphoric senses of archives might suggest that the term is too general to be useful as an analytical concept, tracing back the evolution of the idea and concept of archives and the history of the contemporary practices of archiving is helpful in framing and understanding the aspirations for organising and keeping digitised things and how these ambitions are consummated in practice. Archive is a cultural technique and archiving a practice of collecting (or accumulating), preserving, and making materials retrievable. As Derrida (1995) notes, it kills and replaces human memory. From the

perspective of a critical scrutiny of digitisation, *archive* is a concept that captures in practice and in theory something very fundamental of the underpinnings of the aspirations to digitise and keep digital artefacts whether the archives would be small, large, public, private, fleeting, or long-lived. Taking a closer look at this particular cultural technique helps us to better understand how certain things are valued and organised in contemporary society, what, how, and why things are collected and preserved, how different temporalities of things and human-beings become intertwined, and how the present is related to the past and the future to the present. On an even more fundamental level, pushing forward the remark of Gitelman and Jackson (2013) on the links of archives (in Foucauldian sense) and historical epistemology, the manner in which the archives are defined and demarcated determine what is knowable of the past both at the present and in the future of our present as the future past.

Archives in archival literature

The etymology of 'archive' and related terms in different European languages is in classical Greek. The Greek word *arkheion* (from arkhe, government, rule) and its Latin translation *archivum* could refer to a place for public administration, government building, an official, a room for records keeping or to original (archival) records (Lidman 2012, Blouin Jr. & Rosenberg 2011). The purpose of archives has changed from being administrative instruments of premodern regimes to serve the historical fascination of the period of romanticism in the beginning of the 19th century and the primarily European nationalist and imperial endeavours during the following one hundred years (Cox 2000, Duchein 1992). The second half of the 20th century was a period of pluralisation of archival thought in archival domain (Cook 1997, Ribeiro 2001) and a period when 'archive' turned to a cultural keyword used to denote a broad variety of repositories from databases and information systems to seed banks, libraries, museums, and archaeological excavations (Buchanan 2010). In the archival field, Körmendy (2007) sees the profusion primarily as a result of an external, societal pressure. Archives and archiving have expanded both in volume and in extent. In addition to great men and governmental history, archives are created to document public movements, local history, and marginal communities. Simultaneously, the idea of the archive allowed for a more pluralistic understanding of the audiences and purposes of keeping archives. Theory and practice of archives have shifted from the earlier positivism to functionalism (Delmas 1992) and theorising characterised by critique of earlier assumptions of the neutrality of archives. The recent theorising has acknowledged the subjectivity of archives and the influence of the choices made by their creators, custodians, and users on what archives

contain and what an archive is (Cook 2011, Lane & Hill 2010, Yakel 2011). According to Cook (2013), archives have transformed in the process from passive keepers to active assessors to societal mediators to community facilitators. From the 1990s onwards, the evolution of archival thought has been influenced by new theoretical perspectives, for instance, borrowed from Giddensian sociology (McKemmish 2001), postmodernism (Cook 2001), and critical theory (Dunbar 2006). The contemporary theory has challenged the stability and persistence of archives and appropriated the ideas of processualism, life-cycles (Borglund & Öberg 2006), and, increasingly, the one of continuum (Upward 1997) and participatory negotiation (Shilton & Srinivasan 2008, Robinson 2007, Huvila 2008) of what is an archive and what it contains.

