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ÍNDICES INTERNACIONAIS

Sumário

PRESENTATION NOTE
Rethinking the archive(s)

NOTA DE APRESENTAÇÃO
Repensar o(s) arquivo(s)

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The seminar series *Rethinking the Archive(s)* was held from October 2023 to April 2024 and was organized by the VINCULUM project — funded by the European Research Council and based at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of Universidade Nova de Lisboa[1], — as well as by the Institute for Medieval Studies (IEM) of the same institution[2]. For the VINCULUM project,

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[1] VINCULUM - Entailing Perpetuity: Family, Power, Identity. The Social Agency of a Corporate Body (Southern Europe, 14th-17th Centuries) - ERC Co.G. 819734. https://www.vinculum.fcsh.unl.pt/

[2] Instituto de Estudos Medievais. https://iem.fcsh.unl.pt/en/

the seminar was part of a broader set of activities reflecting the theoretical reconsideration of historians' archives and materials, a key aspect of its scientific framework. This perspective guided the documentary research conducted and the development of the associated database and information system. Related initiatives included the seminar *Open Source Archival Databases for Historians* (July 2022), the Postgraduate Programme in Historical Archivistics (which led to two issues of this magazine)[3], the elective course *Proof, Information, Memory: Training in Archival Science and Atom*, and the International Conference *History and Archival Science: Common Issues in the Construction of Complex Knowledge*[4]. From the IEM's side, the seminar series formed part of its long-standing research activities in Historical Archivistics, an area it has focused on since 2010. These efforts have resulted in projects such as INVENT.ARQ and ARCHIFAM, numerous doctoral dissertations, extensive publications, and the organization of scientific conferences[5].

Within the framework of these two productive models, it was deemed both timely and engaging to organize a series of debates featuring leading figures in scientific thought on archives and archival studies. These experts, representing diverse epistemological and disciplinary traditions, were invited to Portugal, with the National Archive serving as the fitting venue. The goal of the series was to position archives — understood as social constructs — at the heart of the discussion, examining their origins, functions, structures, material aspects, and evolving roles over time, while also evaluating the impact of the digital transition on the formation of collective memory.

By fostering interdisciplinary dialogue, the initiative sought to create a space where Historical Archivistics, History, Information Science(s), and Archival Science could intersect, enriching theoretical and methodological reflections on the concept of the 'Archive' and its connections to various fields of knowledge. This effort aimed to address a growing need within Portugal's scientific community.

Held at a pace of one session per month, the series explored a range of preselected topics. Each session featured analysis and commentary from

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[3] Caminhos da Arquivística Histórica I: materialidades, contextos de produção de informação, representações documentais (2023). *Boletim do Arquivo da Universidade de Coimbra, 36*(2). https://doi.org/10.14195/2182-7974_36_2; Caminhos da Arquivística Histórica II: epistemologias, práticas, propostas (2024). *Boletim do Arquivo da Universidade de Coimbra*, Extra 1. https://doi.org/10.14195/2182-7974_extra2024_1

[4] Information on these events can be found on the project website mentioned above.

[5] The results can be consulted on the IEM website for the INVENT.ARQ project (https://iem.fcsh.unl.pt/en/projects/) and, in their entirety, on the ArqFAM website (https://arqfam.fcsh.unl.pt/?page_id=2269).

esteemed researchers in Portugal, with the overarching goal of bridging any remaining disciplinary divides on the global scientific stage. A plan was set in motion to publish the lectures, along with optional transcriptions of the commentators' insights, in a more accessible format.

The volume now presented is the outcome of this initiative, compiling all conference texts along with commentaries on two of them. Given the richness of these contributions, we provide only a brief introduction, as the works speak for themselves. The collected texts reflect multiple thematic areas, though we refrain from treating them as rigidly distinct — after all, resisting compartmentalization was a key objective shared by the organizers, speakers, and commentators alike.

On the one hand, we have the question of the social contexts of archives, explored by Olivier Poncet — who examines them as 'instruments of power' and engages with the historiography on the subject — and by Randolph Head, who delves into the very notion of 'context,' tracing its historical development over an extended period. Moving closer to historical theory, yet still addressing the intersection of the documentary and archival turns, Joseph Morsel's contribution focuses on concepts and knowledge production. Through a critical analysis of metaphors — specifically 'sources' and 'voices' — he interrogates their naturalisation and implications.

On the other hand, Eric Ketelaar and Geoffrey Yeo, while rooted in archival studies, extend the discussion beyond the field's traditional boundaries. In *Celebrating Change in Archives*, Ketelaar takes an optimistic view of the discipline's evolution, even as he highlights future challenges, such as the ecological sustainability of digital preservation and access. Yeo, meanwhile, investigates the intricate relationships between archives, documents, and information, exploring how these concepts vary across linguistic and cultural contexts and questioning the dominant role of information. L. S. Ascensão de Macedo's comprehensive commentary situates Yeo's arguments within broader archival traditions, particularly regarding the relationship between records and archives.

Turning to the colonial archive and its role in addressing 'epistemic injustices', Charles Jeurgens highlights the significance of archival activism. His work critiques the imposition of Western archival frameworks and examines how colonial systems exercised power through archives. Ana Canas' commentary extends this discussion into the Portuguese context, an especially relevant contribution given the emerging nature of this discourse in Portugal.

We now invite you to engage with this compelling collection of articles, which we have had the privilege of assembling, and to participate in

discussions with the authors and commentators. We hope these contributions will help further the dissemination of rigorous, insightful, and progressive understandings of archives — particularly in these uncertain times, where ethical concerns around information use, and the role of human intelligence in shaping fairer societies remain more pressing than ever.

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We extend our sincere gratitude to everyone who contributed to making this special issue of BAUC possible: the authors and commentators of the conferences; the Director of the National Archives of Torre do Tombo and his team; the institutions that funded the VINCULUM project and IEM (ERC and FCT); and the engaged, enthusiastic audience who actively participated in the various sessions of the cycle. Finally and crucially, we deeply appreciate the generous support of BAUC and IUC in accepting our publishing proposal, which enhances the value of this initiative.

Note of the scientific coordinators:

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Studies

Archives as instruments of power[1]

Os arquivos como instrumentos de poder

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ABSTRACT

Considering archives as instruments of power, whatever that may be, with or without a question mark, is probably one of the most classic of all the facets of archives. Archives are associated with power and especially State power, even while power can take many forms, whether religious, economic, social, gender-based, etc., whether it is the power of one, the power of many, the power of all, whether it is sovereign, delegated or relative. We don't have to consider power in a univocal mode, where it is necessarily confused with domination, force and constraint. Power administers, informs, protects and serves, just as much as it represses, controls, threatens or enslaves. It is power, its nature and objectives, that influence the value of archives as an instrument, and not the other way round, although the liberating and illuminating function of the written word remains secondary and ambiguous. It is possible to adopt several

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[1]   Conference delivered at the seminar "Rethinking the Archive(s)/ Repensar o(s) Arquivo(s)", organized by the VINCULUM project, based at NOVA FCSH, and the Institute for Medieval Studies, NOVA FCSH. National Archive of Torre do Tombo, 4 October 2023. Comments by Pedro Cardim, FCSH NOVA; CHAM- FCSH NOVA. VINCULUM (2023, October 18). *1.ª Sessão do Ciclo de seminários: "Rethinking the Archive(s)/ Repensar o(s) Arquivo(s)"* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqM3Pa3XN8g

positions when considering the relationship between power and archives, whether this relationship is fundamental, instrumental or antagonistic. It could be summed up in a few simple formulas: power through archives, power over archives, power of archives. In short, the relationship between archives and power has three dimensions: functional, symbolic and critical. The social responsibility that the archivist has recently discovered and taken upon himself does not preclude the instrumental dimension of archives, nor does it eliminate their functional, symbolic or critical dimensions, but it does allow us to see more clearly what archives do for power or — to put it another way — what their power is.

KEYWORDS: Archives; State; Domination; Administration; Accountability.

RESUMO

Considerar os arquivos como instrumentos de poder, seja qual for a natureza deste, com ou sem ponto de interrogação, é provavelmente a mais clássica de todas suas as facetas. Os arquivos estão associados ao poder e, sobretudo, ao poder do Estado, ainda que o poder possa assumir diversas formas, sejam elas religiosas, económicas, sociais, de género, etc., seja ele exercido por um único indivíduo, por muitos, ou por todos, seja ele soberano, delegado ou relativo. Não é necessário considerar o poder de forma unívoca, mesmo quando é, por essência, confundido com dominação, força e constrangimento. O poder administra, informa, protege e serve, tanto quanto reprime, controla, ameaça ou escraviza. É o poder, a sua natureza e os seus objetivos, que influenciam o valor dos arquivos como instrumento, e não o contrário, embora a função libertadora e esclarecedora da palavra escrita continue a ser secundária e ambígua. A relação entre o poder e os arquivos pode ser interpretada de diversas formas, podendo ser vista como fundamental, instrumental ou antagónica. Ela pode ser sintetizada em algumas fórmulas simples: poder através dos arquivos, poder sobre os arquivos, poder dos arquivos. Em suma, a relação entre os arquivos e o poder possui três dimensões: funcional, simbólica e crítica. A responsabilidade social que o arquivista recentemente descobriu e assumiu não elimina a dimensão instrumental dos arquivos, nem apaga as suas dimensões funcional, simbólica e crítica; antes permite compreender com maior clareza o que os arquivos fazem pelo poder ou, por outras palavras, qual é o seu poder.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Arquivos; Estado; Dominação; Administração; Dever de responsabilidade.

Considering archives as instruments of power, whatever that may be, with or without a question mark, is probably one of the most classic of all the facets of archives, so much so that it touches on an almost ontological definition of the subject at hand. In some respects, it is a theme that introduces all the others, or at least one which can be linked to any of them.

Without wishing to enter into a heavy and complex debate on the definition of power as an introduction to this text, the direction taken here will aim to establish a form of equivalence with central and State power, as the examples cited move closer to contemporary times — even while power can take many forms, whether religious, economic, social, gender-based, etc., whether it is the power of one, the power of many, the power of all, whether it is sovereign, delegated or relative. In all these cases, archives are associated with power.

In a way, this link is similar to the one we attribute to the written word in terms of domination. Claude Lévi-Strauss even sees it as a kind of invariant of human written culture:

> The only phenomenon that always and everywhere seems to be linked to the appearance of writing […] is the creation of hierarchical societies, societies made up of masters and slaves, societies that use a certain part of their population to work for the benefit of the other part. And when we look at the first uses of writing, it seems that these uses were first and foremost those of power: inventories, catalogues, censuses, laws and decrees; in all cases, whether it be the control of material goods or that of human beings, the manifestation of the power of certain men over other men and over wealth. Control of power and means of control. […] Writing […] seems to us to be permanently associated, in its origins, only with societies founded on the exploitation of man by man. (Charbonnier, 1961, pp. 32-33)[2]

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[2] Le seul phénomène qui semble toujours et partout lié à l'apparition de l'écriture […] c'est la constitution de sociétés hiérarchisées, de sociétés qui se trouvent composées de maîtres et d'esclaves, de sociétés utilisant une certaine partie de leur population pour travailler au profit de l'autre partie. Et quand nous regardons quels ont été les premiers usages de l'écriture, il semble bien que ces usages aient été d'abord ceux du pouvoir : inventaires, catalogues, recensements, lois et mandements ; dans tous les cas, qu'il s'agisse du contrôle des biens matériels ou de celui des êtres humains, manifestation de puissance de certains hommes sur d'autres hommes et sur des richesses. Contrôle de la puissance et moyen de ce contrôle. […] L'écriture […] ne nous paraît associée de façon permanente, dans ses origines, qu'à des sociétés qui sont fondées sur l'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme (Charbonnier, 1961, pp. 32-33).

As we know, however, writing and archives do not necessarily go hand in hand. We can write a lot and keep little, or, in rarer cases, vice versa. Although it is always a delicate and perilous task for historians to venture retrospectively down the path of quantitative assessments of *deperdita*[3], even for our contemporary times when the abundance of numerical data sometimes masks the uncertainty of our exact knowledge, it is clear that the correlation is not systematic. Writing in the European Dark Ages, around the fifth to eighth centuries, must not have been very abundant: the medium was expensive, readers were few and writers even rarer. There is no doubt that we have preserved for this period, which was sparing with the written word, a rate of deeds that is perhaps higher than at other times in relation to the mass produced. Conversely, when the use of written documents took off around the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the losses, which are better documented, were probably enormous, even though archiving was undergoing remarkable qualitative changes (Clanchy, 2012, pp. 59-64; Esch, 1985, pp. 532-534; Bertrand, 2015, pp. 26-27). Power selects what is useful to it, and selects all the more when there is something to choose. The first mark of the use made of archives by those in power is quite simply to make them exist or disappear, through practices that may be rational and effective or that, on the contrary, testify to their imperiousness and weakness. Jacques Derrida asserted that all selection is violence (quoted by Lemoine, 2015, p. 76)[4]: we will therefore agree with him, on condition that we consider that this violence is exerted as much on the holder of the archives as on those who would like to benefit from them.

By insisting from the outset on a form of lament to evoke the existential link that unites power and archives, I do not wish to give the impression that only absences count, as a certain historiography has liked to emphasise for several years[5]. A happy archival approach is possible, rather than one that is dolorous, denunciatory or aggressive. It is important to maintain an open and balanced appreciation of the use of archives by those in power, far from hasty

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[3] About projects on lost manuscripts based on digital tools: Camps, J.-B., & Randon-Furling, J. (2022, December 12-14).

[4] "L'archive commence par la sélection et cette sélection est une violence. Il n'y a pas d'archive sans violence." (Lemoine, 2015, p. 76).

[5] In France in particular, several meetings have been organised these last years around the issue of the lack or absence of archives: "Pas d'archives, pas d'histoire? L'historien face à l'absence de sources" (University of Amiens, 2022, March 31); "Archives fantômes, fantômes d'archives. L'histoire des villes entre disparitions, dispersions, reconstitutions et restitutions documentaires" (Archives nationales, 2022, November 17-18); etc.

value judgements, frightening fantasies or, on the contrary, exalted proclamations. In fact, power is more widely shared than is often claimed, and archives, like archivists, are not as submissive and instrumental as is sometimes claimed, then as now. Let us not forget, as Norbert Elias (2000, pp. 15-53) reminded us, that historical sociology defines power not as a property possessed by some and denied to others, but as a social relationship between individuals occupying unequal positions in the exercise of power.

It goes without saying, then, that the analysis would be misguided if it were to consider power in a univocal mode, where it is necessarily confused with domination, force and constraint. Power administers, informs, protects and serves, just as much as it represses, controls, threatens or enslaves. It is power, its nature and objectives, that influence the value of archives as an instrument, and not the other way round, although the liberating and illuminating function of the written word remains secondary and ambiguous, as Lévi-Strauss points out:

> This, in any case, is the typical evolution that we see, from Egypt to China, when writing makes its debut: it seems to favour the exploitation of men before their enlightenment. […] If my hypothesis is correct, we must admit that the primary function of written communication is to facilitate enslavement. The use of writing for disinterested ends, to derive intellectual and aesthetic satisfaction, is a secondary result, if it is not more often than not reduced to a means of reinforcing, justifying or concealing the other. (Lévi-Strauss, 1962, pp. 352-353)[6]

There is obviously no question of painting a universal picture in space and time of the way in which archives have been the instrument of power. There is no such thing as a world history of archives. Let us simply point out that if we were to begin by climbing one side of this Himalaya of research, the subject of "archives as instruments of power" would no doubt be the easiest, since this is very often the approach that has prevailed in the various geo-cultural areas where the subject of archives has been the

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6   Telle est, en tout cas, l'évolution typique à laquelle on assiste, depuis l'Égypte jusqu'à la Chine, au moment où l'écriture fait son début : elle paraît favoriser l'exploitation des hommes avant leur illumination. […] Si mon hypothèse est exacte, il faut admettre que la fonction primaire de la communication écrite est de faciliter l'asservissement. L'emploi de l'écriture à des fins désintéressées, en vue d'en tirer des satisfactions intellectuelles et esthétiques, est un résultat secondaire, si même il ne se réduit pas le plus souvent à un moyen pour renforcer, justifier ou dissimuler l'autre. (Lévi-Strauss, 1962, pp. 352-353)

subject of somewhat in-depth work. Since the historian, whatever he may say and whatever his efforts, is only ever the product of his time and his culture, I am sometimes aware that I am simply poaching from cultural areas that are not my own, that I am not always able to resist the hold of the contemporary and that I have a certain tendency to place the centre of gravity of my thinking in the modern period, which I know better and which corresponds more or less to a modernity of archives and of the State — that is, of power *par excellence*.

It is possible to adopt a few positions when considering the relationship between power and archives, whether this relationship is fundamental, instrumental or antagonistic. It could be summed up in a few simple formulas: power through archives, power over archives, power of archives. In short, the relationship between archives and power has three dimensions: functional, symbolic and critical[7]. These different facets outline a history of archives and their relation to power, which we would be wrong to imagine as successive, but which gradually accrues — or rather, where the respective importance of each evolves over time.

1. The functional dimension

The primary function of archives is undoubtedly to help establish a form of domination over people, nature and property. However far back we go and however far away we travel, there are numerous examples of archiving, both textual and non-textual, which illustrate this — from the rock engravings of the Val Camonica to the Andean *quipus* and, of course, to the Mesopotamian tablets, the matrix of the ancient archival ideal. This memory of places, people and objects is often numbered, reminding us that owning and governing often means counting. It forms the basis of the closest relationship with power of any kind. Whether we are talking about titles of possession, privileges of use and rights, traces of completed or ongoing transactions, arbitration rulings, or even simple provisional memorandums, there is no power that has not established its claims to spaces and populations through archives, and inscribed them in a variety of temporalities. They

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7   In another vein, Yann Potin (2015, pp. 5-21) sees "trois figures historiques d'incarnation successive du pouvoir à travers l'institution des archives : le trésor, comme prolongement et inscription du corps et du domaine du souverain, la matrice et le coffre des lois, comme instauration d'un nouveau régime juridique de légalité, et la nécropole ou le reliquaire national des documents historiques, comme fondement d'un imaginaire national".

can be short, like the wax tablets of the suppliers to the king of France's household in the thirteenth century; medium, if we think of accounts of all kinds; long, like all those deeds that form the basis of a person's identity or rights; or even be tinged with ambitions of eternity when we confuse archives with some treasure deposited in a sacred space. From then on, the archiving movement spread to very different levels and knew no limits: while the "time of treasures" (Bertrand, 2015, p. 45) in the Middle Ages is clearly identified for sovereign princes or municipal and ecclesiastical powers, the first known or identified archiving by laymen, such as merchants or small lords, demonstrates the spread of the archiving function by capillary action.

The proof that we draw from these archived documents has to do with the notion of truth. In the first place, it is based on the probative force acquired by the document itself at the time it was drawn up, produced in a variety of ways that establish a form of authenticity, even if what is described is not exact, or is even totally forged (Vidal-Naquet, 1989). But the document is also presumed authentic because it comes from the archives of the person who holds it. This *jus archivi*, the most accomplished expression of which can be found in the Holy Roman Empire in the 17th century (Head, 2013, pp. 909-930), merges with the power of domination and is equivalent to what Robert-Henri Bautier has described as the martial figure of the "arsenal of authority" (Bautier, 1968, p. 140; Graf, 2001, pp. 65-81).

However, it is important to remember that archives also have the role of pacifying society and ensuring the coexistence of citizens or subjects, whether the rights of the latter were deposited in the *tabularium* of republican and imperial Rome or whether they were kept by the notaries or judges of the royal power in modern France. By imposing the written norms of the city in the sense understood by Fustel de Coulanges (1862), the government assumes responsibility for preserving the social order through the archival responsibility of which it is at once the instigator, the guarantor and the beneficiary in a variety of ways, whether in terms of social discipline at the time of the modern State-family complex (Hanley, 1995, p. 47) (parish registers), the state taxation of the written word (stamped paper, control of deeds) or, more broadly, the political administration that it authorises.

After all, the arsenal of authority is only activated or called upon when the title of power is challenged. This may be subject to assessment by the judiciary in the course of trials in which a discourse based on diplomatics requirements is built up in fits and starts, sometimes on a case-by-case basis, to distinguish truth from falsehood, if necessary by adding the argument of archiving to the merits of the case. With the concept of administration, the

use of archives becomes more everyday. It is worth pausing here for a moment to consider questions of vocabulary. In the now classic French archival sense, archives exist from the moment a document is created and placed on a desk. Unlike Anglo-Saxon archival science, which distinguishes between records and archives, the life of archives is not subject to transmutation but only to ageing linked to the use value, especially administrative, of the documents, which distinguishes between current, intermediate and definitive archives.

For the administration, archives are a first-rate instrument of knowledge; they provide the State with "archival intelligence" (De Vivo, 2018, pp. 53-85). Reading and re-reading archives is an activity of great importance to all powers. Collections, summaries, tables, compilations, cartularies, chronicles, terriers, inventories, catalogues, databases, etc. all bear witness to the vast movement towards mastery of information associated with any self-respecting power. The documentary forms it takes are the hallmark of successive political and legal expressions, from the feudalism of the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment (feudists) and the modern State. The development of the *raison d'État* in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was closely linked to documentary material, which was alternately concealed and made public, the better to establish territorial and political domination (Catteeuw, 2013; Descendre, 2009). With the exception of specific national characteristics (France under the Valois and the first Bourbons), it went hand in hand with better preservation and controlled disclosure of the archives of negotiations, such as diplomatic correspondence and instructions. In the modern era and well into the nineteenth century, the imperial and colonial dominations and constructions of the European powers were first and foremost those of a history of knowledge and intellectual categories, at least as much as the reality of a territorial occupation (Brendecke, 2009; Stoler, 2009; Houllemare, 2014, pp. 7-31). In the modern era, the administration of archives in colonial territories is often one of the most effective instruments of power available to local political leaders. A governor's archivist in French West Africa or French Indochina, often one of the few scientific staff in the colonial administration, was entrusted with tasks that went beyond his own sphere of work, leading him to set up restrictive formulas for managing administrative documentation (Chamelot, 2021, pp. 21-39).

Does this mean that we should speak of an *archivocracy* and raise the status of archives to the level of offices in a bureaucracy as envisaged by Max Weber? The question deserves to be asked, especially for areas that are not governed by the age-old rules of the *Registratur* that triumphed in Weber's country. The Italian polities of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are said to have established a form of administration through archives that reflects the

importance of diplomatic negotiation and government through letters in these medium-sized powers, which were forced to share the same territory of influence (De Vivo, 2013, pp. 699-728; De Vivo et al., 2015). It is worth noting that the progress of bureaucracy and administrative efficiency, particularly fiscal efficiency, in eighteenth-century France was based on the potential, actual or supposed use of notaries' archives and insinuations in court registries. And good government, so dear to the Republic of Siena in the fourteenth century, was also nourished by good information management, as shown by the management of his *Scrittoio segreto* by the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Como I, for whom "the memory of ancient things is indispensable to the good prince, for his rule must correct the faults and reward the virtues of his subjects" (Rouchon, 2023, p. 385; Rouchon, 2011-2012, pp. 263-306).

There is only one step from administration to control, a step that is easily crossed by the powers that be using archives, as is all too clear for historians of contemporary totalitarian powers, where archives played a decisive role in the surveillance of populations and in the arrest of groups of opponents or targeted communities. As we know, police knowledge has accompanied all powers, whatever their nature, since the emergence of the modern concept of the police in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It even constitutes the *nec plus ultra* of a modern, organised and masterful state. From Paris to Naples, via London and Venice, there was no State power that did not have an administration with the capacity to record the minutest details of the residence, identity and actions of individuals placed, for various reasons, under the surveillance of their authorities. Whether they were then called *lieutenant général de police* or *inquisitori di Stato*, the effectiveness of these institutions depended on their ability to call up their archives at short notice (Jacquet & Kérien, 2023, pp. 68-93). Subsequently, advances in documentary organisation have seen their archival tools evolve, from files to dossiers and then to today's databases, which make the form, the central element of this knowledge, the emblem of police surveillance in the service of a public order that is as much about repression as protection (Berlière & Fournié, 2011). The functional ambivalence of archives is well established. It is also present in their symbolic dimension.