Even if the contemporary discussion has extended the life-span and contexts of relevance of archives and their holdings, the premise of keeping formal archives is still very much based on the *provenance* of the records and the organisational context of their office of origin (Bazerman 2012), a fundamental tenet of archival work, which dates back to the late 19th century and beyond. This emphasis marks out formal archives from informal archives, or in the archival studies parole, (proper) archives from other types of repositories including collections, libraries, and miracle chambers of the late Renaissance and Baroque. Even if the requirement of original order might not always be as compelling in the context of informal archives, theorists like Taylor (2003) and Derrida (1995) with rather different takes on archives than the one held by archival studies scholarship (Bazerman 2012) refer to stability and originality as a characteristic trait of archives. The emphasis of Blouin (Blouin Jr. & Rosenberg 2011) that archive is defined by the organic relationship of the records to their generators also characterises informal archives. Similarly, the conceptualisations of records as information, documents (Yeo 2007), evidence (Brothman 2002), transactions (Cox 2001), or speech acts (Henttonen 2007, Yeo 2010) are rooted in the actual and imagined origins of archival records. The link between records and their worth both in terms of corporate surplus value (an important driver of corporate archives and records management, e.g. Bailey 2007, Ataman 2009, Bailey 2011), or their less tangible role as a source of societal accountability (a central aspect of the discussions of the need to strive for more inclusive and representative archives, e.g, McKemmish et al. 2012, Shilton & Srinivasan 2008) are also dependent on their provenance. In spite of its fundamental nature, provenance is a controversial and complex concept (Douglas 2010). Its apparent simplicity conceals the difficulty of determining what is original, and consequently, as Cook underlines, shifts archives far from

being "unproblematic storehouses of records awaiting historians" (Cook 2011: 631). The same problem applies to the authoritative, authentic, essential, or vital nature of the records kept in an archive (Blouin Jr. & Rosenberg 2011). These assumptions and expectations are easy to agree with, difficult if not impossible to operationalise in practice and therefore often criticised in cultural analysis of archives and archival work outside of the professionally oriented discipline of archival studies (Synenko 2013). The difficulties arise from the complexity of the process on how archival records emerge in time and space, often with a plethora of individuals and institutions involved in the process. Also the kind of record being, for instance, a paper document, a photograph, or a seed of a plant, affect how the provenance can be conceptualised. Even if the critics make an important point in denouncing positivist ideals of provenance, the practical impossibility to determine 'true' origins of an archival record does not mean that the concept could not function as a useful guiding principle of archives and archiving.

The different perceptions of provenance and the nature of the record as, for instance, evidence, information, and persistent representations (Yeo 2007), are kin to the several competing perspectives of the nature of archives in the archival literature. They are anchored in different historical trajectories that conceptualise the premise of an archive to be information (e.g. Gilliland-Swetland 2000, Buckland 1991) or cultural heritage (Manžuch 2009), or that an archive is distinct from other types repositories because archival records are authentic evidence (e.g. Duranti 1999) rather than information, a position which has been criticised in post-modern archives related literature (e.g. Taylor 2003). The mission of archival institutions has been described in terms of preserving and providing access to culture and heritage (e.g. Barry 2010), memory (e.g. Cook 1997, Gilliland-Swetland 2000), and knowledge, supporting learning, promoting identity and understanding (Gilliland-Swetland 2000), and, for instance, serving (e.g. Sundqvist 2007) and empowering their users (e.g. Usherwood et al. 2005). Archives are considered to have a civic role as societal and cultural institutions (e.g. Hickerson 2001, Jimerson 2004, Johnson & Williams 2011) and access to archival records is perceived as a new civic right (Dempsey 2000) independent of the citizens' cultural background. The role of archivists has been characterised in comparable terms in the literature. The descriptions of the role of the "new archivists" tend to emphasise the significance of such factors as outreach (Theimer 2011), technology skills (e.g. Stevenson 2008), pedagogy in formal and informal education (e.g. Krause 2010, Zipsane 2009), engagement (e.g. Prelinger 2010), and collaboration with records creators (e.g. Keough &

Wolfe 2012).

In addition to broadly theoretical and societal rearticulations of archives, the rapid advance of digital technologies has raised questions on how digitality and social media affects (formal) archives (e.g. Bailey 2008, Zhang 2012, Theimer 2011) and Derridean archive (e.g. Treanor 2009) alike in the future. The technology influences societal change and its impact on archives has been described both as an unavoidable premise (e.g. Bailey 2008, Treanor 2009) and an opportunity (Stevenson 2010). In the field of archival studies there is a relatively broad consensus of the continuing value of the fundamental principles of archival work in the digital context (e.g. Gilliland-Swetland 2000, Duranti 2010), but as Bailey has urged, there is a need to "fundamentally rethink the way in which we [records managers] strive to achieve them" (Bailey 2008: xv) in the contemporary context with radically divergent ideas of what an archive is and could be (e.g. Huvila et al. 2008, Theimer 2011, Zeitlyn 2012).

Archives beyond archival studies

At the present, an archive can be many things beyond the 'archives proper' discussed so far. The International Council of Archives (ICA) defines archives from the perspective of the archival profession as "the documentary by-product of human activity maintained for their long-term value" (International Council of Archives 2009: para. 2). This definition carries repercussions for the division of (historical) archives and (current) records maintained in Anglo-American and German archival discourse, a dichotomy which does not exist for instance in the Netherlands, France, Italy, Spain, or the Nordic countries (Ketelaar 2000, Orrman 2007). The perspective endorsed by ICA and the somewhat similar general definition of archives "as a collection of records accumulated by persons, corporate bodies and families in order to support their memories" in the introductory text of Thomassen (2001: 374) are indicative even if not entirely forthright about the focus of interest of archival science scholarship and archival profession in the (archives as) professionally curated outcomes of processes that produce (documentary) records related to the activities of individual and collective bodies (e.g. Thomassen 2001, Craven 2008).

Even if these definitions stem from the institutional field of archivistics, they do also encompass a broader popular understanding of the archives that encompass a broad variety of collections, which either explicitly or implicitly perform an *archival function* (defining how something is an archive rather than why it is an archive). Therefore, it is possible to make a

distinction between archives proper (in a strict archival scientific sense) and other types of repositories as two different types of archives, which both perform archival function to various degrees. By referring to the archival function, the interdisciplinary use of the term archive to refer to different types of digital information systems and repositories (Breakell 2010), seed banks, databases, and collections of things (Buchanan 2010) becomes more compatible with the understanding of 'archives proper' in the archival science literature.

Besides the theoretically sometimes rather vague popular references to archives, the term has also captured the attention of many widely cited philosophers and cultural theorists (e.g. Ebeling & Günzel 2009, Foucault 2002, Derrida 1995). Parallel to the subjectivist emphases of the contemporary archival theory, the humanities scholarship has referred since the 1990s to the *archival turn*, a move from perceiving archives as a source to considering them as a subject (Hutchinson & Weller 2011). In spite of this general turn, the old ideas of 'archive' and 'archiving' have not disappeared and they have a certain tendency to surface as emblematic references to that what archives are supposed to be (e.g. Brockmeier 2010). What has also happened is that a critique of archival principles and remnants of archival positivism from outside has occasionally raised to heights that, as Buchanan (2010) notes, might seem hostile to archives.

Considering the extent of archives related literature, the attempts to produce classifications of different types of archives are conspicuously few. In an attempt to elucidate the premises of different types or ideas of archives, Bowker (2010) makes a distinction between *formal archives* and *trace archives*. Bowker's formal archives are peremptory and sequential, whereas trace archives are "about habits and customs and place rather than coordinate time and space" (Bowker 2010: 213). In contrast to a formal archive, a trace archive is inscribed in the lived environment rather than collected and curated. The idea has similarities with that of Hartley (2010) who makes a distinction between modernistic (formal, institutional) archives based on deterministic (or essence) theory and postmodernist *probability archives* (internet 'archives' like YouTube or the Internet as an archive) based on probability theory.