2. The symbolic dimension

Like institutions (Lordon, 2013), archives cannot be reduced to a materiality and to administrative or judicial uses: they possess a symbolic charge and an imaginary, which can go as far as the emotions, sometimes passionate,

that govern their relationship to power. Their organisation and possession, in particular, reflect an eminently political discourse. Jacques Derrida used and abused the etymological openness of the term to argue that archives are at the very heart of the notion of order:

> Arkhé, it should be remembered, names both the beginning and the command. This name apparently coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, where things begin — the physical, historical or ontological principle — but also the principle according to law, where men and gods command, where authority is exercised, the social order, in this place from which order is given — the nomological principle. (Derrida, 1995, p. 5)[8]

The question of location, both spatial and institutional, is the first symbolic perception of the archives of power. Historians frequently ask questions about the nature of archives and the very exercise of power. The spatial location and choice of buildings reserved for the archives over the centuries and millennia says a lot about the intentions of the powers that be, whether to magnify them with palaces or *ad hoc* temples, to keep them close to the exercise of deliberation or worship, like the treasures of cities or churches, or, conversely, to relegate them to some out-of-the-way place in ordinary or even mediocre premises. No less interesting is the observation of the institutional positioning of the archives, whether it is a single or multiple service, a service integrated into the producer's operations (the most frequent case) or a separate, autonomous service. No organisational formula is in itself unequivocal and definitive. The creation of a separate department is not necessarily a sign of modernity (the *Trésor des chartes* of the Kings of France) or greater transparency: recourse to the notion of archivality proposed by Randolph Head (2018, pp. 29-52), which aims to better integrate archival reasoning from outside Europe, is a good antidote to hasty and anachronistic conclusions. As Filippo De Vivo (2013, pp. 716 et seq.) reminds us, archives are an issue of power within power itself: whether it is a question of appropriating them or of asserting one's objectives and institutional supremacy, archives are an object of internal debate, which can be seen, for example,

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8   Arkhé, rappelons-nous, nomme à la fois le commencement et le commandement. Ce nom coordonné apparemment deux principes en un : le principe selon la nature ou l'histoire, là où les choses commencent – principe physique, historique ou ontologique –, mais aussi le principe selon la loi, là où des hommes et des dieux commandent, là où s'exercent l'autorité, l'ordre social, en ce lieu depuis lequel l'ordre est donné – principe nomologique. (Derrida, 1995, p. 5)

in their attachment to a particular ministerial authority, which situates them sometimes at the heart of power and sometimes at its margins, depending on the point of view adopted.

It may happen that the government does not necessarily have direct control over the archives that result from its activities, without its authority being permanently affected. This is how the progressive affirmation of the modernity of State archives in the modern era, at the very time when the concept of sovereignty was being forged to accompany the advent of new political regimes, went through a phase of dispossession in favour of those involved in political and governmental life, whether it was the secretaries of Tudor England (Hunt, 2018, p. 108) or Valois France (Poncet, 2019b, pp. 42-45) who took their working papers with them, or the administrators of Tokugawa Japan whose power was based on private institutions assimilated by this regime to its professional bureaucracy (Cullen, 2013, pp. 33-65). Conversely, the attention paid to archives can constitute the birth certificate of a new power: the most emblematic example of all is that of the *Archives Nationales* organised in France at the beginning of the French Revolution. The deputy chosen by the National Assembly to head them was appointed Archivist of the Nation, and the first law organising them (1790, September 12) established their founding and symbolic role in the new regime: "The National Archives are the repository of all acts establishing the constitution of the kingdom, its public law, its laws and its distribution into departments."[9]

The seizure of archival documents is one of the early and constant signs of the assertion of power over a territory, a people, a movement, etc. (Sumpf & Laniol, 2012). Territorial conquests following military campaigns are therefore increasingly accompanied in treaties by specific clauses relating to the transfer of archives, *i.e.* proof of newly acquired rights to the victor. Even if they are not always implemented, because the transfer of archives is easier to postpone than the transfer of the territories concerned, these provisions are increasingly taken into account in modern and contemporary times. The removal of specific archives, such as police files or political and diplomatic archives, represents another right of the victor or occupier in contemporary conflicts (Cœuré, 2007; Fonck et al., 2019). These warlike, violent and political spoliations are not the only manifestations of archival conflicts that can be observed over a long period of time (Péquignot

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[9]   "Les Archives nationales sont le dépôt de tous les actes qui établissent la constitution du royaume, son droit public, ses lois et sa distribution en départements." Loi relative aux Achives nationales, article premier (1790). https://artflsrv04.uchicago.edu/philologic4.7/revlawall0922v2/navigate/3/21

& Potin, 2022). The destruction of documents, whether selective and rational or, on the contrary, total and symbolic, is also part of a rationale for asserting power or contesting it, which is sometimes expressed publicly, as in the case of ancient *damnatio memoriae*, but also in medieval and modern times. Subjugating a city, suppressing a dynasty and its power over a territory, opposing a faith, changing a political regime, making people forget a revolt (Poncet, 2022, pp. 259-276; Van Gelder & De Vivo, 2023, pp. 44-78) — these are all good ways of using the effective symbolism of archives (Gosset, 2017).

Despite these various appetites for the archives of the Other, it is important to nuance the value of these archives that are appropriated in this way, as many of them were hardly exploited by their new owner, either because he did not have the time to do so, or because he did not understand them, or because their usefulness had been exceeded, or because it was enough for him to possess them. The performative aspect of archives is an element that has rarely been emphasised in historiography, yet it is extremely powerful. The accumulation of documents, the presumption of total preservation of the memory of a State, a territory, a town, etc., is sometimes enough to ensure the respect and domination of those in power, who do not need to produce the titles and papers thus preserved. For example, there was no rule requiring medieval and modern *chambres des comptes* in France to keep audited accounts and verified supporting documents beyond the audit period. And yet, as we know, these are some of the most important documentary resources that have been handed down to us, even though their value for immediate or deferred use was practically null.

In the same way, the finding aids (inventories, summaries, etc.) produced in abundance in the archives of certain Italian states in the sixteenth century did not really play the political role that their authors had promised themselves, but had more of a psychological function, comparable to a tool to combat the fear of decline. They were undoubtedly more nostalgic monuments to the past than active tools of an archival intelligence — one which would have presupposed a more visible awareness and rationality (De Vivo, 2018). The same is true of family archives, the accumulation of which Maria de Lurdes Rosa (2022, p. 258) has shown to be a symbolic capital, desired and feared at the same time, an object of inheritance envy as much as of patrimonial serenity for its holders. Written documents have an unsuspected radiation, which is sometimes counter-intuitive when we think of totalitarian powers whose main concern might seem to be to eradicate "evidence of their crimes". Many cases show that only a political and military collapse that has occurred or is imminent will

lead certain officials, usually subordinates close to the action and its archives, to destroy the documents in their possession. But the higher up one goes in the political and institutional hierarchies, the more likely one is to keep records of decisions with far-reaching consequences (consider for instance Stalin's order for the execution of Polish prisoners in Katyń) (Zaslavsky, 2007, pp. 163-168).

One of the most symbolic aspects of the relationship between archives and power lies in access or, more often still, denial of access to them, whether normative, real or exaggerated (Combe, 1994). For the jurist Pierre Legendre, the prototype of the State is the living written word, defined in a phrase borrowed from Roman times (emperor Justinian) by the twelfth-century papacy: "[h]e has all the writings of the law in the archive of his chest" (*Omnia jura habet in scrinio pectoris sui*) (Legendre, 1986-1987, pp. 427-428; see also Gillmann, 1912, pp. 3-17). As we know, the *arcana imperii* were one of the privileged modes of expression and government that accompanied the birth of the modern State in the modern era (André et al., 2019). The communication and communicability of archive documents and their inventories are elements that are usually present in almost every legal text relating to this field. These aspects can sometimes take on a sacred aspect, as evidenced by the ban on consulting papal archives without authorisation in the seventeenth century, on pain of excommunication. In our democratic societies, waiting periods and reserved typologies are the focus of much of the attention of the various players involved, and are the source of most of the publicity – sometimes conflicting – given to government archives.

In the symbolic dimension of archives, it is important not to overlook their effects on the various populations that are affected, directly or indirectly, by what is contained, or could be contained, in the archives of power. This vision, which could be described as coming from below, or rather from outside, is that of the citizen, the subject, the user, the dominated, or even the administrator, depending on how you look at it. This very varied public, especially when it comes to ordinary people, who may not be acculturated to the written word, illiterate or illiterate, has a perception of archives that is sometimes based on a powerful imagination and sensibility that confers virtues on archives that are not always recognised by those who have custody of them or who are at the origin of them (Bercé, 1999, pp. 750-759), except precisely by playing with them as Michelet (1974, p. 726) did with his "ghosts" that emerged from the shelves of the *Archives Nationales*[10].

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[10]   "Je ne tardai pas à m'apercevoir dans le silence apparent de ces galeries, qu'il y avait un mouvement, un murmure, qui n'était pas de la mort" (Michelet, 1974, p. 726).

Ignorance or lack of knowledge can, depending on the case, give rise to a respect that is sometimes strong enough to encourage the preservation of documents that are supposed to guarantee a new social order, as was the case with certain tax documents in medieval communes (Herlihy & Klapisch-Zuber, 1978), or on the contrary inspire a fear that can sometimes lead to popular movements that pursue their destruction, as was the case, for example, with the burning of charters during the revolutionary period in France (Bercé, 1999). In the highly sensitive cases of requests to consult maternity records or anonymous childbirths, the relationship with the archives of power is coupled with a wounded, anxious or worried intimacy, which is as much the responsibility of the archives of power as of power itself. The issues surrounding archives can lead to the unleashing of scholarly or judicial passions, as was the case in seventeenth-century France, where scholars, judges, theologians, nobles and the king turned archives into a dramaturgy and an arena for their confrontations and ambitions to prove and tell the truth (Poncet, 2022).

3. The critical dimension

Archives are an offensive and defensive weapon for those in power. However, their orientation and use are not unequivocal. A power that yields to an opponent who takes its place can suddenly find itself at the mercy of its own archives, which are turned, as it were, against itself (Taschereau, 1848; *Papiers et correspondance de la famille impériale*, 1875). The power of archives to subvert other powers is powerful, and there are hardly any limits to the critical use of archives, whether as a loudhailer for the power that holds and produces them or to use them to influence, qualify or even combat that same power, to the point of operating a form of counter-power through archives.

The critical use of archives is not antagonistic to those in power, who are often the first to seize upon them to divulge a discourse constructed *ad hoc* to serve their policy. In fact, this propaganda through archives is one of the major objectives of the latter in ensuring the magnificent memory of power, and has been since the earliest times when archives were considered as tools that glorify the history of the State that gave them form. R. Head's study of the *Leitura Nova* of Manuel I in Portugal has amply demonstrated the constructive and constitutive function of recollection for a power wishing to establish not only the antiquity of its domination but also the innovation

introduced by its current holders (Head, 2018). Similar analyses can be carried out, for identical or even longer periods, on the Korean Annals of the Joseon dynasty. The creation of the first major modern repositories in the West in the sixteenth century more or less met the same objectives, even if these were not obvious, as Arndt Brendecke (2018, pp. 131-150) pointed out in relation to the Simancas archives, where he highlighted the "ambiguous agenda", between an arsenal of authority in which to seek out historical and political elements, and at the same time a prison for the papers of state power, according to Philip II's regulations of 1588. Napoleon I demonstrated this when he had the sovereign papers of the various territories subject to his imperial authority seized in order to concentrate them in the capital of Paris, where a palace was to house them magnificently while his archivist, Pierre-Claude-François Daunou, was charged with exploiting them to provide a political discourse on the destiny of Napoleonic France (Donato, 2019).

Without going as far as these extreme solutions, most governments supported the nascent desire of scholars of all origins — ecclesiastical, judicial and administrative — to rely on original documents to write history. Commissions to historiographers, editorial support from both sides and institutional creations (academies, schools) were the clearest signs of what the authorities asked of historians through archives and for archives. The École des Chartes in Paris (1821) was first and foremost a Napoleonic project, which the Restoration that succeeded it took on board in order to inscribe its political power in the long history of the Middle Ages, where charters were synonymous with regained freedom (Bercé, 1997, p. 23). And all the political regimes that France has subsequently known have facilitated the use of archives in the service of a history designed to support their political ambitions, whether it be the July Monarchy (Potin, 2018, pp. 175-233), the Second Empire or the Third Republic (Hildesheimer, 1997, 1998, 2000; Poncet, 2021).

The writing of history through archives does not depend solely on the will of archivists: we know the extent to which the supply, availability and writing of finding aids considerably influence the way in which archives are used. Michel Foucault insisted on the fact that archives are the product and source of epistemic power through the classificatory, and therefore hierarchical and dominant, knowledge that they possess, sometimes without the knowledge of those who use them (Ogilvie, 2017, pp. 121-134). It has taken a long time to deconstruct or better understand the discourse instituted by archives, for example those of the judiciary, where the word of the institution blurs and modifies the voice of the litigants (Ginzburg, 1976; Cerutti, 2009). This work of distancing historians from the instituted power of archives

actually began as soon as modern rules of criticism were being developed. When Mabillon published his *De re diplomatica* in 1681, even though it was part of a process of voluntary submission to power (the book was dedicated to Louis XIV's minister, Colbert), he provided historians with the critical weapons they needed to free themselves from the heavy domination of the *jus archivi* and authorise them to use all existing sources to develop their account of the past (Poncet, 2022, pp. 274-275). By placing the value of use on the document and not on the place where it was kept, Mabillon opened up an immense field of archival possibilities, in which archives were questioned a priori, but could serve any purpose. From then on, it was accepted by all those in power that, "to paraphrase Clausewitz, archival research was nothing more than the continuation of politics by other means" (Poncet, 2022, p. 276).

In this now permanent battle for power over (and through) archives, the position of archivists has evolved. Initially closely, if not exclusively, in the hands of those in power, their position gradually changed. The temptation to divulge information, for reasons of varying degrees of honesty, combined with an enthusiasm for the historical use of archived documents, led some archivists in the modern era to cross the red line and find themselves accused of conspiring against the power whose archives they kept — as in the case of Michele Lonigo, the first archivist of the *Archivio Segreto Vaticano* in the early seventeenth century (Filippini, 2007, pp. 705-736). The professionalisation of the function from the nineteenth century onwards led archivists to become relatively independent of the authorities. This relative independence with regard to action, sometimes more than that of mind, has been achieved through, among other things, the joint development of administrative rules, the adoption of increasingly scientific methods shared with university users, the emergence of professional associations that are increasingly open to archivists from all powers and counter-powers (Hamard, 2020), the extension of collecting archives to other than those of the authorities (private archives, business archives, etc.), the destruction requirements that are much more onerous than in the past and accompanied by recommendations that are imposed increasingly upstream of archiving, and so on. So much so that the archivist has become aware of his decisive value and — let us say it — his own power.

This critical awakening to the way in which archives can be considered as the site of a tension that it is possible to reverse is also connected — more so, perhaps, than historians admit or understand — with the archival turn that emerged in international research some twenty years ago, and whose

vitality and full maturity are reflected in the VINCULUM project at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa (Poncet, 2019a, pp. 713-743; the VINCULUM site https://www.vinculum.fcsh.unl.pt/). Since Howard Zinn's objurgations in 1977 in the wake of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal (Zinn, 1997, pp. 14-36) and Helen Samuels's famous "Who controls the past?" echoing Orwellian intuitions in 1986 (Samuels, 1986, pp. 109-124), archivists have resolutely embarked on a new path designed to bring about a fundamental change in the relationship between power and its archives. Without even the help of post-modern theory, which has admittedly played its part in the intellectual reversal of the way in which archives are viewed (Schwartz & Cook, 2002, pp. 1-19), archivists have extended their autonomy in an attempt to take the archives of power away from their instrumental condition and restore a form of neutrality to them, and even, for some, to establish them as counter-powers. Without any illusions about the supposed neutrality of archives (Jimerson, 2006, pp. 19-32) — a neutrality that some communities reject to the point of not entrusting their archives to the public authorities for fear of an imposed invisibility — archivists aim to change the univocal meaning of archives in order to restore a critical space that is more open and more accessible in its initial data. The contribution of archivists and archives to the defence of human rights (Boel et al., 2021), and more specifically to the delicate modalities of political transition in certain countries that have achieved democracy after periods of totalitarian and/or enslaving power (countries of the former Eastern European bloc, South Africa, etc.) has thus been decisive (Harris, 2002, 1996; Arzoumanian-Rumin, 2010, pp. 88-97). And even when the creature escapes the creator, as in the extreme case of Wikileaks, undoubtedly facilitated by the digital medium of the archives, the lessons that the archivist can and must draw from it inevitably refer back to his position as a political player, in the service of a power, certainly, but more broadly in the service of a society (Findlay, 2013, pp. 7-22).

This social responsibility that the archivist has discovered and taken upon himself does not preclude the instrumental dimension of archives, nor does it eliminate their functional, symbolic or critical dimensions, but it does allow us to see more clearly what archives do for power or — to put it another way — what their power is. Accountability has thus probably become the primary imperative of archives as instruments of power, not only for the producer-custodian, but also for the archivist, whose multiple actions (collecting, sorting, describing, communicating) are increasingly subject to transparency, and even for users, who are more and more frequently asked to explain the reasons for their use and their research methods.

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Celebrating change in archives[1]

Celebrando a transformação nos arquivos

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with a number of changes. The first is the new way of looking at and beyond the record, trying to read its tacit narratives of power and knowledge, and taking into account archivalterity, which refers to the acts of continuous and discontinuous change that transform the meaning and authenticity of a fonds as it is transmitted over time and space. This means a broadening — thus a change — of archival science and an openness to contributions from other disciplines. Looking beyond the record brings the contexts of archiving to the forefront, the why, who, what, and how, embedded in various temporalities. Contexts will change, *and* creation, capture, organization, and pluralisation will change, *and* societal challenges *and* technology will change. The major change in the 21st century and the major challenge for the archival endeavour is the existential threat from climate change (global warming),

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requiring an urgent switch to environmental sustainability, in all areas of archival practice.

KEYWORDS: Archivistics; Archiving; Archival turn; Ephemerality; Carbon footprint; Sustainability.

RESUMO

Este artigo aborda uma série de transformações. A primeira é a nova forma de olhar para o documento e para além dele, tentando ler as suas narrativas tácitas de poder e de conhecimento, e considerando a "archivalterity" que se refere aos atos de mudança contínua e descontínua que transformam o significado e a autenticidade de um fundo de arquivo à medida que este é transmitido ao longo do tempo e do espaço. Isto implica uma expansão — ou seja, uma transformação — da ciência arquivística e uma abertura aos contributos de outras disciplinas. Olhar para além do documento traz para o centro da discussão os contextos da arquivagem: o porquê, quem, o quê e como, inseridos em várias temporalidades. Os contextos mudarão; e a criação, a guarda, a organização e a pluralização mudarão também; os desafios societais e a tecnologia, mudarão também. A maior transformação no século XXI e o maior desafio de trabalho arquivístico empenhado é a ameaça existencial das alterações climáticas (aquecimento global), exigindo uma mudança urgente para uma maior sustentabilidade ambiental em todas as áreas da prática arquivística.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Arquivística; Arquivagem; Viragem arquivística; Efemeridade; Pegada de carbono; Sustentabilidade.

"If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change."
(Prince Tancredi Falconeri in Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's *The Leopard*)[2]

Celebrating

In May 2023 it was 125 years since the Association of Archivists in the Netherlands published the *Manual for the arrangement and description of archives*: the Dutch Manual by Muller, Feith and Fruin (1898). That

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2 « Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga com'è, bisogna che tutto cambi. »

anniversary would lend itself to a historical overview, looking back at the development of archival science in 125 years. Many authors have contributed to such a history of the profession, I will not repeat it. We can also celebrate the 25th anniversary of the handbook *Arquivística: teoria e prática de uma ciência da informação* (1998, second edition 1999, third edition 2009), by Júlio Ramos, Manuel Luís Real, Fernanda Ribeiro and Armando Malheiro da Silva. The authors of *Arquivística* dedicated their book to the authors of the Dutch Manual who "opened new perspectives for the archival discipline" ("veio abrir novas perspectivas para a disciplina arquivística").

Allow me to refer to another, more personal professional anniversary. A few days ago, it was exactly 25 years since my inaugural address as professor at the University of Amsterdam. I am not going to deal with those twenty-five years of history either, I just want to mention a few moments in the development of archival science, not as historiography, but as a starting point to present some reflections on the need for changes in archival science and in the archival profession. The temporality of our profession means that, like the Roman god Janus, we look in the present to the past on the one hand and to the future on the other, at least this is the traditional Western view which I am going to review later in this lecture.

Archivalisation

In my inaugural address, I introduced the concept of archivalisation: a neologism which I invented, meaning *the conscious or unconscious choice (determined by social and cultural factors) to consider something worth archiving* ("arquivalização, um neologismo que eu mesmo inventei e que significa a escolha consciente ou inconsciente (determinada por fatores sociais e culturais) para considerar se algo merece ser arquivado"). By distinguishing archivalisation from archiving we gain an insight into the social and cultural factors, the standards and values, the ideology, that infuse the creation of archival documents (Matienzo, 2008). Acknowledging archivalisation means that archivists, beyond their preoccupation with the archive they manage, also look beyond the archive. This calls for looking up from the record and through the record, looking beyond — and questioning — its boundaries, in new perspectives, trying to read its tacit narratives of power and knowledge.

Archival Turns

This means a broadening — thus a change — of archival science and an openness to contributions from anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers, cultural and literary theorists, artists, and many more. These and other disciplines have experienced an archival turn in the past twenty-five years. The term archival turn was first used by the anthropologist and historian Ann Stoler, in a paper given at a conference in Saint Petersburg, May 1998. I also participated in that conference and I quoted Stoler in my inaugural lecture later that year. This archival turn, or this move from archives-as-sources to archives-as-subject was presented by Stoler on several occasions, three of them events of extraordinary importance for the discipline of archivistics: the Sawyer seminar *Archives, documentation and institutions of social memory*, the book *Refiguring the Archive* and the journal *Archival Science.*

In 2000-2001 the Sawyer seminar brought some 70 scholars from fifteen countries to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor (USA) (Blouin & Rosenberg, 2006). Ann Stoler's two papers (she was one of the few participants with a double bill) were later published and evolved into a chapter in Stoler, 2009. The participants in the twenty-eight sessions came from various disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, less than one third being scholars and practitioners in archivistics. The point of departure of the seminar's organizers, Fran Blouin and Bill Rosenberg, was "a conception of archives not simply as historical repositories but as a complex of structures, processes, and epistemologies" (Blouin & Rosenberg, 2006, p. vii). This heralded a new view of archives as epistemological sites rather than as sources. Ann Stoler's two papers presented at the Sawyer seminar convincingly argued for this archival turn, which was visible in several other presentations. Stoler developed her two papers into a presentation at the seminar *Refiguring the archive*, hosted in 1998 by the South-African University of Witwatersrand in conjunction with four archival institutions. The thirteen sessions of the seminar attracted speakers and discussants from a wide range of disciplines and professions. Among them Ann Stoler and Jacques Derrida. The book *Refiguring the archive* was published in 2002. In their introduction of *Refiguring the archive*, editors Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris and Graeme Reid stressed the constructedness of archives, not simply as sources but as sites of contested knowledge: "today scholars pay greater attention to the particular processes by which the record was produced and subsequently shaped,

both before its entry into the archive, and increasingly as part of the archival record" (Van Zyl & Verne, 2001, p. 9).