Bowker's idea of trace archives has certain premisory similarities with the Giddensian inspired records continuum model (Upward 1997, McKemmish 2001). In contrast to the life-cycle approaches, records continuum emphasises that records reside in a space-time continuum and have parallel uses and roles throughout their existence that begins long before

they end up in an archival repository (Borglund & Öberg 2006). Moreover, the model suggests that the process of archiving records (from records creation, to their capture in the archival domain, organisation, and pluralisation) parallels with the phases described in Giddens' theory of structuration (Giddens 1984, Upward 1997).

Even if the theoretical (including Bowker's) and often metaphorical conceptions of archives and archival work tend to differ from the practical realities of archival institutions (Ebeling & Günzel 2009) they are indicative of the cultural and societal underpinnings and implications of archives and archiving (Ernst 2008). As Synenko (2013) argues, archival metaphors, like calling the World Wide Web a library, database or an archive, should not be considered less legitimate than empirical accounts or experiences of archival practices. Similarly, he continues, any firm distinction between a 'literal' and 'metaphorical' archive is deeply problematic and cannot be justified. 'Metaphorical' and speculative writing on archives refer to as real archives as the experiences held by archival professionals and historians. The professional understanding of archive, its functions, and functioning in the contemporary and past societies is merely different from how archive is conceptualised as a metaphor by others. In spite of the apparent dissonances between practitioners and theorists and different theorists akin, the speculative literature captures the confluence and dissonance between scholars, archivists, and other stakeholders of archival records and institutions that, as Manoff (2004) notes, indeed revolve around a shared preoccupation with the function and fate of the 'record'. Theorists, including Derrida (1995) and Foucault (2002), have discussed from different perspectives the implications of the paradigmatic continuity and change of 'archives'. They can serve as monuments of an obsession to preserve, as *loci* of social and historical authority (Derrida 1995) and of as much constructed as recorded (Derrida 1995) rather than unearthed, but in both cases, consequently political memory (Foucault 2002). Ernst has explicated the complex material and technological relation of archives and what they archive (Ernst 2008). Richards (1993) has scrutinised the dual role of archives as totalities of knowledge and actively constructed collections. Similarly, Synenko and Taylor problematize the concept of archive by discussing the clash of the views of professionals and cultural theorists (Synenko 2013) and the limits of 'archive' versus a non-archive, "repertoire" (Taylor 2003). Even if these observations are not primarily empirical, they capture many relevant premises of how archives are conceptualised in the literature: the situatedness of archives in the nexus of the creators and keepers of the records, the significance and perplexity of the conceptualisations of the records and their use, and the

practical constraints of acting as a keeper and user of archival records.

Analytical uses of archive

Theoretical scholarship includes many examples of how archive can be used as an analytical concept to discuss prevailing and marginal memory and preservation practices in the society, how the cultural record, whether digital or non-digital, is an outcome of political negotiation and constructed rather than captured, how the use of technologies influences the practical outcomes of what is being preserved, and how the notion of archive epitomises the efforts of the societies to keep rather than forget. These theoretical insights can be used to frame the implicit and outspoken premises of digitisation and its consequences.

To highlight perhaps somewhat less obvious uses of the notion of archive in the context of cultural analysis of digitisation, archive (as related to archival institutions and work) can be a similarly powerful instrument for explicating the practices of digitisation and its different premises. Instead of (and in addition to) calling digitised repositories archives, a more careful consideration of the relation of archive defined as an outcome of certain archival practices and tracing of these changing practices and their relation to existing and emerging repositories can help to understand *how* the outcomes of digitisation could form an archive and to what extent they are something else. The debate on how archival institutions should respond to the emergence of the social web including an abundance of services appearing and/or claiming to perform certain archival functions like YouTube, Flickr, Instagram, and Wikipedia, phenomena like Web 2.0 and the culture of participation (Jenkins 2014) exemplifies the power of the notion of archive as an analytical tool for divesting the complexities of defining ownership, influence, and expertise in an open digital environment. Huvila's (Huvila 2008) framing of participatory archive builds on a radical redistribution of responsibilities between professional custodians and the users of (digital) archival collections and the possibilities offered by digital platforms to turn archive into an open-ended platform for curating records and their related information throughout their entire lifetime. Other authors have conceptualised digital repositories as archives in different terms. In case of the pioneering Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections (Krause and Yakel 2007), the archive in the digital collections was conceptualised in another sense as a repository open for use, commenting and complementing but closed for direct alterations by the general public. Here the considerations of the concept of archive and its multiple possible definitions have helped to engage in a discussion on the relations between the stakeholders of digital repositories:

who should get an opportunity to have a say on what is being presented and made available, how should the holdings be organised and which functions of the repository should be prioritised. Furthermore, a critical reflection of the archiveness of the outcomes of digitisation opens for discussion the provenance (origins and biography), multi-layered continuum of the uses and multiple relevance and roles of these repositories in relation to how they came into being as a result of digitisation. Here a researcher can find useful existing categorisations of how archival literature discusses participation (Huvila 2015b) and how the worth of digital repositories differs depending on whether their longevity or various uses are prioritised (Huvila 2015a). Similarly helpful can be the paradigmatic propositions of redefining 'archive' from the perspective of memory (Cook 1997), access (Menne-Haritz 2001), and knowledge, supporting learning, promoting identity, and understanding (Gilliland-Swetland 2000), or counter-propositions like the one of Zielinski and Winthrop-Young (2015) to define an "AnArchive", a locus of performative provocations, plurality, variants, lack of external purpose, and leadership, everything that a traditional archive is not. Finally, an example of cultural analytic use of the concept of archive can be found in the work of Lucas (2012) who discusses archaeological record (i.e. what is left, kept, and documented in course of archaeological work) as an archive constituted by archaeologists to highlight the constructed and curated rather than unprocessed nature of archaeological evidence. The concept of archive could be used similarly in other contexts of cultural analysis from medical, scientific, and literary to juridical domain and beyond to draw attention to the managed nature of things.

Archive in cultural analysis

The fact that the digital discourse has eagerly embraced the term archive makes it problematic. It has become not only contested (Buchanan 2010) but also analytically meaningless if the particular sense of the term is not carefully described when it is used as an analytical concept. Different conceptualisations can be useful but their usefulness differs from each other. Researchers who refer to the notion of archive from their different theoretical and disciplinary perspectives end up in a similar dilemma that Boltanski (2014) describes between the sociological versus ordinary (non-sociological) use of everyday life categories. They have different meanings in different analytical and theoretical contexts. The power of the metaphorical use of the term lies in the fact that archive is one of the central concepts of the contemporary Western imagination as, for instance, Derrida (1995) and Ernst (2008) persuasively demonstrate. Archive evokes impressions and the term means something

for everyone. In contrast, archive in the context of the evolution of archival institutions and formal archives turns attention to how archives have been practiced in different times, how their function has changed and is changing. At the moment, it seems likely that digitisation is having a deep impact on the practices of making and keeping archives even if the idea of archives is transmuting slower and that there is something that resists change. Similarly, to the practical value of archives, the conceptual value of the notion as an instrument of cultural analysis remains if it is not taken too lightly and without being specific of what type of an archive and what specific archival functions it is used to refer to.

Further resources

- Adema, Janneke: Open Reflections (blog) https://openreflections.wordpress.com
- Archives Library Information Center (ALIC) http://www.archives.gov/research/alic/
- Archives bibliography from 1998 on
  http://archivschule.de/DE/service/bibliographien/archives-bibliography-from-1998-on.html
- A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology
  http://www.archivists.org/glossary/index.asp
- Internet Archive Blog https://blog.archive.org
- Milligan, Ian: Digital History, Web Archives, and the History of 20th Century Canada
  on http://ianmilligan.ca
- Parikka, Jussi: Machinology (blog) http://jussiparikka.net
- Spellbound blog http://www.spellboundblog.com
- Theimer, Kate: Archives Next (blog) http://www.archivesnext.com/

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