Archival Science: the Journal

Stoler's paper was subsequently published in the second volume (2002) of *Archival Science*. The journal (founded in 2001) marked the emancipation of archivistics as an autonomous scholarly discipline (Buchanan, 2011, p. 39). The founders formulated the journal's approach as integrated, intercultural and interdisciplinary (Horsman et al., 2001, pp. 1-2). *Integrated* because the journal would cover the whole of the records continuum. *Intercultural* because the journal would acknowledge "the impact of different cultures on archival theory, methodology and practice, by taking into account different traditions in various parts of the world, and by promoting the exchange and comparison of concepts, views and attitudes in those traditions" and *interdisciplinary* meant an association

> with the scientific disciplines dealing with (1) the function of records and the way they are created, preserved and retrieved, (2) the context in which information is generated, managed and used and (3) the social and cultural environment of records creation in different times and places. (Horsman et al., 2001, p. 1)

This hospitality to other disciplines was and still is essential. As Terry Eastwood wrote in 2017 "In engaging other disciplinary perspectives, archivists have augmented their theory, methods, and practice with insights not of their own making but by no means foreign to their way of thinking. In some cases, these insights are surprising." (p. 19).

The Archive

Surprising, but I have to admit, sometimes staggering. In the past twenty-five years, much of the literature on "the archive" has often been received by members of the archival profession with "[r]ejection, indignation, speculation and even amusement" because "the archive" "seemed to them to be a misguided, misdirected, poorly understood and overly theorized construct of a primarily practical pursuit" (Bastian, 2016, p. 4). This narrow

view has been rectified in recent years by educators and scholars in archivistics like Jeannette Bastian who endeavoured to reconcile "the archive" with the archives. Indeed, one shouldn't make a fuss over the conceptual and practical differences between the singular and the plural[3]. Archives and archive are as Geoffrey Yeo's proposes "boundary objects", which "straddle many different communities of practice; any given object could be claimed by two or more communities" (Yeo, 2008, p. 131).

Postmodernism

The second volume of *Archival Science* (2002) consisted of two thematic double issues *Archives, Records and Power*. The guest editors, Terry Cook and Joan Schwartz, argued in their introduction that archives "are not passive storehouses of old stuff, but active sites where social power is negotiated, contested, confirmed" (Schwartz & Cook, 2002, pp. 1-19). Terry Cook had, the year before, contributed to *Archival Science* the inaugural article "Archival science and postmodernism: new formulations for old concepts". He ended that article by stating

> Process rather than product, becoming rather than being, dynamic rather than static, context rather than text, reflecting time and place rather than universal absolutes - these have become the postmodern watchwords for analyzing and understanding science, society, organizations, and business activity, among others. They should likewise become the watchwords for archival science in the new century, and thus the foundation for a new conceptual paradigm for the profession. (Cook, 2001a)

Such a new paradigm — not only for the profession, but for archivistics as a scholarly endeavour — was presented in the first volume of *Archival Science* by Fernanda Ribeiro (Ribeiro, 2001; see also Ribeiro, 2007). She realized, like Terry Cook, that archival science was reaching a turning point at which old and new perspectives coexist. Her article confronted "the traditional and, admittedly, still dominant view, substantiated in the *historical-technicist* paradigm, and a new approach, which we will designate as *scientific-informational*". This led *inter alia* to the design of a new curriculum for

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3   Unlike Caswell, 2014.

teaching information science which went beyond the traditional separation between archives and libraries.

Terry Cook's article in *Archival Science* dealt with the impact of postmodern ideas on archival theory (Tognoli, 2010). In another article, published in the same year in *Archivaria*, Terry focused more on the societal conditions of postmodernity and how postmodern insights might improve archival practice and profession (Cook, 2001b, p. 14). Inspiration for this came from various thinkers and writers both within and outside archival science. Because, to quote Terry Eastwood again, "engaging other disciplinary perspectives" is essential to any discipline, to theory, methodology and practice (Eastwood, 2017, p. 15). What we have learned from postmodernism is the realization that the so-called "principles" cherished by our profession "such as *respect des fonds*, are likewise revealed as historically contingent, not universal or absolute" (Cook, 2001b, p. 27).

Archives and Collections

Take, for example, the notion of "organically grown" archives, as opposed to "artificially constructed" collections. The concept of a "collection" has been haunting archival practitioners and theorists ever since the *respect des fonds* was formulated in 1841 and codified in the Dutch *Manual for the arrangement and description of archives* of 1898. The core idea of the *Manual* was "that an archive is not so much an arbitrary collection, but a whole that has arisen organically" (Horsman et al., 2001, p. 261). Archives, according to the *Manual*, are the "reflection" of the creator's functions and therefore "not arbitrarily created in the way that historical manuscripts are accumulated" (Muller et al., 2003, p. 19). This organic growth, so many people believed, distinguishes archives from libraries and other "artificial" collections. That difference was obscured in the English edition of the *Manual* because the translator replaced the Dutch "archief" throughout by: archival collection (the Portuguese translation stuck to: arquivo). "Archival collection" became standard in American terminology to the extent that, for example, Mark Greene could write in the recently published *Encyclopedia of archival science* about an archival collection (what Europeans would call: *archief, arquivo, Archiv*) "Note that an archival collection is not to be confused with an artificial collection, which is a set of individual items with separate provenance brought together by a collector around a theme." (Duranti & Franks, 2015, p. 33).

The difference between "organically grown" archives and artificially constructed collections was effectively "deconstructed" by James Currall, Michael Moss and Susan Stuart in two articles published in 2005 and 2006 (Currall et al., 2005; Currall, 2006; see also Ketelaar, 2024, pp. 43-44). They argued that all collections in archives, libraries and museums are constructed and mediated. The creators of a collection privilege some items to be part of the aggregation and reject (often implicitly) others. In my country text messages sent and received by phone by public officials are considered to be archival documents. Very recently it became known that the Dutch prime minister used to select from the text messages he received and sent the 'important ones' — the rest he deleted every day from his phone, apparently assuming that the latter were not archival. In creating his archives, he thus privileged some text messages while rejecting others, putting some on the archival pedestal, sending others into oblivion as "non-archival documents". Such privileging, Currall, Moss and Stuart argued, "is inevitably dynamic, reflecting contemporary circumstances and preoccupations". They concluded that the "various stakeholders in information provision in both the physical and digital domains" should

> enter into meaningful dialogue, not just to quibble about semantics but to debate the harder theoretical, technical and philosophical problems that we have raised and attempted to address. This presents new opportunities to us all, but threatens the carefully cherished boundaries between professions in the established order. (Currall et al., 2006, p. 117)

Process-bound

However, accepting the socially constructed nature of collections *and* archives should not lead to lumping them together. The logic of the archives[4] involves that records and archives are what Theo Thomassen calls "process-bound", that is: they are "generated by coherent work processes and structured and recorded by these work processes in such a

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[4] According to the Oxford English Dictionary logic is "a system or set of principles underlying the arrangements of elements in a computer or electronic device so as to perform a specified task" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 1998).

way that it [the meanings of the record *EK*] can be retrieved from the context of those work processes." (Thomassen, 2001, p. 374). Archival science is a contextual science, as Foscarini and Illerbaig wrote recently (Foscarini & Illerbaig, 2017, p. 177).

Consequently, we do not consider the record or document merely on its own, but within the context of the work process which created the document, and which gives each document its specific meaning within that context. Archiving includes creating and linking a document to a transaction and to the other documents of that transaction by some form of physical or virtual filing. The "archival bond" or the interrelatedness between the records created and received during a particular transaction, is an essential characteristic of archives (Duranti & Franks, 2015, pp. 28-29).

Contexts[5]

The process-bound character of records and archives entails, as I said, looking up from the record and through the record to its contextual agency: the why, who, what, and how[6]. Archiving is a cultural, social and political practice, influenced by societal challenges (including archivalisation) and by technologies, not directly but through the agency of actors who act in a function executing specific work processes, according to a mandate and the actor's functions. In my book *Archiving people* I proposed a model of the archival context (Ketelaar, 2020). It is based on a model by Hans Hofman who adapted an Australian model (SPIRT Recordkeeping Metadata Research Project) by adding "business processes" (Hofman, 2000, p. 58; 2005, p. 138; Hofman's model was based on the modelling in the SPIRT Recordkeeping Metadata Research Project: McKemmish et al., 1999, pp. 12-13). I renamed some of the labels and added "societal challenges" and "technology".

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[5] On contexts see Ketelaar, 2023a, pp. 35-56.

[6] The term "contextual agency of records" is used by Foscarini & Illerbaig (2017, p. 191).
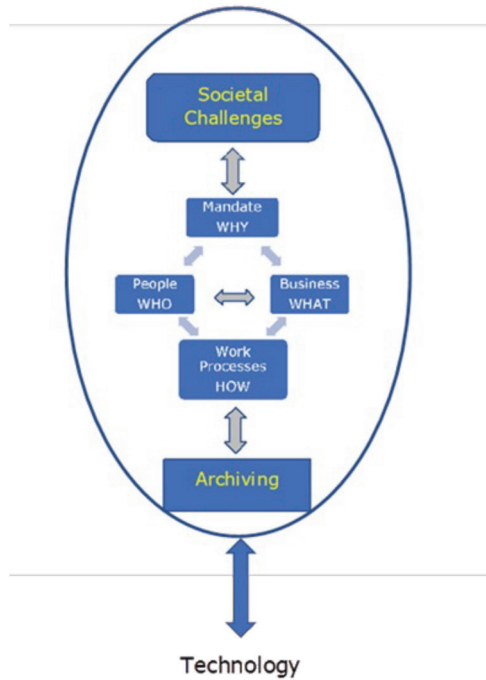
Figure 1 - Model of the archiving context (Ketelaar, 2020, p. 275b, Fig. 11.21).

For example, we acknowledge the need felt by society for an armed force that is anchored constitutionally (mandate: **why**). This results in functions (**what**) performed by actors (**who**) in specific work processes (**how/ where/when**). All this leads to archiving (Ketelaar, 2020, p. 275b; 2023b, pp. 169-182). The changing views of society about, for example, military service have an influence on the military's mandate and subsequently on the functions (the enlisting system), actors (governments, citizens, businesses) and work processes, leading to changes in archiving. Each of these interdependent components is time- and place-bound and influenced by technology. This makes the model dynamic, the more so when we realize that "Archiving" in the model stands for the records continuum wherein archival documents travel back and forth in a recursive process across four dimensions: creation, capture, organization, and pluralization (making the records available to society). Therefore, the model is embedded in various temporalities: why, who, what, and how will change, *and* creation, capture, organization, and pluralisation will change, *and* societal challenges *and* technology will change.

Provenance

In this vision the provenance of archives is linked to functions and activities, rather than to structure and place. Provenance is one of the traditional tenets or principles in archivistics (Douglas, 2017; Michetti, 2017). However, "a new wave of theorizing the concept of 'provenance' (…) suggests that the archival field continues to explore and re-interpret both the affordances and inadequacies of what is generally considered a foundational principle", as a call for papers for a special issue of *Archival Science* on provenance declared, some months ago.

An earlier wave of rediscovering provenance was marked, thirty years ago, by the publication of *Canadian archival studies and the rediscovery of provenance*, edited by Tom Nesmith (1993). Some years later, Nesmith proposed a new concept of provenance: "The provenance of a given record or body of records consists of the social and technical processes of the records' inscription, transmission, contextualization, and interpretation which account for its existence, characteristics, and continuing history." (Nesmith, 1999, p. 146; Millar, 2002, pp. 1-15).

Many scholars and practitioners are working with provenance, in various conceptualizations of the tenet. Peter Horsman said in 2011: "more conceptually, provenance is now rather defined as context" (Horsman, 2011, p. 2). Or rather: contexts (plural), what Verne Harris calls "an ever-unfolding horizon of context(s)" (Harris, 2011, p. 360). There is a risk, however, that in this "incessant movement of continual recontextualisation" the boundaries of provenance become infinite and that "meaningful distinctions between the various parties who concur in the formation of a group of records over time and the role they play may be obscured", as Jennifer Douglas cautions. She advocates acknowledging "the ways in which each of these types of intervention differs from each other in their motives, methods and eventual impact" (Douglas, 2017, p. 40). This calls for more research both on each of the components of my model of the archival context and on their interdependencies and their relative value.

Records-in-Contexts

One of the operationalisations of this view of "provenance defined as context" is the conceptual model *Records in contexts* (note the plural!) or RiC, currently being developed by the International Council on Archives and

meant to replace older standards like ISAD (G) (International Council on Archives, 2023; Santos & Revez, 2023, pp. 137-158). The model recognizes that the contexts in which archival materials arise and are used over time are dynamic and complex. The model proposes a way of contextual description in order to offer different perspectives and different access options. According to RiC, the description of an archival item makes the network of related actors, documents, functions and processes and their contextual history transparent. Among these actors are not only record creators and archivists, but a host of "archivers" (Ketelaar, 2023c, pp. 287-295; or "activators" according to Douglas, 2017, pp. 129-149), in fact "everyone who has contributed to the record and has been affected by its action," to quote Livia Iacovino who advocates a "participant model" of provenance along the lines of earlier proposals by Chris Hurley and others (Iacovino, 2010; Upward et al., 2011). As I argued at the Sawyer seminar and subsequently in my *Tacit narratives* (2001) "Every interaction, intervention, interrogation, and interpretation by creator, user, and archivist is an activation of the record." (Ketelaar, 2001; Yeo, 2018, pp. 39-40). This is echoed in the RiC model: "ongoing use and reuse of the records becomes part of the history of the records; it re-contextualizes them. The use and reuse generate other records, thereby extending the social-document network" (International Council on Archives, 2023, p. 7; see also Santos & Revez, 2023, p. 149; McLeod & Lomas, 2023, p. 437).

The same is true for the use and reuse by records-subjects, their communities and other co-creators. But, as Jessica Lapp argues, "not all record interventions can be reduced or elevated to the level of co-creation" (Lapp, 2023, p. 125). She refers to Michelle Caswell's refusal to position prisoners of the Khmer Rouge "as co-creators of their photographic prison record, suggesting that to do so would position victims of the Khmer Rouge as somehow complicit in their trauma, abuse, and murder" (Caswell, 2014, pp. 18-20, 58-59, 158). Nonetheless, "recognizing the rights of co-creators as part of an archive's provenance" (Douglas, 2017, p. 43) is a first step towards decolonizing archival theory, methodologies and practices, decolonizing being one of the great challenges to the archival profession (Gordon, 2014).

Archivalterity

Postmodern views have led archival scholars to repudiate the assumption that archival documents are static, unchangeable, fixed. They are "shaped

by the decisions and actions of their originators and custodians" (Yeo, 2018, p. 42). I will deal later with the fixity of digital records.

The Australian records continuum model implies that an archival document while travelling throughout the continuum is created and recreated, getting different meanings along the way. This is called by Heather MacNeil archivalterity, which "refers to the acts of continuous and discontinuous change that transform the meaning and authenticity of a fonds as it is transmitted over time and space" (MacNeil, 2008, p. 14). This challenges archival theory and methodology to displace or at least change traditional conceptualisations of records and archives. I may refer to the important work of international multidisciplinary research networks like Interpares and RecordDNA (Duranti & Thibodeau, 2006, pp. 13-68; McLeod & Lomas, 2023, pp. 411-446; InterPARES. International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems, 2002; Record DNA, n.d.). The former, led by Luciana Duranti (University of British Columbia) and the latter, led by Elizabeth Lomas and Julie McLeod (University College London and University of Northumbria) yielded important output, including a host of questions for future multidisciplinary or "convergent" research (McLeod & Lomas, 2023, p. 400).

Affordances

Most archivists would keep to the definition of records as "information created, received and maintained as evidence and information…" etc. (Yeo, 2018, p. 51). This circular definition (information is information) in the international standard ISO 15489 was amended later into "information created, received and maintained as evidence and as an asset by an organization or person…". Both the original and the revised definition of records have been scrutinized by Geoffrey Yeo in his remarkable book *Records, information and data. Exploring the role of record-keeping in an information culture* (2018), the fruit of many years of thinking and writing about records and archives. In 2007 Yeo proposed that information is not an entity that can be managed; information is one of the properties (or, in Geoffrey Yeo's terminology: affordances) of a record, "a capacity that records can supply to a user, or a benefit that can be derived from their use" (Yeo, 2018, pp. 95-96; *Oxford English Dictionary*, n.d.). Evidence is another affordance of records (McLeod & Lomas, 2023, pp. 418-420). Other affordances of records are values like "memory, accountability, legitimization of power, a sense of personal or

social identity and continuity, and the communication of such benefits across space and time" (Yeo, 2007, p. 330).

These affordances are potentials, awaiting to be activated and to give a meaning to the record. A record does not *have* meanings: "different meanings are assigned to the same resource by different people at different times", as Jonathan Furner wrote, and he added "that ''the'' conventional meaning of a given resource is a matter of intersubjective consensus" (Furner, 2010, pp. 4155-4156). This approach brings the user and their meaning making to the forefront.

Para-archiving

Allow me a personal note here. In 1997 the chair of archivistics at the University of Amsterdam was transferred from the history department to book, library, and information studies which was renamed into library, archives and information studies. The latter two were subsequently moved to the newly created department of media studies. There I discovered how colleagues working with television, film, journalism, and new media were primarily interested in the reception of media and the interaction with readers and viewers, more than in the production. That opened my eyes to paying more attention in archival studies to the user as co-creator and to archiving as a human practice. People are involved in day-to-day acts of classification, arrangement, selection, etc. (Van Alphen, 2023, p. 16). Think of arranging books on a bookshelf, or using a mobile phone to capture images, or throwing away the shopkeeper's receipt. These are basically archiving practices. Media scholar and artist Jacek Smolicki proposes the concept of para-archiving:

> a practice performed on a personal level, by an amateur and dilettante interested in documenting and possibly preserving some aspects of the world that he/she is genuinely passionate and curious about in their everyday life. (…) [it] occurs parallel to other kinds of both voluntary and non-voluntary, automated, imperceptible capturing and micro-archiving practices and mechanisms taking place on daily basis. (Smolicki, 2017, p. 17; see also Smolicki, n.d.)

Recently Anne Klein, professor at the Laval University in Québec, has proposed a Copernican turn in archival theory and practice (Klein, 2019). She states "archives become truly archives only through their utilization".

She advocates rethinking archives from the point of view of their exploitation rather than from their production. She amends the records continuum model by adding exploitation as a fifth dimension. This proposal to bring the exploitation of archives and thus the user of archives to the forefront is in line with other recent paradigmatic changes in archival theory, methodology and practice. One was labeled Archives 2.0, an approach in which archivists use technology to become more user-centered, another move towards archival autonomy. This is a concept recently proposed by Australian scholars, being "the ability for individuals and communities to participate in societal memory, with their own voice, becoming participatory agents in recordkeeping and archiving" (Evans et al., 2015, p. 347; Gilliland & McKemmish, 2014, pp. 78-88)[7]. Viewing archives as participatory frameworks is broadening into a view of archives as part of an ecology, a term I used "to stress the interdependence, mutuality, and coexistence of archives/records and other memory texts in a societal context" (Ketelaar, 2014, p. 150; see also Taylor, 1984, pp. 25-37; Wick, 2017, pp. 13-34). Actors in that ecology are the archivers I mentioned before. But not all archivers are equal in the deeply social world of the archive, as sociologists Damon Mayrl and Nicholas Hoover Wilson found out (Mayrl & Wilson, 2020, pp. 407-426). In the relationship between scholars/users and archivists, they write, "vectors of inequality" may be hidden. They are instances of power. Indeed, every interaction with the archive by an archiver is intentionally or unintentionally enforced by power (Ketelaar, 2002, pp. 221-238; 2005, pp. 277-298; Jimerson, 2009).

The Digital

Archival science in the 21st century studies phenomena that look like traditional facts and events, even carry traditional labels, but that are conceptually totally different. An 'original' is no original, a 'record' is not a record, 'provenance', 'preservation', 'access', and 'use' are no provenance, preservation, access, and use as we used to know them (Ketelaar, 2007, pp. 167-191).

Digital records don't have their content, structure and form in or on a physical medium. They are *potential* documents, coming into existence only by virtue of software that understands how to access and display them. The

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[7]   On people's participation in the preservation of digital art, by crowdsourcing and webarchiving see Bartlett, 2017, pp. 131-148.

software sooner or later becomes obsolete, which necessitates "refreshing" the documents through migration or other techniques. The perceptible form of a digital document "is always being manufactured just-in-time, on the spot" (Levy, 2001, p. 152). This makes a digital document an ephemeral fluid manifestation. The same is true for digital instantiations of works of art — digital-born or digitized analogue materials. I argue that preserving an artwork or an archival document means enacting it by capturing the ephemeron, drawing on the reserves embedded in the originating instantiation of the work, at its inception. Further instantiations are what the people at the Rhizome digital archive (Rhizome Archive, n.d.) call variants, they will not and cannot be exact copies, they are approximations, if only because the public is not the same as in earlier performances. This makes the distinction between original and copy irrelevant "to those concerned with performance and liveness", as Nash and Vaugh argue about digital performance artworks, but it would be also true for digital documents (Nash & Vaughan, 2017, p. 153; Ketelaar, 2003, p. 13).

Ephemerality

"Archives are comprised in their continuing and future enactment and use; in layers of performance." (Clarke et al., 2018, p. 11). They are not static, "they are constantly refreshed so that their ephemerality endures", to quote Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (Chun, 2008, p. 167; repr. in: Huhtamo & Parikka, 2011, p. 184). This enduring ephemerality has been tested, for example, by the Australian Circus Oz Living Archive, founded in 2014 and revived in 2022 (Circus Oz Living Archive, 2014; Carlin & Vaughan, 2015). This living archive "is not merely a digital repository; it is a dynamic part of the mediated enactment of design in, and as, cultural imagination and articulation" (Morrison et al., 2015, p. 163). The Circus Oz Living Archive is one example of the endeavours to preserve works of art by enactment, rather than by "freezing" a particular instantiation which traditionally has been seen as a characteristic of the archive.

Artists and archivists have to become "more permissive of change" (Jones et al., 2009, p. 169) of the work of art and the archive, more permissive of the ephemeral performance of art and archive. Annet Dekker signals that changing attitudes "towards archiving are increasingly focused on ephemerality and require strategies of modulation, movement, and mutation" (Dekker, 2017, p. 20).

Appraisal[8]

The editors of *Artists in the archive* define archiving as giving place, order and future to the remainder. "The double meaning of *remain*", Jussi Parikka writes, "is that which is left behind as enduring legacy that is archived but also that which is *left out* of the classification or the archive" (Parikka, 2019, p. 5). Indeed, archives are a residue, left after the non-archivable has been removed (Miller, 2002, p. 6). Archiving entails appraisal, which is "distinguishing records of continuing value from those of no further value so that the latter may be eliminated" (The National Archives, 2022).

Appraisal is one of those interventions which co-determine the meaning of archives, because the archives after appraisal are not the same as the archives before appraisal. In the digital age, the appraisal process begins with the design of the recordkeeping system when one determines which documents are captured, that is: accepted by the system and thus becoming records. Moreover, digital records cannot be left on the shelves for years, waiting to be appraised. Therefore at the front-end one has to decide which documents have to be kept in the system as records, and which records can be disposed of later, either through destruction or by transferring them to another system. "Archiving by design" means that when designing the information systems that support work processes, one has to take into account the sustainability of the information from those work processes.

Sustainability

Sustainability implies acting "that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"[9]. The major change in the 21st century and the major challenge for the archival endeavour is the existential threat from climate change (global warming), requiring an urgent switch to sustainability, in particular environmental sustainability, in all areas of archival practice (Pendergrass et al., 2019, p. 166). Much of the as yet scarce literature on archives and climate change concerns the "receiving end": the threat *to* archives of climate change. But equally (and perhaps more) important is to look at the "producing end, to

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8   This paragraph is taken from Ketelaar, 2023a, p. 46.

9   Adapting the definition of sustainable development in the Brundtland report *Our common future* (1987), cited by Pendergrass et al., 2019, endnote 5.

the treat *from* archives: how much is archiving contributing to global warming through emission of greenhouse gasses. Recently a special issue of *Comma*, the journal of the International Council on Archives was devoted to archives and climate change. It contains, among others, an in-depth study by Aurèle Nicolet and Basma Makhlouf Shabou, on the ecological costs of our archival practices (Nicolet & Shabou, 2021, pp. 399-415).

In my country, the impact on climate change of the National Archives of The Netherlands has been calculated as 3879 ton CO^2 equivalent, just as much as the emission of 204 Dutch households (of 2.2 people). Nearly all (87%) of that footprint is caused by IT and data storage, plus energy (9%). Reducing emissions and energy consumption are the key solutions to tackle global warming and its effects (loss of biodiversity, forest fires, sea level rise, etc.). "Archival workers," Samantha Winn writes, "have both an ethical imperative and a functional exigency to develop practices which do not require infinite exploitable resources" (Winn, 2020, p. 12). As the code of ethics of the Archives & Records Association (UK & Ireland) states: "Insofar as it is within their power to do so, members should minimise the adverse effects of their work on the environment." (Archives & Records Association (UK & Ireland), 2020).

In 2019 the *American Archivist* published an extensive report *Toward environmentally sustainable digital preservation* which not only includes a thorough literature review, but importantly offers a roadmap (see also Abbey, 2012, pp. 92-115; Paschalidou et al., 2022, pp. 1066-1088) for strategies to reduce the environmental impact of digital archival practices. Even more important and more difficult are the report's recommendations to reevaluate the archivist's basic assumptions of appraisal, permanence, and availability of digital content (Pendergrass et al., 2019, pp. 167, 181). Such a reevaluation is urgent. Cultural heritage organisations, the authors Keith Pendergrass, Walker Sampson, Tim Walsh, and Laura Alagna argue, "need to reduce the amount of digital content that they preserve while reducing the resource-intensity of its storage and delivery" (Pendergrass et al., 2019, p. 177). This entails a number of paradigm shifts.

Paradigm Shifts

The first paradigm shift concerns appraisal. Some people assume that appraisal of records (what to keep, what to destroy) is no longer necessary in the digital age because of the unlimited storage capacity and searchability of

digital media. That is, however, a myth. Enduring storage and enduring access require enormous resources: buildings, staff, energy, constant upgrading and migration of software and hardware, etc. Every terabyte less as a result of appraisal, is not only a saving in these annually recurring costs, but more importantly a reduction of the archives' carbon footprint[10]. To reduce the environmental impact, archival institutions have to develop additional criteria alongside existing principles for selection and appraisal (Pendergrass et al., 2019, p. 182). Pendergrass and his co-authors formulate questions like "Is there a demonstrated need for digital availability of the analog materials?" Do you need to preserve all copies of a digital record or (a more uneasy question) do you need to preserve the analog original that has been digitized? Should every item be migrated or digitized to the highest quality possible?

The second paradigm shift, signaled by Pendergrass and his co-authors, concerns permanence (O'Toole, 1989, pp. 10-25). They challenge the assumption in current digital preservation practice of "a goal of zero change or loss in digital collections over time" (Pendergrass et al., 2019, p. 186); and they urge archival institutions to "determine acceptable levels of loss in digital preservation programs". Paschalidou et al. (2022, pp. 1072-1074) "advocate a paradigm of 'sufficiency'". As Jeff Rothenberg wrote two decades ago in a report commissioned by the Dutch National Archives: we must choose what to lose (Rothenberg & Bikson, 1999, p. 6; Rothenberg, 2000, p. 56). Instead of striving for permanence, archivists should decide what constitutes "good enough" digital preservation, using terms as "continuing" or "enduring". "Perhaps the rhetoric of the archive should move away from notions of fixed, stable records" (Jones et al., 2009, p. 169). Rinehart and Ippolito advocate to relinquish the "fixation with fixity" (Rinehart & Ippolito, 2014, p. 95; see also, McLeod & Lomas, 2023, p. 413), and embrace "lossyness" (Goldman, 2019, p. 289). Furthermore, improving the efficiency of preservation practices (for example reducing the frequency of fixity checks and the number of redundant copies), will lead to the storage of less data and thus reducing the storage footprint.

The third and final paradigm shift proposed in the report *Toward environmentally sustainable digital preservation* relates to availability. Users expect "near-constant" (24/7) and immediate access to any and all digital born and digitized materials (Pendergrass et al., 2019, p. 191). But they usually do not realize that retrieving files from a digital collection causes CO_2 emissions. The footprint of the archive service grows with every action in which its

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[10]   Geoffrey Yeo discusses various options of keeping everything digital and minimizing appraisal of digital records: Yeo, 2018, pp. 45-63; see also Bussel & Smit, 2014, pp. 271-277.

servers use computing power and also with the loading of web pages and the downloading of files. However,

> Cultural heritage organizations can reduce the environmental impact of digital access and delivery by critically examining the justifications for mass digitization, implementing on-demand access strategies, adjusting storage technologies for access, and ensuring timely — but not necessarily immediate — delivery. (Pendergrass et al., 2019, p. 192)

Changes

Each of these three paradigm shifts (regarding appraisal, permanence, and availability) entails changes in archival science and the archival profession. Each of these paradigms shifts calls for theoretical and methodological revisiting of canonical principles and practices. They were once conceived, adapted and adopted. They are not immanent and immobile. On the contrary, in the longer term they are variable and changeable. This offers room for agency, for evolution and often also for revolutionary changes in archival principles and practices. Changes that are often the consequence of changes in society, technology, etc. Opposing those changes with an appeal to tradition ("it has always been like that") is a bad tactic. This also applies to an appeal to the law or to professional ethics: "that is not allowed". After all, the rules of law and professional conduct were created by people, people who acted in a certain environment at a certain time for a certain purpose.

Archivistics as a scholarly and professional endeavour, too, is not immanent and immobile. It moves through time and space, adapting, inhaling, and infusing from other disciplines. Archivistics has profited from positivism, structuralism, postmodernism, from scholarship in historiography, anthropology, critical race theory, sociology, psychology, philosophy, cultural and literary theory, and art. Archivistics is being enriched by feminist, queering, and postcolonial methodologies and epistemologies which "are a powerful means of addressing the tenets of Western archival scholarship and practice" (Lapp, 2023, p. 133). They are the "archival returns" or new perspectives endowing and changing archival theory, methodology, and practice (Ketelaar, 2016, pp. 228-268).

Everything flows and nothing stays, Heraclitus said. No person ever steps in the same river twice. And so I am back at the beginning: "If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change".

I have dealt with a number of changes. The first was the new way of looking at and beyond the record, trying to read its tacit narratives of power and knowledge, and taking into account archivalterity, which "refers to the acts of continuous and discontinuous change that transform the meaning and authenticity of a fonds as it is transmitted over time and space" (MacNeil, 2008, p. 14). This means a broadening — thus a change — of archival science and an openness to contributions from other disciplines. In the move to the digital, Michael Moss and David Thomas argue, "records have stepped beyond their boundaries" (Moss & Thomas, 2024, pp. 139-150). Looking beyond the record brings the contexts of archiving to the forefront, the why, who, what, and how, embedded in various temporalities. Contexts will change, *and* creation, capture, organization, and pluralisation will change, *and* societal challenges *and* technology will change. Major changes in archival theory, methodology and practice are effected by bringing the exploitation of archives and thus the user of archives to the forefront. This is in line with other recent changes such as viewing archives as participatory frameworks, acknowledging archival autonomy, and viewing archives as part of an ecology. I have argued that archivists have to become "more permissive of change" of the archive, more permissive of the ephemeral performance of the archive.

Temporalities

Before closing, I want to return to climate change and time. Climate change endangers the archivist's core mission to steward records and archives for the benefit of present and future generations. In a non-linear time framework is the past never past, it is never "over", as trauma victims know all too well (Caswell, 2021, pp. 26-47). The past is present in the here-and-now, time future is "contained in time past," as T.S. Eliot wrote (Burnt Norton).

> Time present and time past
> Are both perhaps present in time future,
> And time future contained in time past (Ketelaar, 2004, pp. 20-35).

These words could serve as a motto of records continuum thinking, wherein (as I said) archival documents have no single temporality but travel in time back and forth. "They are configured and refigured through spacetime."

(McKemmish, 2016, p. 140). Once written or spoken they "enter past time and can only be understood from present time" (Moss & Thomas, 2017, p. 55), in a non-linear but recursive sequence not separating past, present and future. Derrida writes that every interpretation of the archive is an enrichment, an extension of the archive. That is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future (Derrida, 1996, p. 68). The archive is not just a sheltering of the past: it is, in Derrida's words, an anticipation of the future (Derrida, 1996, p. 18). That future has already begun.

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For an epistemology of sources: Who's talking there?[1]

Para uma epistemologia das fontes: Quem fala através delas?

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ABSTRACT

Usually, historians in France recognize that their task is to "make the sources speak". What might appear to be a simple question of a technical nature (making known what is contained in the sources), however, conceals a balance of power that is certainly inherent to the historical academic field. Indeed, "making the sources speak" poses a problem in terms of both the concept of "sources" and the verb "to speak". Initially, the crucial issue for a discipline that sees itself as a mode of indirect knowledge was to make the medium transparent, as if we could hear the witnesses directly in order to arrive at the truth of things. Hence the designation of historical material with a set of naturalizing metaphors that have had the crucial consequence of eliminating from historical reflection the meaning effects linked to the

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1   Conference delivered at the seminar "Rethinking the Archive(s)/ Repensar o(s) Arquivo(s)", organized by the VINCULUM project, based at NOVA FCSH, and the Institute for Medieval Studies, NOVA FCSH. National Archive of Torre do Tombo, Lisbon, 6 December 2023. Comments by Maria de Lurdes Rosa, FCSH NOVA; IHC - FCSH NOVA. VINCULUM (2023, December 19). *3.ª Sessão do Ciclo de seminários: "Rethinking the Archive(s)/ Repensar o(s) Arquivo(s)"* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0WnqIY7EKDw

conditions of transmission and, in particular, archiving (selection, classification, inventory), which have only appeared on the historians' horizon since the beginning of the 21st century as part of the "documentary turn". This has not, however, done away with the question of the voices to be heard in the sources, which has been taken over by ethical concerns, giving to the "archival turn" a distinctly different tone from the "documentary turn". This raises the question of the extent to which this question of the voices to be recovered not only reintroduces the dream of unmediated access to the past, but also overvalues the individual at the expense of society, as part of a regression in collective rationality.

KEYWORD: Sources; Archives; Voices; Categorization; Dehistoricization.

RESUMO

Habitualmente, os historiadores em França reconhecem que a sua tarefa é "fazer falar as fontes". O que poderia parecer uma mera questão de natureza técnica (dar a conhecer aquilo que as fontes contêm) esconde, no entanto, um equilíbrio de poder que é certamente intrínseco ao campo académico da História. De facto, "fazer falar as fontes" coloca um problema tanto no conceito de "fontes" como no verbo "falar". Inicialmente, a questão central para uma disciplina que se assume como um modo de conhecimento indireto era tornar o meio transparente, como se pudéssemos ouvir diretamente os testemunhos e, assim, chegar à verdade das coisas. Daí a utilização de um conjunto de metáforas naturalizantes para designar o material histórico, que excluiu da reflexão histórica a consideração dos efeitos ligados às condições de transmissão e, em particular, do arquivamento (seleção, classificação, inventário), elementos que só começaram a surgir no horizonte dos historiadores a partir do início do século XXI, no contexto da "viragem documental". Contudo, a questão das vozes presentes nas fontes permaneceu, passando a ser abordada a partir de preocupações éticas, que conferem à "viragem arquivística" um tom claramente distinto do da "viragem documental". Coloca-se assim a questão de saber até que ponto esta busca pelas vozes a serem recuperadas não só reintroduz o sonho do acesso não mediado ao passado, mas também sobrevaloriza o indivíduo em detrimento da sociedade, fazendo parte de uma regressão na racionalidade coletiva.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Fontes; Arquivos; Vozes; Categorização; Desistoricização.

> They had not got quite free of their own past – but when they really
> did come across something ancient, they didn't know how to treat it.
> They were like little children admiring a spring, leaning in too far and
> falling headfirst into the water.
> (Andrus Kivirähk, *The man who spoke snakish*, 2007)

I would like to start with a reminder: epistemology is "the critical study of the postulates, conclusions and methods of a particular science, considered from the point of view of its evolution, in order to determine its logical origin, value and scientific scope" (CNRTL, 2012) and, in this way, to enable the progress of knowledge; furthermore it seems to me that we can consider with Alain Guerreau that "the evolution of historical science has reached a point where the elucidation of presuppositions constitutes an essential key to all progress" (Guerreau, 2001, p. 1140). It is therefore a certain number of presuppositions surrounding sources that will constitute my object here.

To do so, I shall use an expression familiar to French historians, namely the task of *faire parler les sources* ("making the sources speak"). What might appear to be a simple technical question (making known what is contained in the sources) may well conceal a hidden balance of power, if we accept that in French, *faire parler (quelqu'un)* ("making [somebody] speak") refers rather to the fact of extracting from him, generally against his will or even under torture, words hitherto unspoken. The question therefore arises: to what extent does the historian's classic relationship with sources consist in torturing them? To make them say what we think they are hiding? But as all the work on torture has shown, if in a few cases sincere (which does not mean exact) things are extracted, more often than not the torturer is told what he wants to hear... Does making sources speak, then, amount to making them say what is expected of them, rather than really paying attention to what *they* have to say? If so, what do they have to tell us as sources, beyond their most visible statement (the text)?

I will begin by trying to pin down what the phrase "as a source" means in the sentence that I have just written, before asking what to "speak" or "tell" mean with respect to a source.

I. "Sources" as a dehistoricization of archives

Here, I am going to address the question of the production of *silences* – paradoxically correlative to the interrogation of what *speaks* in sources – in

this case questioning everything that precedes historical seizure, leading to the spontaneous belief that the presence of sources is self-evident, with only destruction being historical acts.

1. Fons sive Natura?

This interrogative formula[2] is expressly a hijacking (by me) of a formula used by Spinoza in his *Theologico-Political Treatise* (1670) and then in the fourth part of the *Ethics* (written between 1661 and 1675 and published at his death in 1677) intituled "De servitute humana seu de affectum viribus", the two terms *Deus* and *Natura* being equivalent here (Spinoza, 1905, pp. 113; 116)[3] – but as Descartes also already stated in his sixth *Méditation Métaphysique* (1641): "By Nature, considered in general, I now mean nothing other than God himself, or the order and disposition that God has established in created things" (Descartes, 1973, p. 88)[4].

I am introducing here, in my question, the hypothesis of an equivalence between *Fons* and *Natura* – but, logically, this hypothesis necessarily rests, since it is based on the Spinozian formula, on an analogy between the terms *Deus* and *Fons*. This analogy, however, is by no means gratuitous on my part: it is based on the ancient metaphor of the thirst for salvation that only God can quench, and is expressed in the close relationship, in theology as in liturgy, between water and the operation of the Holy Spirit. A number of textual and pictorial clues point to this.

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[2]   Part of what follows in this section was presented in a lecture entitled "*Fons sive Natura*? L'immanence des sources face à la transcendance naturaliste de l'historien", delivered at the opening of a conference (*Source, poison ou accident: comprendre le document dans les sciences historiques*) organized by the École nationale des chartes in Paris on October 19, 2023.

[3]   Spinoza, 1905, p. 113 ("æternum namque illud et infinitum Ens, quod Deum seu Naturam appellamus, eadem, qua existit, necessitate agit. [...] Ratio igitur, seu causa, cur Deus seu Natura agit, et cur existit, una eademque est") and p. 116 ("Potentia, qua res singulares, et consequenter homo suum esse conservat, est ipsa Dei sive Naturæ potentia [...]. Potentia itaque hominis, quatenus per ipsius actualem essentiam explicatur, pars est infinitæ Dei seu Naturæ potentiæ, hoc est essentiæ"), translated in English by R. H. M. Elwes: "the eternal and infinite Being, which we call God or Nature, acts by the same necessity as that whereby it exists. [...] The reason or cause why God or Nature exists, and the reason why he acts, are one and the same"; then "The power, whereby each particular thing, and consequently man, preserves his being, is the power of God or of Nature [...]. Thus the power of man, in so far as it is explained through his own actual essence, is a part of the infinite power of God or Nature, in other words, of the essence thereof".

[4]   Descartes, 1973, p. 88 : "Par la nature, considérée en général, je n'entends maintenant autre chose que Dieu même, ou bien l'ordre et la disposition que Dieu a établie dans les choses créées".

For example, the lexicogram produced by Nicolas Perreaux to show the lexical field of "water" in *Patrologia Latina* (essentially for the fourth through twelfth centuries) (Perreaux, 2013, p. 370) clearly shows that *Fons* focuses on all the instruments or signs of redemption (*Christus*, *ecclesia*, *fides*, *bonum*, *baptisma*, *sacrum-sacer*, *oleum*, *lacrima*, *sanguis*, *gaudium*, *puteus*, etc.). For a slightly later period, consider the mid-fifteenth-century painting by the Pseudo-Van Eyck in the Prado entitled *La fuente de la Gracia* (Workshop of Jan van Eyck, 1440-1450), featuring the Father in pontifical majesty, the Son as lamb and the Holy Spirit as wellspring. Finally, still at the end of the Ancien Régime (in Jacques Le Goff's perspective of the "long Middle Ages"), a number of paintings depict *Saint John the Baptist at the spring* (e.g. those painted by Nicolas Régnier, ca. 1625; Guercino, 1661; or Giacomo Parolini, 1710), where the source is obviously the Grace lavished by God, but which human beings must seek out and strive to capture (in a certain way, and irrespective of the difference in dates, these latter paintings represent the human extension of the Prado painting).

The certainly apocryphal nature of the formula *Fons sive Natura* that I am setting out here is therefore not based on the analogy between *Fons* and *Deus*, which was classic in medieval society (in the broadest sense), but on the novelty that the analogy between *Deus* and *Natura* represented in the mid-seventeenth century. I refer here to Descartes and Spinoza because of what they (unintentionally) represent from the point of view of modernity – and which in both cases earned them violent attacks and accusations of pantheism or even atheism. From a theological point of view, the scandal of Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura* was to propose an immanentist vision of God, a God neither personified nor transcendent, namely the natural world. To clarify matters, let me remind you that immanence designates the character of that which has its principle in itself, and which must therefore be explained by itself, without reference to an external truth – in contrast to transcendence, which corresponds to what Marcel Gauchet (1977, p. 5) termed the *dette du sens* ("debt of meaning")[5]: the cause, principle or meaning of things or beings being found outside themselves, in an external and superior cause, namely in God in the case of medieval societies.

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5   "*Dette du sens*: ce que durant des millénaires les hommes ont reconnu devoir aux dieux, ce que les sociétés ont à peu près toujours cru devoir aux opérations des autres, aux décrets de l'au-delà ou aux volontés de l'invisible." ("*Debt of meaning*: what for millennia men have acknowledged they owe to the gods, what societies have more or less always believed they owed to the operations of others, to the decrees of the beyond or to the wills of the invisible.") (Gauchet, 1977, p. 5)

Now, the modern world is specifically characterized by what Max Weber in 1917 called the *Entzauberung der Welt* ("disenchantment of the world", taken up again in 1985 by Marcel Gauchet, in a work whose subtitle is very close to that of his 1977 article) (Weber, 1919, p. 16; Gauchet, 1985) – a disenchantment of the world whose most radical formulation is undoubtedly Nietzsche's "God is dead" (*The Gay Science*, 1882) and by virtue of which we can no longer hope to discover a transcendent, hidden truth (or, for that matter, a sense of history, devoid of any finality, be it that of salvation or the universal happiness of mankind)[6]. As a result, Spinoza, like Descartes, would be – unwittingly and unwillingly – a harbinger of modernity, *i.e.* of the immanence of the meaning of the world and, as far as the historian is concerned, of the immanence of the meaning of sources on the world's past.

To speak, as I do here, of the "immanence of sources" is then to assume that the meaning of what we call "sources" must first and foremost be referred to their very existence (answering the question "how is it that sources exist?" or, more simply, "why do we have sources – or at least things we call 'sources'?"), rather than taking this existence for granted and focusing solely on the *causa scribendi* and author's intentionality (forming a kind of "beyond" of the text). This was one of the intuitions behind the so-called *linguistic turn*, which – for reasons of competitive positioning within the United States' academic field (Noiriel, 2005, pp. 160-176) – radicalized the demand to take into account the discursive logics internal to texts, to the point of denying them any historicity (leading one of its main theoretical inspirers, Jacques Derrida, to reaffirm that "there is no such thing as *hors-contexte*" (Derrida, 1990, p. 252).

What we call "sources" are not simply containers of information that we have to capture; they are part of the social reality which we set out to study. They are not, therefore, screens for reality – in the double sense of a surface for projecting or hiding what lies behind – they are the *only* reality with which historians are confronted (hence the idea of the immanence of sources), and from which we can attempt to identify the social interrelations that generated them, and which they helped to configure. Over and above what they say, it is therefore their produced and preserved character, as the only effective foundations of their existence today, that should first and foremost retain our attention.

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[6] Daston, 1995, p. 40, proposes a more refined interpretation of the phenomenon, to which I will return below.

2. Sources? What sources?

However, I have already stressed the distinction between "sources" and "what we call 'sources'". Indeed, "sources" are not just preserved documents (written or otherwise); they are first and foremost a concept, *i.e.* a way of ordering the world and, more prosaically, of defining a field of observation. I shall not go back over what I have already had occasion to write about the role of concepts in the work of historians, and more broadly, within the Dulac Group, in the science of the social (Morsel, 2012; Dulac, 2022, p. 25).

However, there are two things to remember about the concept of "sources". In 2003/2004, I outlined the semantic transformations of the French term (Morsel, 2004). Since then, I have continued this examination (Morsel, 2009, pp. 42-45) and extended it to the German case (given Germany's key role in the construction of historical science in the nineteenth century, but also thanks to the work of Hans Blumenberg (2009), Ludolf Kuchenbuch (2000), Thomas Rathmann and Nikolaus Wegmann (2004).

Three main observations can be made: on the one hand, as shown by the frequency graphs based on the thousands of works digitized by Google[7], there is a clear synchrony between French and German (but the same applies to English) in the start of the specifically historical use of the concept, with a few isolated uses in the eighteenth century (none before) and regular and increasing use from around 1800, *i.e.* when the practice of history and its theory began to take shape. The results of our syntagmatic searches on Google Books seem to me to be confirmed by our search for uses of the word *Geschichtsquelle* ("source of history") in the *Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* from 1600 to 2000 (DWDS, n.d.).

The second observation concerns the substitution, towards the end of the nineteenth century, of a metaphor of horizontal flow for the earlier one of vertical drawing: *puiser aux sources*, *aus der Quelle schöpfen* ("to draw from the sources" – reminiscent of the very close semantic proximity, in the

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7   Google Books Ngram Viewer. (n.d.). *Source historique, sources historiques.* Google. https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=source+historique,sources+historiques&year_start=1700&year_end=2019&corpus=fr-2019&smoothing=3; Google Books Ngram Viewer. (n.d.). *Geschichtsquellen, Geschichtsquelle, historische Quelle, historischen Quellen.* Google. https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=Geschichtsquellen,Geschichtsquelle,historische+Quelle,historischen+Quellen&year_start=1700&year_end=2019&corpus=de-2019&smoothing=3; Google Books Ngram Viewer. (n.d.). *Historical source, historical sources, sources of history, source of history.* Google. https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=historical+source,historical+sources,sources+of+history,source+of+history&year_start=1700&year_end=2019&corpus=en-2019&smoothing=3

Middle Ages, between *fons* and *puteus*)[8]. But what disappears is not so much the depth/surface relationship (which is still very much present in the psychoanalysis being developed at the time) as the evocation of the researcher's effort ("drawing") in favor of a spontaneous phenomenon, flowing from source – the meaning of the French expression *couler de source* (literally "to flow from source") also changing: from being easy (as opposed to drawing) still in the seventeenth century, it now means being obvious, self-evident.

The third observation concerns the spatial, rather than temporal, spread of the "gushing water" metaphor: it can be found in all European (Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian, Slavic, Greek, Hungarian) languages, or in languages that have been europeanized from the very point of view of historical practice (Hebrew, Japanese). What is important here is that exactly the same metaphor of gushing water has been adopted to designate the basic matter of the historical craft, whereas metaphors are almost never equivalent from one language to another. We should therefore consider that not only does historical science seem to have been built from 1800 onwards around the spontaneous use of a concept common to all European or European-inspired historiographies, but above all that this concept seemed to carry a connotation of spontaneous gushing – apparently more crucial than the idea of the historian's effort.

3. Truth and naturalism

I confess to having found no historical study of the metaphorical values of water at the end of the Ancien Régime, given that the corresponding article in the *Encyclopédie* is limited to the concrete, physical, chemical, medical and other aspects of water. I would remind you, however, that Jean Starobinski emphasized the importance of water as a principle of transparency, neutrality and naturalness in the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Starobinski, 1971, pp. 303-309), and that when choosing the standards for the new, supposedly natural, metric system, the central referents were the terrestrial meridian (as a measure of length) and water (as a measure of mass), the combination of these two referents defining measures of capacity (1 l. = 1 dm^3).

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[8] By way of example: "les chartes, les chroniques et d'autres sources où l'on a coutume de puiser pour écrire l'histoire" (Quiquerez, 1856, p. 39). Half a century later, Delisle (1907, p. 296) refers to royal deeds "provenant de sources diverses, mais toutes très pures, que le hasard a fait affluer, les uns au Musée britannique, les autres au Record Office".

Examining the connotations of the "wellspring" metaphor in fact leads in two directions: on the one hand, water as a figure of transparency, and on the other, gushing as a figure of naturalness. I shall not dwell here on the first point (transparency), which refers to an epistemology of historical truth on which I have had occasion to comment recently (Morsel & Noûs, 2022). As far as naturalness is concerned, we could be satisfied with a simple reading in terms of the history of ideas, with the choice of the word "sources" simply stemming from a taste for the wild and pure nature characteristic of the end of the Ancien Régime and the prodromes of Romanticism. But that would be to stop halfway, considering that the only thing that has changed is the appreciation of nature, in contrast to the previous situation – that is, in a way, to the transition from Voltaire to Rousseau[9], the latter having been accused by the former of wishing to return us to the state of nature, *i.e.* inhumanity (Voltaire, 1880, p. 447)[10].

But modernity does not lie in a different relationship with nature, it lies in the very relationship with nature, with nature itself. And therein lies the main novelty in relation to what I had conceived in 2003/2004. For while I had indeed emphasized the naturalizing effect (in the sense of making something natural, obvious, self-evident) of the metaphor of the source, I had not imagined the extent to which this relationship to nature referred to something much deeper than the simple representations or discourses that might be confronted, as between Voltaire and Rousseau.

Indeed, in 2005, Philippe Descola's book *Par-delà nature et culture* was published, which shows how human societies are structurally based on four fundamental ontologies, *i.e.* four ways of thinking about the world and their relationship to other beings: totemistic, animistic, analogistic and naturalistic ontologies. While P. Descola does not speak of the Middle Ages, but only of early modernity (up to and including the seventeenth century) in order to link it to analogist ontology, Anita Guerreau-Jalabert's works of the 2010s have clearly shown that the same applies to the Middle Ages (Guerreau-Jalabert, 2015), and thus to what we might call the "long Middle Ages", up to and including the seventeenth century.

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9   Goethe is said to have declared that "Voltaire is the end of the old world, Rousseau the beginning of the new" – but I have not been able to find the origin of this often-quoted apophthegm (e.g. by Babbitt, 1919, p. 32; Guitton, 1980, p. 950) but without any precise reference…

10   "On n'a jamais employé tant d'esprit à vouloir nous rendre bêtes; il prend envie de marcher à quatre pattes [qualified further as "allure naturelle"] quand on lit votre ouvrage [*i.e.*, Rousseau's *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, 1754]" (Voltaire, 1880, p. 447).

But this analogism has given way to naturalism, *i.e.* (contrary to what Marcel Gauchet envisaged) to a new transcendence – that of nature, as a principle both good and original (some even see in the discourse on nature a new metaphysics). This naturalism consists in the certainty "that nature exists and that a certain number of entities [*i.e.* everything that does not belong to culture] owe their existence and development to a principle alien to the effects of the human will" (Descola, 1996, p. 65)[11] – which is why it is appropriate to speak of naturalistic transcendence. Already in 1995, Loraine Daston had underlined that after 1700, "nature became the other" in relation to the human being, so that biological metaphors could be transferred on society, but also anthropomorphist arguments on nature – which conversely made easier the biological interpretation of society. And she argues that the scientific revolution in the nineteenth century produced less a secularization or Weber's disenchantment of the world than the "vigorous imposition of Judeo-Christian theology" (Daston, 1995, p. 40).

Naturalistic ontology thus tends to deny human action as the cause of the appearance and development of things considered "natural", by inventing a nature where there is none – which nowadays increasingly takes the form of a biologization of the social, *i.e.* a wild transfer of biological notions (DNA, organism, evolution, mutation, alpha male, etc.) onto social phenomena which, according to a "Durkheimian" epistemology, should be explained by the social. Hence, the more we talk about nature, the less we talk about society – and this biologization of the social was denounced by Bourdieu (1982, p. 50) and precisely studied in the collective book *Biology as Society* (Daston, 1995).

It is easy to see, then, that the process of "naturalization" brought about by the use of the word "sources" is part of a logic of de-socialization, *i.e.* ultimately of de-historicization. As a result, historians' relationship with "sources" is twofold – on the one hand, because it is a way of designating the documents they work with, but on the other, because the concept functions as a symptom of what they should be contributing to: the constant rehistoricization of the social, against the tendency of any social system to generate amnesia about its origins. Consequently, beyond the fact that historians must always cite their sources, they must above all historicize them, *i.e.* account for the genesis of their availability today.

"Sources" are therefore not just "remains", comparable – to keep an aquatic analogy – to what is left on humans' beach once the sea of history

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11   "La nature existe et un certain nombre d'entités doivent leur existence et leur développement à un principe étranger aux effets de la volonté humaine." (Descola, 1996, p. 65).

has receded… Indeed, these "remains" have been preserved, through the procedures of archiving, namely sorting and classifying. To speak of "my/our sources" without further ado is not only to naturalize their existence, and thus to sacrifice to the naturalist ontology that governs our conception of the world, it is to obliterate all the technologies, inseparably historical and sociological, that have made and still make documents accessible today. It is this invisibilization of prior operations that enables the researcher not only to speak spontaneously of "his/her sources", but also and above all to become the exclusive author of his or her work, appropriations sanctioned by his or her name on the title page. Hence the question mark in the titles of sections 1 and 2.

4) Generalized conceptual dehistoricization

In my opinion, it is this invisibilization that also leads to the ambiguity of the word "corpus" noted a short while ago by Eliana Magnani (2017) – among medievalists, but in my opinion not only. In fact, the term designates: 1) either all the documents of a certain type and/or from a certain area that remain with us today, such as the *Corpus des inscriptions de la France médiévale*, the *Corpus des sceaux français du Moyen Âge*, the *Corpus des actes royaux*, in Portugal the *Corpus dos mosaicos romanos de Portugal*, the *Corpus signorum das fíbulas proto-históricas e romanas de Portugal*, in Latin the *Corpus vitrearum*, the *Corpus christianorum*, the *Corpus Burgundiae Medii Aevi*, the *Corpus catalogorum Belgii*, the *Corpus epigraphicum portugalensium*, and so on; 2) or the set of documents assembled by a given individual for his or her own work (his or her working corpus).

It is as if the same word could designate both an inherited ("natural") whole, coming to us like water from a spring, and the result of a set of procedures for collecting and sorting documents according to a problematic, as if the aforementioned inherited whole (such as the *Corpus epigraphicum portugalensium*) were not itself anything other than a self-existing whole (everything that has not disappeared), whereas it is the result of typification procedures ("epigraphy", "seal", "diploma", "stained glass", "book list", "charter", etc.) within a set of things made available today by generations of curators (in the broadest sense of the term)...

And it is without any doubt the same thing that is produced by another term, "data", which I believe is being used more and more frequently, as a result of the transformations of the technical system that we are witnessing: computerization (*cf.* the German *EDV*, *Elektronische Datenverarbeitung*,

literally "electronic data processing", for "informatics") and the multiplication of databases that Jean-Philippe Genet designated in 1977 as "metasources" (Genet, 1977, p. 232). I had already noticed, in a purely impressionistic way, the substitutability of the formula "we have no data" for "we have no sources" on this or that phenomenon. But a more systematic examination of the notion leads to two observations.

On the one hand, the term "data" is in itself misleading, because it gives the impression that, as in the case of "sources", what the historian is working on comes to him or her, somewhat mysteriously or naturally, by the grace of history, and therefore that he or she is working on what is already there – whereas in reality the only data are those that the historian gives himself or herself, by constituting his or her corpus of work. In fact, this question was already raised in the 1950s by sociologists in the English-speaking world (Jensen, 1950; Becker, 1952), followed by the entire constructivist current in sociology (for example Drucker, 2011), who drew attention to the fact that, to quote Jensen, "It is an unfortunate accident of history that the term *datum* (Latin, past participle of *dare*, 'to give') rather than *captum* (Latin, past participle of *capere*, 'to take') should have come to symbolize the unit-phenomenon in science. For science deals, not with 'that which has been given' by nature to the scientist, but with 'that which has been taken' or selected from nature by the scientist in accordance with his purpose, arid to a degree even constructed out of nature by the scientist's preliminary assumptions as to which of 'the things which have been given' are also to be 'taken' or observed." (Jensen, 1950, p. ix; also quoted by Becker, 1952, p. 278).

They therefore advocate the use of *capta* rather than *data*, since it is the scientists who produce their material. However, in my view, this is only one aspect of the situation in which historians find themselves, since while they do take hold of their sources (when they build up their corpus in the second sense of the term), they are also dependent on all the previous procedures for making all ancient documents available, in the archival context.

The inadequacy of the concept of "data" for this second aspect, too, was highlighted by Bruno Latour, who then proposed instead the term *sublata* in the sense of "obtained" (less active than "taken") to evoke the position of beneficiary that is that of the researcher:

> the very word *data* […] describes as poorly as possible what the ordinary cognitive capacities of scholars, scientists and intellectuals apply to. It should be replaced by the much more realistic term *obtained*, and consequently we should speak of *obtained bases*, of *sublata* rather

than *data*, in both Latin and English. […] No hellenist, no sanskritist, no specialist in Mesopotamian tablets will be ashamed to say that, deprived of scholarly editions, he could not interpret anything and would have no higher or more meticulous thoughts than those that cross his mind as he pushes his shopping cart down the aisles of a supermarket. (Latour, 2007, p. 609)[12]

However, perhaps the most surprising thing for me – given that I was implicitly correlating the current use of the concept of "data" with the context of computerization – was to examine the evolution of the frequency of this use in the field of history. The curve of this evolution seems to be rigorously close to that of "sources", at least if we compare the use of the syntagms "historical data" and "historical sources", with even a prevalence of "data"[13] – without being able to distinguish for the moment, because the fine work has not yet been done, what comes under the properly historian discourse and what comes under the public discourse on the past. Nevertheless, it is also worth noting the remarkable synchronicity of the start, as if "data", like "sources", had been part of the mental horizon from the very beginnings of historical science.

So, it is not just the word "sources" that is causing the amnesia of documentary genesis, or at least the reduction of this genesis to the writing phase alone, it is the whole conceptual system developed between the mid-seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries, linked to the end of the feudal era ("long Middle Ages") and the transition to the liberal/capitalist – or even naturalist – era, and which is clearly not specific to documentary designation alone. The same can be said for "corpus", "data" – but also "texts" or "traces", which transform documents into mere sets of signs of a bygone past[14], at the expense of everything that ensured their "transformission"

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12 "Ce mot même de *données* […] décrit aussi mal que possible ce sur quoi s'appliquent les capacités cognitives ordinaires des érudits, des savants et des intellectuels. Il faudrait remplacer ce terme par celui, beaucoup plus réaliste, d'*obtenues* et parler par conséquent de *bases d'obtenues*, de *sublata* plutôt que de *data* pour parler à la fois latin et anglais. […] Aucun helléniste, aucun sanskritiste, aucun spécialiste des tablettes mésopotamiennes n'aura honte de dire que, privé d'éditions savantes, il ne pourrait interpréter quoi que ce soit et n'aurait pas de pensées plus hautes ou plus méticuleuses que celles qui lui traversent l'esprit en poussant son caddie dans les allées d'un supermarché." (Latour, 2007, p. 609)

13 Google Books Ngram Viewer. (n.d.). *Données historiques, sources historiques*. Google. https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=données+historiques,sources+historiques&year_start=1600&year_end=2019&corpus=fr-2019&smoothing=3

14 About "texts", see Cerquiglini (1989) as much as Kuchenbuch, Kleine (2006). About "traces" and their relation to the past, see Morsel (2016).

(Chouquer, 2007, pp. 255-256), namely transmission and transformation (concrete – by copying; by modification of intertextuality – in archiving; by requalification – conceptual; by change of perception – with the advent of observation in the scientific sense of the term).

Consequently: *Fons non Natura sed Historia*. And Ernst Pitz was quite right to consider that the first characteristic of a source now available is not so much to have been produced (a necessary but not sufficient condition) as to have been archived (Demade, 2004, p. 131). As a result, answering the question "Who is talking in the sources?" should lead to a broader solution: not only the author, not only the society in which he lived and which determined the general conditions of dicibility, but also the generations of archivists (in the broadest sense) who have ensured access to these sources today, at the cost of selections, classifications and inventorizations that cannot fail to weigh on the meaning we think we grasp in these "sources". To borrow a famous metaphor, today's historian is no more than a dwarf standing on the shoulders of archivists…

II. Historicization of archives = recovered voices?

If the historicization of archives leads to the elimination of silences, does this mean that the voices of the past can be heard again? And if so, which ones? Those of archivists? Of transmitters? Others (including the "voiceless")? This raises a deeper question: is anyone really speaking in the sources? What does "speaking" mean here, if not a metaphor?

In 2019, Maria de Lurdes Rosa, Rita Sampaio da Nóvoa, Alice Borges Gago and Maria João da Câmara secured publication of a book entitled *Recovered voices, newfound questions. Family archives and historical research* (Rosa et al., 2019). Unless I am mistaken, the question of recovered (or to-be-recovered) voices is addressed (apart from the Foreword by Ana Canas Delgado Martins, pp. 10-11) only in the introduction signed by the four coordinators (Rosa et al., 2019, pp. 13-20), but not in any of the contributions that make up the book. However, there is a very interesting shift here in relation to a reflection presented in 2012 in Maria de Lurdes Rosa's introductory contribution to the volume she edited entitled *Arquivos de família, séc. XIII-XX: que presente, que futuro?*[15]

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15   Não foi por acaso que desde o início da formação dos estudos pós-coloniais assumiu papel central a crítica ao arquivo colonial, visto como poderosíssimo motor de reunião de

The general idea was that family archives provide access to a level of reality absent from public (state, official) archives, because the latter are largely the product of systems of social domination, for which archives had above all the function of governing humans. The voices of these humans are never heard, since they are transformed into objects of domination, and thus deprived of their condition as subjects. But although feminist studies drew early attention to the absence of women in historical narratives, and this absence was correlated with their widespread absence from sources, it was less from gender history that consideration of the effects of archiving came than from so-called "post-colonial" history.

In the 2019 book, however, it is less the question of the disappearance of the voices of little people in relation to the great that is raised than that of the role of historians and archivists in this disappearance: the "silences" – what historians generally call "lack of sources" – are in fact not only due to ancient (for me, medieval and post-medieval) producers and archivists, they are also produced by today's historians and archivists, because of their choices, with no doubt less because of their own will than because they embody social institutions that function as sounding boards for social issues that go far beyond them (Rosa et al., 2019, pp. 13-14)[16].

There has thus been a certain change in the way of conceiving the question of voices and silences, which, especially since the 1990s, has taken on a growing importance in the preoccupations of some historians as part of the *ethical turn* that has gripped history and underlies the North American *archival turn* – a development which, as I have already had occasion to emphasize, differs greatly from the *tournant documentaire* ("documentary turn") observed in Europe (Morsel, 2021, p. 20). I am not going to return to this point here, especially as I believe that the question of the relationship between science and ethics is extremely complex and cannot be settled in a few sentences. On the other hand, I would like to try to clarify the ques-

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informação para uso governativo e, mais gravosa e essencialmente, como fautor de exclusão perene de actores da História, porque excluídos do arquivo. Em reflexo, a valorização dos suportes de memória não estatais, não oficiais, em conjunto com todas tentativas teóricas de encontrar a voz dos subalternos, dos marginalizados, dos passivos, trouxe para a ribalta os arquivos de comunidades e evidenciou o interesse destas em conservarem e valorizarem as suas memórias. (Rosa, 2012, p. 16)

16   However, historians and archivists also play an active role in this dialectics, whether they recognize it or not. When historiography favours certain types of sources to the detriment of others, voices are heard and others are silenced. When archival acquisition policies favour the integration of certain types of documentary sets over others, there are voices heard and others silenced. (Rosa et al., 2019, pp. 13-14)

tion of the discourse conveyed on archives using the question of "voices". This implies that I will not attempt to answer all the theoretical or epistemological questions raised by the use of this metaphor (since it is indeed a metaphor: in most historical cases, it is not a question of voices that are actually heard), but that I will instead focus on the relationship between this metaphorical use and the question that concerns us here, that of sources and archives. A first key aspect of this use of the metaphor of voices to be reheard consists in restoring to all actors their status as subjects. However, this requirement for restitution rests on two foundations, which are not necessarily present at the same time.

A moral duty for the historian?

The first foundation is that of justice, by correcting the vision of the past or even avenging it – for example, when subaltern studies lead to cancel practices. In this perspective, history is no longer simply a place of know-how, but also and above all a place of duty. But what is a voice: a bodily/individual expression (thought to guarantee the authenticity of real history[17], or a social relationship (disqualified as an abstraction constructed by historians) – because what speaks through your voice is not just you but, through you, something else? If we follow Pierre Bourdieu, the truth of what is said lies precisely outside vocal expression, because what is actually said is overdetermined by "the economy of linguistic exchanges" (subtitle of his 1982 book *Ce que parler veut dire*), while unconscious body language betrays "the truest" at the same time as it weighs on "all intentional expressions, starting with speech" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 51)[18]. This raises the question of whether the use of the metaphor of voices is indeed appropriate to signal the new attention which historians must pay to singular situations in relation to the dominant social norm.

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[17]　But beside the voice's bodily link with the singular individual, we may wonder whether the voice is not also a guarantee of authenticity, given the role it has long played in the construction of legal truth, due to the importance attached by Roman law to oral testimony, long superior to that recorded on "the skin of a dead animal" (Morsel, 2020, p. 161).

[18]　"Le corps fonctionne donc comme un langage par lequel on est parlé plutôt qu'on ne le parle, un langage de la nature, où se trahit le plus caché et le plus vrai à la fois, parce que le moins consciemment contrôlé et contrôlable, et qui contamine et surdétermine de ses messages perçus et aperçus toutes les expressions intentionnelles, à commencer par la parole." (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 51)

What is more, David W. Sabean has observed how, in Württemberg in the modern era, court and administrative reports set up formulas by which those writing put at a distance "popular" words considered "dirty" (not only coarse language, but even quite simply the fact of talking about limbs or bodily organs), within the framework of logics of distinction in which both the speaking/writing relationship and that between questioner and respondent are articulated (Sabean, 1996). In so doing, respondents are returned to the sphere of the carnal, while those who write are attached to the sphere of the spiritual. In this light, we should ask ourselves to what extent seeking out the voices of the dominated is not a way of renewing their assignment to the carnal (which in our society has become the corporeal, as Pierre Bourdieu's long-standing observations on the assignment of workers, women and peasants to the corporeal clearly show (Bourdieu, 1962, pp. 96-109; Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1980, pp. 173-195; Bourdieu, 1990) and reserving the spiritual (in our society: intelligence) for the dominant.

However, this is not the place to debate the merits or otherwise of this demand for justice, which also raises the problem of the relationship between history and the past, and above all that of the historian's responsibility towards the people of the past, all the people of the past (including the modest and/or marginalized). Here we would return to the idea, notably developed by the philosopher Paul Ricœur, that an essential function of the historian is to save the people of the past from oblivion – which is but only possible if we mourn by accepting the loss forever of certain things from the past (Ricœur, 2000). However, the first mourning we have to do is that we do not work on things or people, but on documents that tell us about them – this is our historian condition, which in no way implies a position of inferiority for historians in relation to other scientists who would work directly on their object (I showed the inaccuracy of this belief in Morsel, 2016, pp. 864-867). Consequently, mourning the past is in a way consubstantial with historical work as work on documents, because the past is not the historian's object, and this work is not intended for the resurrection of the past (which, according to Jules Michelet, 1880, pp. iii-iv, and 1987, p. 25, or more recently to Henri-Irénée Marrou, 1961, pp. 1468-1470, should be the goal of historians), by treating archives as "traces" of a vanished reality, when the first task is to try to find in them what is symptomatic of the historicity of their engendering (Morsel, 2016). This is to say that treating archives as voices is contradictory to the aforementioned task of rehistoricizing sources…

2. A historiographical renewal?

The second key aspect of the use of the metaphor of voices is the (re) appearance of actors in historical questioning, in contrast to French social history (the history of social structures and groups), whose paradigm had dominated the international historiographical landscape (under the misleading name of École des *Annales*) until the late 1970s, before entering a crisis of relative exhaustion of its explanatory potential in the face of the US *linguistic turn* and Italian *microstoria*, but also, in France itself, of the discursive history (of Althusserian or Foucauldian obedience). In addition to abstracting from the structures of domination revealed by the archives that implemented them and preserve their form, priority was now given to identifying individual consciousnesses, to which the concept of "voice" could provide a convenient cloak, with the underlying idea that a voice refers, through the intermediary of a particular body, to a concrete, real individual (as opposed to society, which would not really exist – as Margareth Thatcher had clearly asserted).

To this should be added a concern about the alleged novelty of the archival turn's questioning of voice. As far back as 1969, in a work I consider fundamental for historians, *L'archéologie du savoir*, Michel Foucault was already perceiving an undermining of history as such, linked to "the questioning of the document", against the traditional practice of

> reconstructing, from what the documents say – and sometimes only half-worded – the past from which they emanate and which has now faded far behind them; the document was always treated as the language of a voice now silenced – its fragile trace, but by chance decipherable. [...] To put it briefly, history, in its traditional form, undertook to 'memorize' the *monuments* of the past, to transform them into *documents*, and to make these traces speak, traces which, by themselves, are often not verbal, or silently say something other than what they say. (Foucault, 1969, pp. 14-15)[19]

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19   [R]econstituer, à partir de ce que disent les documents – et parfois à demi-mot – le passé dont ils émanent et qui s'est évanoui maintenant loin derrière eux; le document était toujours traité comme le langage d'une voix maintenant réduite au silence – sa trace fragile, mais par chance déchiffrable. [...] Disons pour faire bref que l'histoire, dans sa forme traditionnelle, entreprenait de "mémoriser" les *monuments* du passé, de les transformer en *documents* et de faire parler ces traces qui, par elles-mêmes, souvent ne sont point verbales, ou disent en silence autre chose que ce qu'elles disent. (Foucault, 1969, pp. 14-15)

In Foucault's work, we can see that this undermining of traditional practice corresponds to the emergence of what came to be known as the *École des Annales*, whose crisis in the 1980s I mentioned earlier, led the *Annales* to make a "critical turn" in 1988 (and few time later to change its subtitle). As a result, is not the claim to be breaking silences and listening to the voices of actors from the 1990s onwards a false novelty – as the valorization of the singular and the individual (possibly under the banner of methodological individualism) at the expense of the collective and the social revives what Foucault calls "that form of [traditional] history that was in secret, but entirely, referred to the synthetic activity of the subject" and which "was to provide the sovereignty of consciousness with a safer, less exposed shelter than myths, kinship systems, languages, sexuality…"? (Foucault, 1969, p. 24)[20].

However, if these remarks qualify the apparent novelty of listening to the voices of the voiceless, the same cannot be said for the question raised in the introduction to the aforementioned volume *Recovered voices*, namely the role of today's historians and archivists in the production of silences. For this then leads to making the current practice of historical research not the issue of a social ethic (*i.e.* respecting everyone) but the result of a scientific epistemology (*i.e.* taking into account the conditions of validity of results). Consequently, far more than a historiographical renewal, it is an epistemological renewal that we are dealing with, namely, integrating the role of archivists (and, when they do it, historians) in the meaning of documents.

3. Hearing rather than seeing – or more precisely, for the historian, rather than reading?

The voices are heard, and it is clear that the use of this historical metaphor is based at least in part, implicitly, on a mistrust of the written word, reputed to relay the dominant ideology. The attention paid to this "media" shift (speaking vs. writing) would then simply be a recognition of the fact that the written word is a medium historically monopolized by the dominant (and thus confiscated from the working classes, women and various subaltern groups), including from the point of view of conditions of conservation and

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20   [C]e qu'on pleure si fort, ce n'est pas la disparition de l'histoire, c'est l'effacement de cette forme d'histoire qui était en secret, mais tout entière référée à l'activité synthétique du sujet ; ce qu'on pleure, c'est ce devenir qui devait fournir à la souveraineté de la conscience un abri plus sûr, moins exposé, que les mythes, les systèmes de parenté, les langues, la sexualité ou le désir. (Foucault, 1969, p. 24)

accessibility to archives. As a result, there is something of a contradiction in putting archives and voices together – at least in the case of ancient archives, where there are no sound recordings, so that for those societies inaccessible to oral history, the historian is reduced to a quest for minute traces in the interstices or on the margins of the inscribed and archived dominant culture. This is what Arlette Farge did, for example, in her *Essai pour une histoire des voix au dix-huitième siècle* (Farge, 2009), based on written fragments from the French working classes, and what Antonio Castillo Gómez's research project (funded by Spanish research organizations) *Vox populi. Espacios, prácticas y estratégias de visibilidad de las escrituras del margen en las épocas moderna y contemporánea* (2020-2024) seeks to do, and which expressly falls within the framework of subaltern studies.

But why should a critique of the monopoly of the written word given over to reading necessarily imply the valorisation of the *spoken word* given over to *listening*? Because in any case, we will not be able to hear these voices: it is only a metaphor, as I said, and these so-called voices are indeed to be read – hence why this metaphor here? Finally, I would like to propose a global hypothesis – global because going beyond the intentionality of those who use this metaphor.

To do this, I will draw on Martin Jay's 1993 presentation of a general intellectual phenomenon, namely the development of what he calls "anti-ocularcentrism" in (more or less constructed) theories of knowledge in France (Jay, 1993) and, by extension, in the United States and other countries, thanks to the incredible (and strange) aura of the so-called "French thinkers"… This anti-ocularcentrism began as early as the second half of the nineteenth century but flourished especially in the two periods following the World Wars, with the shaking of the quiet assurance of Europeans and then North Americans, in the second half of the 20th century, as to the meaning of the world and history which they were leisurely sharing. And indeed, if we follow Martin Jay as I do here, anti-ocularcentrism means both the questioning of Enlightenment rationalism and doubt about the ability of vision to serve as the basis of knowledge – including vision as the practical foundation of reading, since both Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong saw the printing press as an instrument for reinforcing the visual (or scopic) regime of world knowledge.

We should therefore ask ourselves whether the widespread use, from the 1990s onwards, of the metaphor of voices to be found in archives is not just another sign of the crisis of consciousness of Westerners (in the broadest sense), but also of a crisis of their rationality. It is here, however, that the "tournant documentaire" can provide a response to this double crisis

(reflected in the *archival turn*), since it consists in revaluing the visuality as well as the materiality of documents, beyond their mere legibility and therefore their statements, which, indeed, most often emanate from the powerful (as far as the Middle Ages are concerned, including the long ones). This visuality and materiality refer to the conditions of production and use of these documents, in their time and afterwards, and their text is only one aspect of their meaning – even if it is apparently the easiest, and therefore the most misleading, to exploit.

Consequently, and beyond the social and identity-related issues involved, the question of voices seems to me to run the risk of distracting from the major problem facing historians: even before asking what the documents do not say, *i.e.* the silences of the sources, are we sure we understand what they mean – beyond the mere level of what they say? Do they not express much more than the voices we think we hear in them?

Ultimately, the answer to the question posed in my title ("Who's talking there?") would be: nobody, because we hear nothing in the sources.

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Context(s) of the Archive: Regimes of archiving and historiography since the late Middle Ages[1]

O(s) Contexto(s) do Arquivo: Sistemas de arquivamento e a historiografia desde o final da Idade Média

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ABSTRACT

Both historical and archival theorists use the concept of "context," but with significantly different referents. Historical context generally refers to circumstances surrounding events or actors of interest, and can range from the local details of events to global trends. Archival context, in contrast, was rigorously defined during the emergence of canonical Western archival theory in the 19th century, and refers to assemblages of records created by an actor – individual or institutional – while conducting its business, which must be preserved according to the canons of provenance and *respect des fonds*. This paper argues that archival context itself has a history, however,

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and that the canonical version associated with modernity and a capitalist political economy was preceded in Europe by a particularist, pertinence-based understanding of archival context that emerged from the political economy of privilege in late medieval and early modern Europe. Moreover, a post-modern understanding of archival context embodied in the model of the records continuum is emerging today, in connection with a political economy of commodified information. The essay offers both historical cases and comparative considerations to illuminate this trajectory. Close attention to context in historical and archival theories, which look at how archival thinking and historical thinking were entwined over this entire trajectory, provides a fresh perspective for understanding both past deep structures and current tendencies. The goal of scholarship is both to make meaning out of the evidence around us in disciplinary ways, but also to reflect on the conditions of that meaning-making: the limitations, the questions unasked, the patterns not perceived. Looking at archival regimes as a historian – given that historians today are profoundly dependent on archives – can add a recursive and dynamic perspective on long-standing models of transformative change.

RESUMO
Tanto os historiadores como os teóricos dos arquivos utilizam o conceito de "contexto", mas com aplicações significativamente diferentes. O contexto histórico refere-se geralmente às circunstâncias que envolvem os acontecimentos ou os atores em questão, abrangendo desde pormenores de ocorrências locais até tendências globais. O contexto arquivístico, por outro lado, foi rigorosamente definido com a emergência da teoria canónica dos arquivos ocidentais no século XIX, referindo-se a conjuntos de documentos criados por um ator (individual ou coletivo), no exercício da sua atividade, que devem ser preservados de acordo com os princípios da proveniência e da ordem original. O presente artigo defende que o contexto arquivístico tem, ele próprio, uma história e que a versão canónica, associada à modernidade e a uma economia política capitalista, foi precedida, na Europa, por uma conceção particularista, baseada na pertinência do contexto arquivístico, que emergiu da economia política do privilégio, entre o final da Idade Média e o início da Época Moderna. Além disso, está a surgir, atualmente, uma compreensão pós-moderna do contexto arquivístico, consubstanciada no modelo

de *records continuum*, que se articula com uma economia política da infor-mação mercantilizada. Este ensaio apresenta casos históricos e reflexões comparativas para esclarecer esta trajetória. Dá especial atenção ao contexto nas teorias históricas e arquivísticas, analisando como o pensamento arqui-vístico e o pensamento histórico se entrelaçaram ao longo do tempo, o que oferece uma nova perspetiva para compreender tanto as estruturas profun-das do passado quanto as tendências atuais. O objetivo dos estudos acadé-micos é, por um lado, atribuir sentido às provas que nos rodeiam de acordo com as normas das disciplinas e, por outro, refletir sobre as condições desse processo de construção de sentido: as limitações, as questões não levanta-das, os padrões não percebidos. O olhar do historiador sobre os regimes arquivísticos – dado que os historiadores atuais estão profundamente depen-dentes dos arquivos – pode adicionar uma perspetiva contínua e dinâmica aos modelos de mudança transformadora de longa duração.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Contexto histórico; Contexto arquivístico; Historiografia; Arquivos europeus.

I. Introduction: archival and historical contexts

When considering the contexts of archives and archival practice, a historian's first impulse is to address the *historical* context, such as the early modern European archives I have been studying for nearly three decades[2]. To understand archival collections, such as the remarkable material in the Torre do Tombo in Lisbon, any historian – certainly, any historian of archives – will consider the circumstances surrounding the materials' creation, pres-ervation, and organization. For example, when looking at the beautiful volumes of the *Leitura Nova*, a unique archival product in the Torre do Tombo from the 16th century, one must consider the political history of Portugal in this era, the history of the royal chancellery and its agents, and

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[2]   This essay took shape as a public lecture, and explores ideas around the historical and archival meaning of "context" in a broad perspective. It grows out of reflections in my book on archival organization in early modern Europe: Head (2019), which I developed further in Head (2021, pp. 104-127); and in a lecture delivered in July, 2021 on "Archived Landscapes and Archival Landscapes: Architectures of Political Record Keeping in Early Modern Western Europe, 1450-1700", at LOWE Research Cluster Conference "Architectures of Order", Goethe Universität, Frankfurt aM, Germany. I also thank the UC Riverside PhD students in HIST 240F and HIST 290 who have explored recent archival theory with me over the past years.

the political circumstances from the 1450s to 1550s, all of which shaped these volumes' production[3].

The concept of "archives in context" has a quite different meaning for archivists than for historians, however. Modern archival theory maintains that each archives (to use the British term) or each *fonds* has a context within the larger system of document preservation, and that such context is essential for correctly understanding what a *fonds* contains and what its contents mean[4]. This premise is central to the archival theory that emerged during the 19th century in Europe, which emphasized *respect des fonds* and the preservation of provenance. The powerful idea here is that we can best understand the documents created by an institution when they remain in the arrangement that they had while being used in the chambers of power. If documents are detached from this context, in contrast, we will not understand why they were important at that moment, and may thus misunderstand the actions that produced them in the first place. The *Leitura Nova* constitutes a *fonds*, but so do the "primitive charters" registered for daily use that were its original source, and so do other groups of royal records. All must be considered in their contexts.

At first, the two senses of 'context' here – let us call them historical context and archival context – may seem quite distinct, each the product of separate disciplinary developments and focused on the respective concerns of historiography and archival theory. Yet they are connected as well, since the very idea of *interpretation in context* became salient for both historiography and archival science between the mid-18th and the mid-19th century[5]. Invocations of "context" today, moreover, convey a deeper epistemological claim, namely that the interpretation of texts is enriched – or, in the strong form of contextualism, is only possible[6] – in the *context* of other texts. That both historians and archivists began making similar claims at about the same time suggests that there are deeper connections between the two senses of 'archives in context' I am discussing. At stake are not simply historical methods or practices in state archives, but more generally the way that European intellectual culture has derived meaning about the human past from texts.

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3   See Head (2019) for additional literature and context on the *Leitura Nova*; and Deswarte (1977).

4   This form of "archival context" is central to modern archival theory, canonized in the *Dutch Manual*. For recent reflections, see Horsman et al. (2003, pp. 249-270); and Cook (1997, pp. 17-63).

5   Discussed in the introduction and essays in Müller (2015).

6   See the discussion in Rysiew (2023).

To understand these developments, we must start before the double emergence of 'context' as a crucial term for archivistics and historiography. Looking at pre-1800 archives and their organization, I will argue that archival contexts in pre-modern archives emerged primarily in relation to political configurations *external* to the institution keeping a particular archive. This pre-modern pattern in archive formation – which diverged sharply from the 19th-century ideal of provenance – was not simply a matter of happenstance, but rather reveals a characteristic political epistemology that was hegemonic across the European system, one closely connected to the political economy of privilege that predominated from before 1400 to about 1800. We can speak, I think, of a coherent archival regime over this period. Examining that regime thus provides a way to diagnose the deep structures of early modern European political culture, with all its inequalities, oppression and instability, as well as its growth, innovations, and changes.

Moreover, if there was a shift in regimes that stretched across historiography, archival practice, and many other disciplines somewhere around 1800, this invites us to inquire into the deep structure of the successor regime – the one that comprises modern historiography with its central focus on archival research as well as national archives organized on the basis of *respect des fonds*. Additionally, since it appears to me that we are in the middle of another, comparable shift in the early 21st century, visible in changing canons of history-writing and new archival theories of the records continuum, what are the corresponding epistemological assumptions and social and political underpinnings for the emergent regimes in these two disciplines? These are very large questions about which I can make only preliminary suggestions, by which I hope to add a *longue durée* historical perspective to Eric Ketelaar's reflections on similar topics in this volume (Ketelaar, 2025).

The narrative I am proposing reproduces the familiar periodization of *pre-modern, modern, and post-modern* in European cultures and society. Close attention to context in historical and archival theories does not necessarily change that macro-perspective. However, looking at how archival thinking and historical thinking were entwined over this entire trajectory provides a fresh perspective for understanding both past deep structures and current tendencies. The goal of scholarship is both to make meaning out of the evidence around us in disciplinary ways, but also to reflect on the conditions of our meaning-making – the limitations, the questions unasked, the patterns not perceived. Looking at archival regimes as a historian – given that historians today are profoundly dependent on archives – can add a recursive and dynamic perspective on long-standing models of transformative change.

II. Context and the making of meaning

An important first step is to consider what we mean by 'context'. The incomparable Peter Burke has taken up this issue from a historical perspective in an illuminating article entitled "Context in Context" (Burke, 2022, pp. 152-177). As Burke notes, the term 'context' has roots in theological hermeneutics, and was used by St. Augustine in such expressions as *contextio scripturae* before it was abandoned for nearly a millenium in favor of the related term *circumstantiae.* For theologians, <u>con</u>text – meaning passages connected with the passages they sought to interpret – enabled a better understanding of a given phrase in Scripture. "Context" reappeared as a concept in early modern literature and philology after 1500, and its use expanded explosively in the mid-20th century. Modern and especially post-modern hermeneutics assert that interpretation is enriched or even determined not by the word or text being interpreted, but by the relevant context. This may feel self-evident to us today. Words never exist in a vacuum, but are connected with other phenomena, starting with other words that precede or follow them, and extending to "the time, place, public, and so forth," that is, to the circumstances (Burke, 2022, p. 153). Nevertheless, some schools of theology and philosophy have denied that context is relevant to interpretation in favor of essentialism or formalism. The importance of context for interpretation was amplified when Roman Jakobsen and other linguists showed that the very sounds that make up words are not objective phonic phenomena, but rather consist in relationships with other phonemes: the same physical vibrations are interpreted differently depending on the sonic context. Modern historians have long assumed that context – by which we mean anything from other documents to global trends – is central to the interpretation of all historical evidence.

The claim that meaning-making depends not only on text but also on context is slippery, however. The problem lies in determining what the *relevant* words, texts, or circumstances are that should guide a reader in interpretation. As Burke concludes at the end of his whirlwind tour:

> […] the concept of context is one that has been defined precisely or vaguely, narrowly or broadly, and employed in both a flexible and a rigid manner… Context is often regarded as local, but the idea of a 'global context' is also in circulation. It might well be asked, What is *not* context? (Burke, 2022, p. 171)

While this philosophical problem admits to no simple solution, looking more closely at the history of archival practices may help understand the shifts in relevant context that affected archival collections from the early modern period and the historians who rely on them.

III. Three archival regimes

A good starting point is to focus on the way different actors chose different ways to organize and access archival material over the past six centuries. Archival history suggests that a specific and narrow understanding of context lay at the center of 19th century archival theory, which produced the ideas of provenance and *respect des fonds*[7]. My argument here will be that this new understanding grew out of earlier shifts in archival practice that had changed the *way* (though not the *fact*) that archival order responded to larger historical contexts. Today, the way archival theory understands context is changing again, suggesting that another fundamental shift in epistemologies is underway.

The two epochal shifts that archival historians perceive in Europe since the Middle Ages – one somewhere around 1800, the other now under way – prompt me to propose three regimes of archival organization, each of which both participated in and also documents for us how archival contexts changed over time, specifically for political archives and the documents they preserve. In each regime, "archival context" (in the sense of what other records each record was put together with), and "historical context" (in the sense of the dominant regime of power and knowledge at the time), followed interlocking pathways of change. Each of these proposed regimes, to be clear, is also a broad ideal type, many of whose features can be found at all times. What else changed during these shifts – the political foundations, the economic system, the information ecology, the global network, or many other possibilities – has been debated endlessly since the Enlightenment. The focus here, however, is on political archives in their historical contexts.

The first archival regime I perceive is broadly captured by the terms *treasury* and *pertinence*. In this system, each document's perceived *value* and *content* provided the primary context for organizing, using, and understanding it. The archival logic of pertinence was epistemologically particularistic: it focused on specific external actors or places, and it tended to treat docu-

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7   For succinct surveys: Ridener (2009); Delsalle (1998).

ments in isolation, rather than encouraging their aggregation through statistics. Systems of pertinence in archival context corresponded, at least in Europe, to a political economy of privilege that treated dominion as partible and fragmented, documented in charters that described and allocated specific privileges. Empirical examples for this regime will come from the ideal-topographical architectures identified by Peter Rück, such as those found in 15th century Savoy, 17th century Zurich, and many other early modern archives (Rück, 1975; further examples in Head, 2019, esp. chs. 9-10).

The second archival regime, which began to take shape in the 16th century, is associated with the terms *registry* and *provenance*. When implemented, this system foregrounded documents' role in the flow of political decision-making as the critical context for their organization and preservation, which oriented them primarily to the emerging modern state (further discussion in Head, 2019, chs. 13-14; Head, 2021). Archiving under registry and provenance rests on what we might call an epistemology of informed administration, whose ideal types were articulated, among others, by Max Weber, and which co-evolved with the political economies of national capitalism. This system became canonized in archival theory during the triumph of the national state in the 19th century, with which it was intimately connected. In archival practice, this system is seen especially clearly in German and Dutch *Registratur,* whose sophisticated, internally-oriented organization of files created coherent provenances for archiving. It came to predominate in modern state information systems and record management environments during the 20th century[8].

The third, still emerging, archival regime that I perceive has developed recently in the work of archival thinkers whose commitments to subaltern, community, and indigenous records has pushed them away from the administrative state. In this regime's perspective, multiple contexts for records derive from a broad definition of 'records creators', and archivists emphasize their obligation to provide transparency and accountability to multiple publics – which often brings them into tension with state-operated recordkeeping. The records continuum model, which seeks to formalize this regime, rests on an epistemology of pluralization and virtuality, enabled by growing entanglement with digital media. More speculatively, I perceive post-canonical archival thinking as corresponding to (but also critiqueing) a political

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[8] The publication of the Dutch Manual (Muller et al., 1898) marks the moment when canonical modern archival theory emerged, in most accounts. See Ketelaar (1996) for a transnational introduction.

economy characterized by the commodification and virtualization of property and power, which became strikingly visible, for example, during the global financial crisis in 2008-2009[9].

IV. Historical contexts for early European archiving

Two characteristics of political dominion in late medieval Europe provided the historical context for the way rulers accumulated and managed written records to sustain their power during the earliest archival regime we are considering. The first, with deep roots in the past, was that control over land and people was managed through a complex discourse of privileges. Privileges, imagined as grants of authority licensed from above, were a way to formalize the profound fragmentation of political control that characterized Western Europe after the 9th century. Originally attached primarily to people, privileges documented the flow of parcelized authority among political actors that included not only emperors and kings, but lords, monasteries, and eventually corporate entities like towns and even villages. The flow of privileges, large and small, encouraged the use of writing, and centers of authority created *treasuries* of privileges that established their legitimacy and the scope of their control[10]. The second tendency, which accelerated in the later Middle Ages, was the territorialization of dominion: political actors increasingly accumulated bundles of privileges over particular places, including control over serfs and free people, influence over local churches, rights to economic resources such as mills and ponds, and more[11]. Such territorialized bundles of privileges became a key context for asserting dominion and defending against rival power centers. At the same time, power remained deeply entangled with interpersonal networks, mediated by noble houses and corporate institutions, leading to a complex tapestry with overlapping jurisdictions and endless litigation, which further drove the increase in written records.

The clerks responsible for preserving and organizing the tide of charters by which the political economy of privilege operated generally chose to

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9   Post-canonical archival theory is a rapidly developing body of work that is not yet complete. Key authors include Terry Cook, Sue McKemmish, Anne Gilliland, Frank Upward, Michelle Caswell, and many others. Cook (1997), and Ridener (2009) cover the earlier phases. For a recent manifesto, see Caswell et al. (2017).

10   This terminology and periodization introduced in Bautier (1968). Yann Potin (2020) has developed the theme of 'treasury' much further.

11   For a canonical view of this transition in the German lands: Moraw (1985).

organize their hoards in relation to the landscape of privilege. Archival spaces could reflect those giving and receiving privileges – higher lords and neighboring authorities – or the divisions of territory created by the bundles of privileges a lordship possessed. The chests, armoires, rooms and register books that filled late medieval archives were subdivided into such spaces, and new information specialists (*Registrators* or archivists) gathered documents that they saw as connected into separate boxes, or copied them into differentiated sections of registers according to the content of the privileges that charters documented – that is, according to their pertinence. Through archivists' work, therefore, document repositories came to mirror the structure of jurisdictions, alliances, and hierarchies in a ruler's political sphere, along with the domains where the ruler claimed control. To put it more broadly: rulers and their servants understood the charters they possessed as being about the external world of domains and jurisdictions, about specific lords and subjects.

V. Peter Rück's contribution

Peter Rück's career united historical and archival disciplines to an unusual degree, making him a seminal figure for historical studies of European archives. The massive reorganization of the Savoyard archives in Chambery undertaken in the 1440s, known as the Clairvaux Register, provided a perfect case for Rück's analysis[12]. The scale of the reorganization, in which documents were re-housed in 45 new armoires while 13 new register volumes were created to describe the resulting collection, meant that Rück could analyze a *designed* solution to making a large archival collection useful. As Rück noted, "consciousness of the way structures of dominion and archival structures are intertwined is old and also widely recognized today" (Rück, 1975). What set Rück's analysis apart was his recognition that this intertwining could be read deep into the internal structure of archival collections.

Rück named the remarkably lucid architecture found in the Clairvaux system of the 1440s *ideal-topographical*. As Rück put it, the goal was "the physically visible, ideal-oriented, placement of holdings in the archive's space. Mental and material orders were to coincide" (Rück, 2019). The Savoy archive after this reorganization was characterized by precisely articulated spaces that mirrored dominion in late medieval Europe. In a critical second step,

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12   See Rück (2019) for the empirical material discussed below.

this order was also reproduced in book-form finding aids. The first armoire contained boxes with charters and documents pertaining to Savoy's interactions with the papacy, and was described in the first section of the manuscript register. The next box pertained to archbishops, the next two to bishops, and so on down the ecclesiastical hierarchy, each with its corresponding section in the registers. Starting in Armoire 7, the Holy Roman and Greek emperors started a new sequence, followed by kings, dauphins, dukes, and cities, in that order. The result was a double mirroring: the actors in Europe's spiritual and political hierarchies defined specific archival contexts, namely boxes in the archive, that also corresponded to pages in the register.

A second part of the archive, in Armoires 14-45, accommodated documents about the House of Savoy's own dominion over others. Here, the logic was more muddled, in keeping with the tangled reality of the Savoyard domains. The sequence of cabinets did not correspond to any bird's-eye mapping of Savoyard territory. Rather, it was the relationship of the ruling family to complexes of privileges and authority that provided the critical context. The dynasty's internal records came first, including testaments, marriage contracts and appanages; then records about directly ruled domains, the *baillivats*; then the domains of subordinate lords and areas where Savoy possessed specific privileges but not primary dominion. We should not overlook that the correspondence between archival spaces and external contexts ran in both directions. The order of the archive not only mirrored the imagined order of the world, it also supported and re-circulated this order through the archive's role in administration and litigation. Archival context was defined by dominion over spaces, and the resulting archive also supported the reproduction of spatial divisions, often down to the present.

VI. An epistemology of the particular in early modern archiving

Rück's analysis helps us understand how the archival context of documents in Savoy, as in most of late medieval Europe, derived from external political contexts through the principle of pertinence. Such connections enabled not only the preservation but also the finding of documents for use in contention over specific places, people, and privileges. Late medieval and early modern secretaries needed to be able to find evidence of particular privileges, and late medieval sources about archives are replete with references to finding, often using terms such as *facilitas inveniendi* that echoed the world of Scholastic reference books (discussion in Head, 2019, esp. chs.

3, 5). The methods used for finding specific documents in Savoy and elsewhere therefore give us deeper insight into the political epistemology of the rulers and secretaries who created and operated these archives. What do changes in organization and finding tools tell us, not just about archives themselves, but also about larger structures associated with the shift from early modern to modern states and their underlying cultural foundations? Important evidence comes from the quite specific nature of archival finding in ideal topographic systems.

I argued above that for these rulers and archivists, archival records consisted primarily of signs about particulars out in the world, in the form of authentic records of past actions that could inform action in the present. This focus on particulars, implicit in both ideal-topographical architectures and in early modern indexing practices, led to archives organized by means of division, and also explains the surprising lack of records aggregation in Europe during this period. In the words of the 17th century Italian scholar Baldessare Bonifacio:

> That order is certainly to be kept in archives is demonstrated to everyone by Nature herself: first it is proper to *divide up* locations, then affairs, and finally times. If we aid this *division* by means of indexes arranged alphabetically, nothing will be difficult for us find. (Baldessare, 1632, as quoted in Born, 1941, p. 236 [emphasis mine])

As Bonifacio also suggests, indexes became an important tool for finding records within the pertinence archives of early modernity. However, the Clairvaux Registers discussed by Rück had no indexes, since in ideal-topographical archives, archival context itself was a primary finding tool. Users of the Clairvaux Register knew both the political hierarchy and the character of the various domains of the House of Savoy, which supported their searching: they knew that kings came before dukes, and that family wills were more important than the baillivats.

After 1500, the flood of diverse documents to be preserved and rulers' growing interest in deriving more information from archives meant that this approach was insufficient. Search based on context alone in ideal-topographical archives also faced the problem of defining what documents were "about", when most were about more than one thing. Archivists' lamentations about this problem are a useful clue, since this seems to us a trivial problem. The common solution was to create indexes (often linked to rubricated words in the margins of documents) that allowed searching for a

particular name or place independently of a document's location. This was the strategy suggested by Bonifacio, and used in the *Leitura Nova* volumes created here in the Torre do Tombo in 16th century (notably, without alphabetization of the indexes).

A seventeenth-century archive that combined an unusually explicit ideal-topographic plan with supplemental indexes emerged in Zurich in 1646, documented in a volume entitled *Index archivorum generalis* (Staatsarchiv Zürich […], n.d.). The complete reorganization of the chancellery office with its 485 boxes of documents carried out by Johann Heinrich Waser created 13 sections, which traced both external political and ecclesiastical hierarchies, as in Savoy, and the different domains under the city's control. Additional sections comprised categories such as judicial administration or negotiations with Zurich's Swiss allies. In describing this system in the *Index generalis*, Waser explained the need for a second finding tool, the *Index archivorum specialis,* as follows:

> Thus, in the *index specialori,* documents that pertain to a single matter are found together, even if they are located in different boxes; since often a single document contains points pertaining to different matters, but one can not divide the document, but needs to put it under a single title. (Waser cited in Head, 2019, p. 211, from Staatsarchiv Zürich […], n.d., fol. [vii])

Arrangement by pertinence, supported by indexical supplements, was a common strategy across Europe at this time, though in a wild variety of configurations. The related indexes linked specific referents out in the world of politics to the relevant documents in the archive. In doing so, moreover, systematic indexing had the potential to bring together separated documents that shared a common point of reference. In this way, the rapid proliferation of indexes in archives after 1600 also helped to develop a technology that would enable a momentous shift in archival context that began in European archives during the 17th and 18th centuries.

VII. Beyond pertinence: states, information, and modern archival practices

Under regimes that conceptualized politics in the language of privilege, a parcelizing approach to political knowledge long prevailed. But over time,

the growing "info-lust" (to use Ann Blair's phrase (Blair, 2010)) of rulers and functionaries made the limitations of existing archival epistemology increasingly apparent, especially in larger administrations. Although it is impossible to point to a single sharp break, a fundamental shift in practice began in the 17th century. Some state archivists, seeking coherence for their "oceans of documents" in the face of demands from the rulers of Europe's information states, began to organize documents primarily in relation to their place in a state's decision-making processes[13]. This shift produced assemblages of records that were different in their form, their content, and their organization from previous practices. From being evidence about particulars in the world, records became evidence about the process by which a state dealt with the world – which also helped make the new state institutions visible and legible to its agents and subjects. To be understood properly, records in such a system had to remain connected to the offices, agents, and pathways that received, produced, and annotated them, since their context of creation was now essential for understanding what they meant, in contrast to the traditional charter, which was imagined to be self-explanatory and self-sufficient. Such dependence on documentary context became a fundamental component of provenance in archival theory as it took shape in the 19th century.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, chancelleries increased their ability to manage documents consistently, and thus to track matters of interest out in the world. A general term for this development is registry, and it has been studied most systematically in the German lands and Netherlands, although it was at work among larger archival systems across Europe (see Head, 2019, chs. 11-12, for more on the emergence of registries). Three key features characterized the new archival contexts that administrators began creating in registries. First, new administrative structures were dedicated to managing documents and the information in them, separately from the chancelleries where documents were used. Second, documents were organized around the internal processes of the state involved. Third, these documents were intentionally held accessible to provide useful information to rulers and their agents, rather than being kept in treasuries for use in litigation. Registry thus focused record-keepers' attention on making and executing decisions within a political apparatus, rather than on contexts

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13   The phrase "an ocean of letters and of registers, confused as by a storm," comes from the French 14th century archivist Gérard de Montaigu, cited in Delaborde (1909, cxi). The term "information state" in this context was developed by Higgs (2003).

outside the apparatus. In a registry, the outside world became raw material for state action, rather than providing the framework that shaped the internal architecture of the archives.

The book-form protocols that European cities began creating in the High Middle Ages were proto-registries, as Eric Ketelaar and others have shown (Ketelaar, 1980). Items in protocols were entered chronologically, which emphasized the document's connection to the city in a specific functional context, rather than oriented to external circumstances. Registers and protocol books in various political units grew in volume and became more specialized over the sixteenth century, adding more and more metadata that placed records in contexts defined by offices, councils, or other state institutions. Such registers reveal that their creators were beginning to understand the state – an abstract entity, in principle – as the actor that provided the most important context for records over time.

Registry systems have received relatively little scholarly attention, and the way that the sophisticated transaction-file registries of nineteenth-century Prussia and its neighbors developed still needs considerable study. A clear example of this new orientation in a moderately-sized archive appeared during a complete archival reorganization in the city of Lucerne, Switzerland, in 1698. In place of a system of boxes based on pertinence, the city secretary, Johann Karl Balthasar, removed many old documents into an 'old archive' that would no longer grow, then rearranged his storage system for new records not according to actors or places, but according to functions of his city-state, such as 'commerce' or 'military affairs'. The system was also designed to allow extensive and detailed indexing of names and places (which were still important, after all), so that a single document or a single entry in a protocol could have multiple index entries (Head, 2007). In Brandenburg-Prussia, the key step took place in the early-17th century when a dedicated office, the *Registratur,* began managing not only the old records in the chancellery, but the ongoing paperwork of the electorate's new Secret Council, thus tying recordkeeping tightly to the business of the realm. After 1639, archivist Christoph Schönbeck created a new set of comprehensive categories for keeping all kinds of records. Although modeled on the existing ideal-topographical shelves and bundles, Schönbeck detached his categories from physical spaces and turned them into a conceptual grid oriented to the Electorate's operations and priorities, rather to the imagined political world. Another key step was to enforce the shared set of categories on the Secret Council's own secretaries. As a result, records and files could be smoothly transferred out of the Council's offices when closed, yet easily accessed later,

linking Council and archive in the execution of the state's business (Head, 2019, ch. 11, with additional literature).

When fully developed in the nineteenth century, the Prussian *Registratur* stood between the archive (now meaning the corpus of closed cases) and the state apparatus, on the one hand, and between the world and the state apparatus, supporting the deliberation of the ruler and his councils, on the other. Each ministry's incoming correspondence was directed to its *Registratur,* where each item triggered the creation of a new file within the pre-existing system of categories[14]. Whether a petition from a subject, a query from a lower court about how to handle a case, or a bill for river dredging, each incoming document went into the same system. The *Registratur* sought out relevant past documents from the archive to the file, and then routed the file to the appropriate officers and councils for deliberation. The authority's decision and the final communication of the outcome entered the same file in the registry according to a complex tracking system.

In this system, evidence from the external world became raw material that entered the state's purview through the registry. The registry file enabled a decision by the ruler, which could then be sent back out into the world. The subject's petition was denied, the court was instructed how to sentence the defendant, and the dredger's bill was either paid or returned for further proof of work completed. People and places in the world were still vital to an administration that operated in this mode. But for an office's management of records, the world was approached through bundles of information that could be moved, divided, categorized, and otherwise processed to reach a decision[15]. The state became the context for the registry's operations, while the registry and its archive provided contexts for the questions the state faced.

The archival principles that correspond to, and indeed grew out of, such registry systems in all of their variations are provenance and *respect-des-fonds*. Provenance argues that if state records are meaningful primarily in the context of the state's actions, then only preservation in the order created by that state will preserve their intelligibility. If removed from their transactional context, their meaning will be corrupted or lost. The principle of *respect des fonds* follows: the way that an office assembled and annotated records – that is, their archival context – is fundamental for their informational value.

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[14] The canonical analysis in archival terms of the German registry in Meissner (1935); a lucid overview in Miller (2003).

[15] The impact of parcellization on knowledge practices is provocatively analyzed by Alberto Cevolini, e.g. Cevolini (2022).

Moreover, such offices often expended great effort in indexing their case files, yet such effort would go lost – indeed, all too often it *did* go lost during ill-designed reorganizations – unless the body of files and indexes were kept together as a *fonds*.

Archival practice and the emergence of modern archival theory were only one dimension of a systemic transition in European information practices, which included historiography. The appearance of Rankean historical writing, centered on the actions of nations and their states, dovetails well with archives that privileged state action in their organization (Eskildsen, 2008; Müller, 2015). Another trend that emerged during the 17th century was growing interest in *aggregated* information from bodies of records, leading to the creation of genres such as population registers and land cadasters. Aggregation proved to be extremely difficult in pre-modern archives, however, with their deep-seated emphasis on the particular, but was made easier by the reorganization of archives on the basis of provenance. By the end of the 19th century, both archival theory and historical theory had reached new canonical formulations that shaped practices in archives and in history-writing for the next century. The appearance of both the *Dutch Manual* and the influential *Introduction aux études historiques* of Langlois and Seignobos in 1898 manifested the maturity of the new paradigms (Muller et al., 1898; Langlois & Seignobos, 1992). The enormous expansion of administrative paperwork during the 20th century prompted new discussions about how to manage archives that further articulated the implications of provenance and *respect de fonds* as canonical principles for vast new state archives in the larger framework of records management.

VIII. Another transition? From provenance to the records continuum

A new revolution in archival theory has begun during our lifetimes, responding to shifting media technologies, evolving political economies, and changing historiographical practice. The changes are large enough to suggest that another transformation of record-keeping regimes has begun to encroach on the state-oriented paradigm characteristic of modern archival science, and this transformation resonates with developments in the humanities and especially historiography. These developments are integral parts of post-modern thinking in that they question not only the details, but the underlying epistemologies that shaped both archival science and historical theory from the early nineteenth century until World War II.

Modern archival theory began to come under criticism from several directions in the 1970s. Australian and Canadian archivists began seeking alternatives to the iron cage of provenance and the supposed distinction between active records (which were not deemed archival) and closed records in custodial archives (Cook, 1997). They argued that in modern information states, records management would be more effective if it preceded archival custody, rather than beginning when records were transferred to the archive. Meanwhile, scholars of indigenous peoples in Australia and Canada, as well as community- and identity-focused archivists in England and the United States, began critiquing the canonical protocols of acquisition, appraisal, arrangement, and description that were taught in archival management schools. Eric Ketelaar has been a leading figure in these turns, both though his own research and by co-creating a journal, *Archival Science,* that has been at the forefront of developments in archival theory. Post-canonical archival thinking found philosophical resonance in post-structuralism and is exerting growing influence in Europe and around the world as modern states deal with the colonial material found in their archives or in the archives of their former colonizers[16].

Other theorists, like Verne Harris and Jeanette Bastian, have critiqued how canonical theory limits 'record creators' to institutional actors embedded in power systems, only reluctantly considering private archives and rejecting responsibility for preserving memory from the perspective of those outside of – or oppressed by – official institutions (Bastian, 2003; Harris, 2002). Those seeking to archive marginalized communities have called for archival theory that supports community archives as well as state archives[17]. Anne Gilliland and Sue McKemmish have emphasized that archivists' duties include promoting transparency and social accountability in state organs, not just documenting their operations for internal use[18]. All these developments have been inflected by the rapid spread of digital recordkeeping and storage, which throws up new challenges for authentication, appraisal, and the long-term preservation of records. New forms such as databases seem to put the whole idea of provenance into question, since records are dynamic and may be created *ad hoc* by queries to an underlying file that is constantly changing.

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[16]   South Africa played a pivotal role in some aspects of the global appropriation of post-colonial archival theory (Hamilton et al., 2002).

[17]   A foundational opening of the question in Flinn (2007); various scholars have expanded and refined the remit of community archiving; a conspectus in Caswell et al. (2016).

[18]   Both are proflic authors. See e.g. Gilliland (2011); and McKemmish & Gilliland (2014).

In this emerging archival regime, how do new archival contexts connect with political, social, and cultural contexts, both in content and in organization? If not oriented to the operations of a state, what should be the guiding principle of post-modern archival organization? The *records continuum model* proposes a new framework for archival context althogether, drawing on systems theory to view the relevant contexts for records in archives not as fixed, but rather as dynamic and constantly evolving. In the words of Frank Upward, archivists need to:

> […] move from the object, the thing in a general metaphysical view, and create a more dynamic relational view of the processes that form the object, including the archivist[']s own ongoing involvement in the formation of archives as a sociocultural resource". (Upward, 2005)

This is a complex theory, but its central point is that *multiple* contexts shape the trajectory of archival records and assemblages, shaped by issues of usership, time, and space. In contrast to the iron law of provenance – that the business of an office is the only relevant context for each *fonds* – records continuum theory argues that context is not fixed, but must be analyzed dynamically over time in terms of identity, transactionality, evidentiality, and recordkeeping systems. Records creators are no longer limited to official producers in state offices, but actively encompass the subjects as well as the makers of records, especially in situations of power difference and oppression. Records can be used not only to track the operations of a state, but to challenge it and subject it to accountability.

Shifting perspectives on record-makers and record users have begun shaping new digital platforms for managing archival and cultural resource material. The platform called Mukurtu, for example, rejects the idea of pan-optical access confined to official gatekeepers, and instead is built around the idea of differential access to materials depending on the identity of the seeker. Mukurtu was designed originally for Indigenous communities seeking to catalog their documents and material culture in ways that respected their own boundaries of legitimate access. For example, documents and objects can be restricted to tribal members or members of a particular clan or age-class, or specified as intended for women only. Mukurtu's goal of ensuring that "you can tell your stories and your history, your way" leaves behind the positivist claims associated with modern archival theory (Mukurtu CMS, n.d.)[19].

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19   Thanks to Robin Katz of UCR libraries for introducing me to this resource.

Like its predecessors, post-canonical archival practice also resonates with a specific political economy. If early modern archiving reflected a political economy of privilege, and modern archiving a political economy of capitalist states, then the new archival science appears to correspond to our emerging political economy resting on on the commodification of information. This became visible, for example, in the MERS electronic mortgage registry in the United States, which broke down spectacularly in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. MERS was created to allow financial claims resting on mortgages of property – traditionally documented in local registers of title – to be commodified and infinitely subdivided into instruments such as collateralized debt obligations (CDO) and residential mortgage-backed securities (RMBS). Digital registry allowed the value of property to be completely abstracted for trading in financial markets – at least until those markets collapsed. After 2008, however, the absence of diplomatically valid chains of transfer led to a crisis of forged signatures and litigation in the United States, since the law did not recognize the record-keeping practices of MERS[20].

The new archival theory also resonates with changes in history writing over the last generation. If Renaissance historiography looked for "exemplary" virtuous or vicious individuals, and if modern historiography was structured by narratives about the growth and character of nation states, then post-modern historiography, which is still taking shape, allows multiple perspectives that reflect not only incommensurate perspectives on the world, but also the positionality of historians and the communities they belong to.

IX. Closing thoughts

Every regime of archival context makes choices about what counts as context, and therefore generates constraints on and affordances for making meaning from documents. The regime of particularity and privilege that predominated until 1700 not only gave literate elites backed by feudal power a near monopoly over the ability to deploy documents; it also made aggregate knowledge about European societies nearly impossible to compile, built as it was on a tapestry of accessible particulars. The regime of registry in

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20   The role of MERS in the "robo-signing controversy" (2024) in 2010 was much discussed in legal and financial blogs at the time. See also Esquivel (2012).

the service of national states allowed information to be deployed at an enormous scale by nation states, even as it continued many of the exclusions of the prior regime. It also enabled new forms of surveillance and extraction from those outside state power, in part through the imposition of colonial information regimes on many parts of the world[21].

A key claim of records continuum theory is that "while a record's content and structure can be seen as fixed, in terms of its contextualization, a record is 'always in the process of becoming'" (*apud* McKemmish, 2001, p. 335). Such an archival regime of differentiated access and plural contexts faces a risk of losing coherence, however, in parallel with critiques of post-modernism in other spheres. If contexts are not fixed, but depend on who is accessing a record by means of metadata that is different today than it will be tomorrow, how can any stability of meaning be possible? Are we headed to the world of George Orwell's *1984,* in which:

> The mutability of the past is the central tenet of IngSoc. Past events… have no objective existence, but survive only in the written records and in human memories. The past is whatever the records and the memories agree upon. And since the Party is in full control of all records and in equally full control of the minds of its members, it follows that the past is whatever the Party chooses to make it[22].

Yet archival context in post-modern archiving is different from Orwell's totalitarianism. Unlike the IngSoc party, post-modern archivists are enjoined from erasing and replacing documents to change the past. The implication of pluralized contexts, instead, is that the same words on the same piece of paper or parchment can generate *different* meanings for differently situated readers in differently structured archives – but without silencing other contexts and meanings. Managing archival records under such conditions raises new challenges for archivists, as it does for historians debating records' meaning. The purpose of new archival theories is make these conditions visible, while protecting the fixed 'content and structure' of records for the future. In the end, no regime by which we preserve and interrogate the

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21   Colonial information regimes have been a vital site for rethinking archivally-based historical writing. In addition to the foundational work by Stoler (2009) and Trouillot (1995), see more recently the essays in Donato (2019).

22   Much quoted, including in talks and articles by archivists since at least the 1980s, e.g. Samuels, 1986. Orwell is cited from Orwell, 1977, p. 54 (Original work published 1949).

human past will ever be free of contexts – contexts in the past, in the archive, and in our present. The goal in treating contexts as a matter of choice and consciousness – reframing but not replacing archival records – is to free us for richer debate rather than to blind us for increased control.

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Archives, records, and information: Terms, concepts, and relationships across linguistic cultures[1]

Arquivos, documentos e informação: Termos, conceitos e relações entre culturas linguísticas

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a lightly revised version of a talk that I gave as part of the seminar cycle *Rethinking the Archive(s) / Repensar o(s) Arquivo(s)* in Lisbon in March 2024. The organisers of the seminar asked me to speak about three terms that are central to our professional discourse: *archives*, *records*, and *information*. These terms give rise to a number of questions that I sought to address. What are the concepts that underlie them? How might they be related? How are the terms used in different languages and how are they understood in different linguistic cultures? Is there still a place for distinct understandings of *archives* and *records*

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1   Conference delivered at the seminar "Rethinking the Archive(s)/ Repensar o(s) Arquivo(s)", organized by the VINCULUM project, based at NOVA FCSH, and the Institute for Medieval Studies, NOVA FCSH. National Archive of Torre do Tombo, Lisbon, 6 March 2024. Comments by Laureano Ascensão Macedo, CEC-FL-UL, published in this volume. VINCULUM (2024, March 13). *5.ª Sessão do Ciclo de seminários: "Rethinking the Archive(s)/ Repensar o(s) Arquivo(s)"* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhVvvwNlPTQ

in a world increasingly dominated by ideas about *information*? In attempting to answer these questions, it seems best to begin by considering the terms themselves. Each of them has a diverse range of meanings, and this paper aims to examine how the three words have been used in the past as well as how they are understood today. It begins by discussing historical and current understandings of *archives*. It examines the origins of the word *records*, its transformation from a purely Anglophone to a largely global term, and the challenges that arise in translating *records* from English into other languages. It then considers how ideas about *information* intersect with our comprehension of records and archives, and offers some concluding thoughts on the importance of records and record-keeping in the digital era of the twenty-first century.

RESUMO
O presente texto é uma versão ligeiramente revista da conferência que proferi no ciclo de seminários *Rethinking the Archive(s) / Repensar o(s) Arquivo(s)*, realizada em Lisboa, em março de 2024. Os organizadores do seminário pediram-me que abordasse três termos que são centrais no nosso discurso profissional: *arquivos*, *documentos* e *informação*. Estes termos suscitam um conjunto de questões que explorarei no texto: Quais são os conceitos subjacentes a cada um deles? Como podem estar relacionados? De que forma são utilizados em diferentes línguas e como são compreendidos em diferentes culturas linguísticas? Haverá ainda espaço para diferentes entendimentos sobre o significado de *arquivos* e de *documentos* num mundo cada vez mais dominado por ideias sobre *informação*? Ao tentar responder a estas questões, parece-me mais adequado começar por equacionar os próprios termos. Cada um deles tem uma gama diversificada de significados, e este texto tem como objetivo examinar como as três palavras foram usadas no passado e como são entendidas atualmente. O texto começa por discutir os conceitos históricos e atuais de *arquivos*. Examina as origens da palavra *records*/ documentos, e a sua transformação enquanto termo puramente anglófono para um termo amplamente global, e os desafios que surgem na tradução de *records* do inglês para outras línguas. Em seguida, analisa a forma como as ideias sobre *informação* se cruzam com a nossa compreensão dos *documentos* e dos *arquivos*, e termina com algumas considerações

sobre a importância dos documentos e do seu arquivamento na era digital do século XXI.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Arquivos; Documentos; Informação.

Archives

Archives, *records*, and *information* are a trio of contested terms, each capable of bearing a complex range of meanings. In seeking to examine how they have been interpreted and understood in different cultural contexts, I propose to begin by discussing the word *archives*, which is ostensibly the oldest of the three. This word, or its equivalent, exists in almost every language in Europe. As most archivists know, its origins lie in ancient Greece, where the word ἀρχεῖον (*archeion*) was used to refer to a place where laws, decrees, accounts, and title deeds were brought together, stored, and made available for consultation. The Greek word *archeion* gave rise to the Latin *archivum*, which in turn was the origin of *arquivo* in Portuguese, *archive* in English, and similar words in other modern European languages.

In the classical era, archives were essentially repositories. As time passed, however, the material holdings of repositories also came to be labelled as "archives", and the pioneers of archival literature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries all offered definitions of archives as materials rather than places or institutions (Muller et al., 1898, p. 1; Jenkinson, 1922, p. 11; Casanova, 1928, p. 19). To the best of my knowledge, this extension of meaning has occurred in almost every European language: if I speak in French of *les archives*, or in Italian of an *archivio*, it is not immediately obvious whether I am referring to a place, to the materials held in that place, or indeed to both.

In recent years, the range of meaning of *archives* has undergone several further shifts. Historically, in every language and every country where the word was used, it carried an association with public acts, or with writings kept by government bodies, but more recently it has become commonplace to accept that archives can also include non-written materials, and that they can be maintained by businesses, non-profit organisations, families, and individual persons as well as government institutions.

A further extension occurred when the word *archive* began to be used to denote the totality of documentary materials created or received by a single organisation, family, or person, irrespective of where those materials

were stored. From this perspective, an archive is a whole made up of parts. It can be moved from place to place; its ownership can be divided, with different parts of the archive dispersed among different individuals, institutions, or nation-states; but conceptually it can still be identified as a single archive.

Particularly in English-speaking countries in the twentieth century, some people have wanted to limit the scope of *archives* to materials designated for long-term retention, those judged to have historical or cultural value, or those that have been formally entrusted to an archival repository; but in many countries of continental Europe there is a history of resistance to limitations of this kind (Duchein, 1992, p. 53). Even in Anglophone cultures, many commentators insist that these restrictions are unduly confining and that the status of an archive does not depend on its historical merit, its long-term preservation, or its custodial arrangements.

Debates have also arisen about the extent to which archives — in the sense of materials or writings — can be described as natural or organic accumulations. In the twentieth century, archivists generally insisted that the growth of an archive was a natural process, but today this assumption seems open to dispute. Individual items within an archive may perhaps be said to have come into existence more or less naturally as life or business progressed, but decisions about which items were to be kept, and how they would be organised and presented to users, are based on fallible human judgement. In parallel with this, many archivists have moved away from conceptions of archives as rigidly arranged entities. Recognising that no single ordering can capture the multiple relationships of archival materials or serve the multiple needs of their diverse users, archivists have begun to seek more flexible ways of addressing context and provenance (Michetti, 2013, pp. 1002-1010; Yeo, 2016, pp. 135-169).

In recent years, the shift to understanding archives as materials rather than institutions has also encouraged scholars to examine non-traditional or non-Western ways of maintaining archives or preserving memories. In seeking to re-define archives to accommodate these alternative perspectives, some scholars have argued that archives should be reconceptualised as assemblages of any objects deemed significant by those who assemble them (Flinn, 2011, pp. 164-165); others affirm that the term *archives* embraces not only collections of material objects, but also a range of memory-related practices in non-material forms (Evans et al., 2017, p. 6).

Understandings of archives have been further complicated by computer scientists, cultural theorists, and others who have appropriated the word *archives* — or, more usually, the word *archive*, in the singular — for

their own purposes. In computer science, an archive can be a back-up copy, a set of files or datasets stored offline, or a part of a website that displays superseded content. Digital humanities scholars, artists, audio-visual curators, and digital librarians have also adopted the word and use it to describe collections that have little resemblance to archives as archivists have traditionally understood them: a body of literature, for example, or a collection of soundtracks drawn from a variety of sources, may be described as an archive.

In the view of one recent cultural commentator, an archive in its "widest sense" is any "collection of data brought together to resist its being lost to memory" (Marchand, 2017, p. 139). An American literary scholar has taken this further, and argues that "all artifacts form one vast archive, the tangible residue of the activities of humanity" (Tanselle, 2002, p. 405). Cultural theorists influenced by the works of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida have rendered the concept of "the archive" into a metaphor for almost any protocol used for the control of knowledge or the exercise of hegemony. Today, as cultural historian Julietta Singh has observed, «"archive"… can mean almost anything» (Singh, 2018, p. 22).

How might we respond to these developments? Many archivists have been unenthusiastic about them. Some have simply ignored them; some have vociferously objected to the appropriation of a key concept of our discipline by scholars in other fields. Some have pointed out that most writings about "the archive" by scholars of literature, art, or cultural theory show little awareness of archival science as a discipline with an extensive literature of its own (Caswell, 2016). Others, however, have adopted some of the ideas put forward by non-archivists and have incorporated notions about archives from other disciplines into their own thinking. Rightly or wrongly, perceptions of archives as an inclusive concept, embracing a wider range of materials than archivists traditionally believed, are rapidly gaining popularity among archival scholars. I think we can confidently predict that, in the years ahead, further new conceptualisations of archives will continue to appear, both within the professional community of archivists and outside it.

Record(s): an Anglophone concept?

In summarising the changing uses of the word *archives*, I have been treading territory that is familiar to almost every European archivist and archival scholar. However, the early history of the word *record* is less well-known. To a considerable degree, the topic has remained unexplored by European

scholars simply because — until very recently — the word was specific to English-language discourse; there is still no precise equivalent to *record* in most other European languages. Even in England, however, the word's evolving uses have not been thoroughly researched until very recently.

Until the latter part of the twentieth century, both the term and the concept of *record* were confined to England and to other countries — such as the United States — that have legal and administrative systems with English origins. Although many archivists in non-English-speaking countries have begun to adopt the word *record* in recent decades, it remains distinctive of the English language. The word does, of course, have roots in Latin; it derives from the Latin verb *recordari* (to remember), widely used in ancient Roman literature. In modern languages other than English, words derived from *recordari* still connote "remembrance"; their meanings do not correspond to *record* as the term is now understood in Anglophone cultures.

This distinctive understanding of *record* originated with the common lawyers of twelfth-century England, who invented the Latin word *recordum* and used it to indicate a judge's oral testimony of judgements made in the proceedings of a court. After oral methods of recalling judicial business began to be superseded by writing in the late twelfth and more especially in the thirteenth century, the term *recordum* — later Anglicised as *record* — came to be applied to their written successors (Clanchy, 2013, pp. 78-79; Thorne, 1934; Yeo, 2022).

Between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, concepts of record in England gradually shifted from an exclusive association with courts of law to a perception that records could be made and kept across a much wider array of contexts. By 1700, many people accepted that the term could be employed to describe the writings of a range of church and state institutions.

Some later developments in the meanings attributed to *record* paralleled the changes in understandings of *archives* discussed earlier in this paper. In particular, an extension of the concept of record beyond the writings of corporate bodies to embrace those of private individuals had become commonplace by the early twentieth century. Most English archivists of that era, such as Sir Hilary Jenkinson, instinctively saw *records* as the products of official or institutional activities, but many of them also used the word to refer to personal and family papers or other unofficial writings (Yeo, 2022, pp. 30-31).

Other new concepts of record emerged in the twentieth century, after the birth of what was initially called *records administration* — a term soon replaced by *records management* — in the United States in the 1940s.

The pioneers of records management associated the word *record* with organisational business needs and sought to confine *archives* to materials kept for historical or cultural purposes. These usages were promoted in the writings of Theodore Schellenberg and led to the famous dogfight between Schellenberg and Jenkinson, who insisted that the words *records* and *archives* were "practically synonyms" and castigated Schellenberg for advocating a point of view that (in Jenkinson's opinion) was both "arbitrary" and "dangerous" (Jenkinson, 1957, pp. 147-149).

A more recent development in Anglophone discourse is an acknowledgement that records need not be in the physical form of *documents*. This, I think, is very largely a consequence of the digital revolution, with its frequent emphasis on *data* rather than on documents in the sense of fixed units of narrative text. In the early days of computing, as Australian archivist Adrian Cunningham has noted, archivists "tended to be a bit standoffish about data"; because data in database systems are often subject to constant updating, they lack stability, and this led many archivists in the late twentieth century to "regard data management as someone else's concern" (Cunningham, 2020, p. 172). In the twenty-first century, however, most archivists have come to recognise that records can be, and increasingly are, created using structured data and database applications.

The relationship of *documents* to *data* has remained a matter of debate. In English-language writings, some commentators have wanted to demarcate a clear boundary between them, some have argued that the universe of *data* subsumes *documents*, and others — though perhaps in smaller numbers — have turned this argument on its head and have claimed that the definition of *document* embraces what computer scientists call *data*. Whatever view we take of these disagreements, it seems undisputable that the growth of database technologies has occasioned some shifts in conceptualisations of what a *record* might be.

Just as it has been widely accepted in recent years that *archives* can include non-written materials, it has also come to be acknowledged that a *record* need not be dependent on the use of writing. Few archivists would now dispute that a record can — and frequently does — consist of one or more visual images, or combinations of images and written text. Video and audio technologies can also be used to create records. A few years ago, I made a survey of professional literature and collected more than fifty definitions of *record* from recent decades; the definitions were very varied, but almost all of them insisted that records could be created and maintained in "any media".

Despite this apparent acceptance of diversity, however, it is evident that even today expansive concepts remain in competition with more restrictive modes of thought. Some twenty-first-century commentators want to limit the term *records* to items deliberately designed or selected for medium-term or long-term retention, while others affirm that ephemeral items, casual communications, and items that survive only through happenstance can also qualify as records. Some professionals in our field continue to limit their perception of records to organisational settings and insist that records are confined to items captured and managed within an organisation's formal control system, while others — including many proponents of "records continuum" theories — seek an inclusive view that extends the concept of records to non-textual materials kept by marginalised communities and to the traditions, songs, dances, and rituals of indigenous cultures across the world (Gilliland, 2017, pp. 54-55; Piggott, 2012, pp. 251-270).

In my own writings I have claimed that records and record-keeping practices can be identified in early societies such as Mesopotamia, Pharaonic Egypt, and Shang-dynasty China (Yeo, 2021). On more than one occasion I have chosen to write about the *khipu* (or *quipu*), the knotted cord device used by the administrators of the Inka empire, and to interpret khipus as records and archives maintained in a society where writing was absent. Indeed, the identification of khipus as archives dates back as far as the work of the Italian scholar Baldassare Bonifacio in the seventeenth century (Bonifacio, 1632, p. 6). Diverse and inclusive conceptualisations are not wholly new.

The polysemic nature of the word *archives* has often been accepted without demur; today, within our profession, its use to designate both institutions and materials is largely taken for granted and seems to cause few difficulties in everyday practice. Disquiet has largely been restricted to the appropriation of the word by cultural theorists, computer technologists, and others outside the profession.

But different understandings of the word *record* have often led to acrimonious debate within the profession, at least in English-speaking countries. Most professionals agree that records are made and accrued in the course of activities that take place in the world, and that they are closely connected with those activities; but beyond this, consensus is often lacking. Does a record come into existence when an inscription is made, when it is communicated or used in the course of activity, or only when someone designates or selects it for preservation? Some practitioners insist that records are defined by management procedures; others (more convinc-

ingly, in my opinion) argue that they are distinguished by their associations with actions and events[2].

Further questions ensue. Is a record essentially an object, or might it more appropriately be characterised as a relationship between object and event? If it has object characteristics, is it always an individual item or can a multiplicity of items constitute a single record? Should enquiries about objects and physical items now be abandoned, in the light of newer understandings that records can be intangible? All these questions can give rise to considerable disagreement.

Academic commentators also disagree about whether records must be fixed and secured against change or alteration, as archivists have traditionally believed, or whether we live in a world where fixity is a chimera and records are always fluid. Each of these views has its advocates, and there often seems to be a gulf of mutual incomprehension between the parties to the debate. Further tensions arise because in Anglophone countries *record* is a word used in everyday speech as well as specialist discourse. It has to bear many differing nuances.

Record(s): a global term?

Although the word *record* is still widely perceived as characteristic of English-speaking societies, there are indications that it is now becoming a global term in our discipline. Most notably, it has been adopted by several Francophone archivists; in 2006, for example, Marie-Anne Chabin and Françoise Watel published an article entitled *L'approche française du records management* (Chabin & Watel, 2006; see also Fournier & Morineau, 2005). In countries around the world, large numbers of archivists have come to recognise — and sometimes to employ — the word *record*, even if many of them apprehend it as a foreign importation. However, professional leaders in non-Anglophone countries have often resisted the use of the English word, and attempts have frequently been made to find a translation using words such as *registres* and *documents* in French, or *registros* and *documentos* in Portuguese. To the best of my knowledge, this seems to have been the usual practice in Portugal in recent years.

When I was invited to speak in the seminar cycle *Rethinking the Archive(s) / Repensar o(s) Arquivo(s)* in March 2024, the organisers of the seminar kindly sent

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2   I argue in favour of this latter view in Yeo (2011). Others who propose similar arguments include McKemmish (1999) and Menne-Haritz (2006).

me an invitation in English and asked me to talk on the theme *Archives, records, and information*; shortly afterwards, however, I observed that when the title of my talk was rendered into Portuguese it had become *Arquivos, documentos e informação*. When I noticed this shift from *records* to *documentos*, I began to give some thought to questions of translation. It occurred to me that there might perhaps be an expectation that, if I spoke to a Portuguese audience about the English concept of *records*, my remarks would be equally applicable to the Portuguese concept of *documentos*. But I am not convinced that this is wholly correct.

Besides a concept of *records* there is, of course, a concept of *documents* in the English language. I have already mentioned the ongoing Anglophone discourse about relationships between *documents* and *data*. This is not the place to explore the English concept of *documents* in detail, but I want to emphasise that the concept of *documents* in English is not the same as the concept of *records*. In an article that I wrote in 2011, I analysed the two concepts at some length and concluded that documents and records follow different logics. Documents, I argued, are generally defined by their format; unlike records, they are almost always perceived as entities at item level. In some circumstances, I affirmed, a single document may constitute a record, but in others a record might be a part of a document or a set of documents; physical or digital objects that are not in documentary format can also be records (Yeo, 2011; for the understanding of *documents* at item level, see also Duchein, 1992, p. 52). Some English-speaking archivists might interpret these concepts differently, but the English concept of *documents* certainly allows an interpretation along these lines.

I am not qualified to offer a full analysis of the concept of *documentos* in Portuguese, and I do not know how much diversity in interpretation it allows or how far my characterisation of *documents* in English might apply to it. I strongly suspect, however, that the Portuguese concept of *documentos* is not identical either to the English concept of *documents* or to the English concept of *records*[3].

Difficulties of this kind are not limited to translations between English and Portuguese. When the international standard ISO 30300 (*Records Management: Core Concepts and Vocabulary*) was translated from English into Norwegian, *records management* was rendered by the Norwegian term *dokumentasjons-forvaltning*, but *record* was translated as *registrer* (Brorson, 2023, p. 7). We may observe that the Norwegians chose to invoke words

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[3] Cf. the comments of Couture (1996, pp. 80-81) on the supposed equivalence between *records* in English and *documents* in French. See also Ketelaar & Frings-Hessami (2021, pp. 4-5); Soum-Paris (2021, pp. 15-16).

equivalent both to *document* and to *register*, in order to resolve the challenges of translating technical terms across linguistic boundaries. Yet in English, neither *document* nor *register* carries precisely the same connotations as *record*. There is, of course, some overlap in the significance of all these words. But ultimately the translation is misleading. This becomes apparent if we look across to non-European cultures: we can see that an Inka *khipu*, for example, can be described in English as a *record*, but it is far from clear that it can be called a *document* or a *register* in the English senses of these words.

The Slovenian language apparently has five words that can be translated as *record*, but all are said to have slightly different meanings (Foscarini et al., 2021, p. 69). I have been told that, in German, there are at least eight such words[4], and I would be hugely surprised if any of them carries precisely the same nuances as the word *record* in English. Eric Ketelaar wrote in 1997 that "many… terms in the professional archival terminology… are only understandable in another language when one knows… the… cultural, legal, historical, and sometimes political background of the term" (Ketelaar, 1997, p. 143). I believe that Ketelaar was right; when we face what Michel Duchein called *la tour de Babel archivistique* (Duchein, 1992, p. 49), we must accept that linguistic usages and their associated concepts are always shaped by the forces of local culture. Even in non-Anglophone countries that have adopted the English word *record*, the word is almost certainly acquiring further local nuances that differ from the nuances it bears in English.

Information

After this excursion into the field of comparative linguistics, I now come to the third member of our trio: how and where might the concept of *information* fit into our understandings of archives and records? In older writings about archives, *information* was barely mentioned. But today it has a high public profile and many archivists identify themselves as information professionals. Archives, we are told, are part of an "information multiverse" (Gilliland & Willer, 2014, p. 1117), and archival studies is said to be a sub-field of information studies (Caswell, 2016, paragraph 6). Some commentators go further and claim that, in a digital era, distinctions between archives and information are irrelevant, and that the two disciplines are converging, or should converge, into a single profession called *information management*.

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4   E-mails from Rod Stone to the author, 16 January and 2 February 2024.

Similar trends can be observed among records managers. In an age when the importance of information is constantly promoted, many — perhaps most — records managers have enthusiastically adopted the notion that they are information professionals. Both in the United Kingdom and in Australia, the divisions of the National Archives that were responsible for records management have been rebranded as coordinators of information management, and have rewritten their published guidance in a way that emphasises the role of *information* and minimises the use of the word *record* (Cunningham, 2020, p. 170; Yeo, 2018, pp. 176, 184-185).

Other records managers, especially in North America, have embraced the concept of *information governance*, defined by one of its proponents as "the holistic, coordinated approach to information" (Blair, 2018, p. 23). Some see records management as an "essential building block" of information governance (Carlisle, 2018, p. 407), but for others it seems that notions of records management as a distinct practice are now redundant. Some professional associations, such as ARMA International in the United States, seem to have abandoned the word *record* almost entirely, presumably on the grounds that records and their management have been superseded by newer practices in the world of information. Like archivists, records managers have often struggled to maintain their profile in the workplace, and many of them have been tempted to rebrand their discipline in the hope that a new label will enhance their visibility and allow their voices to be heard in the corridors of power.

Although information has a glamour that records and archives frequently appear to lack, the precise meaning or meanings of *information* are not easy to pin down; as information scientist Christopher Fox observed, information appears to be ubiquitous in the modern world, but "no one seems to know exactly what information is" (Fox, 1983, p. 3; cf. Hill, 2005, p. 13). Records professionals who have embraced the term have seldom troubled to investigate it in depth, and their assumptions about the ways in which information and records might be connected have often been very disparate. Some have chosen to see records as a *type* of information; others think that records *contain* information; a third view is that information becomes a record when it has evidentiary value or when measures are taken to ensure its rigorous management; and a fourth is that distinct perceptions of records are no longer needed because the universe of information has subsumed them[5].

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[5]   See Yeo (2018, pp. xi, 52-53, 73-77, 94), where I discuss these disparate opinions at greater length. For the notion that information can "become" a record, see also Choksy (2014, p. 15); Biber & Luker (2017, p. 6); Wiltshire Police and Crime Commissioner (2022, p. 6).

Although the discordance of these opinions is rarely remarked in our professional literature, the view that information becomes a record when it is managed in a special way does not seem easily reconcilable with the opinion that governance of information is superseding the management of records; the view that records are a distinct type of information seems incompatible with the notion that differences between records and information are vanishing. As Adrian Cunningham has noted, in adopting ideas derived from discourses about information, "many of us seem happy to rebrand… ourselves as professionals serving a concept that we have made little if any effort to understand" (Cunningham, 2020, p. 171).

Relating *information* to *records*

About ten years ago, I set out to explore some of the possible meanings of the term *information* and to investigate the conceptual relationships — real or supposed — between information and records. Most of my findings found their way into my book *Records, Information and Data*, published in 2018; the book also aimed to provide a detailed study of "the place of record-making and record-keeping in today's information culture" (Yeo, 2018, p. viii; see also Yeo, 2017; Yeo & Lowry, 2020). In the present paper, I cannot hope to examine every aspect of these topics or to give a full account of my investigations, but I will attempt to explain why I thought these were important questions and to summarise the conclusions that I reached in my book.

Like *record*, the word *information* has antecedents in ancient Latin, and a pedigree in the English language that reaches back to the Middle Ages. Early dictionaries explained *information* as an "act of informing" or as "intelligence given", and for many centuries it was assumed that information was both abstract and intangible. More recently, it has often been perceived as a material entity, a physical or digital object or set of objects that can be measured, stored, and systematically managed. However, this newer understanding is by no means universally accepted. Today, the word *information* can bear many different meanings; several observers have commented that there are "as many definitions of information… as there are writers on the topic" (Furner, 2015, p. 364; cf. Logan, 2020, p. 233).

In English, *information* is always singular, but in a number of other European languages, including (I believe) Portuguese, its counterparts have a plural as well as a singular form. Thus in many parts of the world information is apparently a countable phenomenon; in English-speaking countries

it is not. Whatever the precise implications of this may be, it offers a clear indication that understandings of information vary, not only across time, but also across different linguistic cultures.

One popular approach in recent years has been to define information in relation to *data*; information is frequently described as data that have been concentrated, processed, or improved. But data in their turn have often been defined as "the raw material of information" (Brotby, 2009, p. 7), thus introducing a circularity of argument that leads us nowhere. Writings by computer scientists lack agreement on what is meant by the word *data*; it seems uncertain, for example, whether data are deemed to be meaningful or whether they are simply clusters of binary signals on digital media (Yeo, 2018, pp. 115-117). *Data* remains an elusive term, and its definition is just as fluid as definitions of information.

When we come to explore points of contact and points of difference between information and records, we may find it more fruitful to view these concepts through a lens of performativity. Information — whatever it may be — often appears inert. People choose to do things — sometimes very important things — in the light of the information they possess, but the information itself does nothing at all. Commentators writing from a modernist or rationalist perspective often associate information with facts, or supposed facts, about the world (Stair et al., 2011, p. 6). Information tells us how the world is, how it was at some moment in the past, or how it is supposed to have been. But the information we possess about the world seems largely distinct from the world it describes.

Records, by way of contrast, are not passive, but active; at the moment of their creation, they are linked to the performance of action, and in their later lives they continue to have active social roles. Consider, for example, an e-mail in which I write "I apologise" to someone I have offended. When I despatch this e-mail, I do not merely send information about an apology; I perform the act of apologising. Writing and acting are intimately connected. Other records work in a similar way: they pose questions, issue instructions, make promises and agreements, or confer rights of ownership. They are not pieces of information, but agents by which actions are performed.

Of course, many records are created to make statements about the world; they report on events that have taken place or decisions that have been reached. But to make a statement is also to perform an act. As numerous cultural critics have reminded us in recent years, statements about the world are not autonomous truths. Some may be false; others may be ambiguous. All are contingent on the actors who make them and the contexts in which they are made.

Records are always closely associated with human behaviour. Record-making is not merely a matter of documenting or describing activities or events external to the recording process. Humans *perform* activities through records, and these activities are essential to our systems of rights, duties, commitments, and obligations. Records enable people to conduct business and communicate with others in the course of their daily lives, and they play a powerful role in the construction of our social world.

We may want to ask how records achieve these results. I have argued that they function as *representations* of activities. A representation is something that stands, or is believed to stand, for something else: records stand for things that happen in the world (Yeo, 2007, pp. 334-338). But they do not merely describe actions undertaken at earlier moments in time. Records also participate in actions and help to constitute them. We can perform an action, such as making a statement, giving an instruction, or entering into a contract, by representing ourselves as performing it. As management scientist Marc Berg remarked, "the creation of the representation… is… involved in the very event it represents" (Berg, 1996, p. 500).

Activities and events are perceived to have endings in time, but records have *persistence*: they have the capacity to remain available after the activities or events they represent have ceased. Because they are persistent representations, records can participate, not only in creating and conferring rights, duties, and obligations, but also in sustaining them after the moment of their creation.

Suppose, for example, that I make a promise; the act of making the promise occurs today, but the conventions of western societies insist that the obligation of the promise endures until it is fulfilled (Smith & Searle, 2003, p. 305). But because records, too, remain in existence after their moments of issuance, we can use them to underpin the continuation of promises, contracts, rights, and responsibilities over time. The ability of records to create rights and obligations and to represent their creation persistently places record-making and record-keeping at the foundation of social life.

If we understand records in this way, we may ask where concepts of information fit into the picture. I have argued that information is not a material entity, but an intangible affordance that can be garnered both from records and from a diversity of other sources. It is one of the many affordances that records offer: others that often figure in archival discourse include evidence, senses of identity, and reinforcement of memory (Yeo, 2018, pp. 154-156). Like evidence, information is a product of interpretation, rather than a commodity that resides in a record and merely awaits extraction by a user.

Photographic records supply a useful example. Rather than claiming that information is embedded within photographs, it seems more congruent to argue that we can elicit information when we examine them. Such information can extend beyond the subjects depicted in photographs: we may, for instance, obtain information about photographic techniques or photographers' preferences for particular locations. Textual records seem equally versatile. A file of correspondence may provide users with information about items of business, social networks, or styles of writing. A user can employ records to acquire information, not only about the activities that the records represent, but also about topics that may not be explicit in the records' content. Different users interpret records in different ways and conjure different information from them.

I am very doubtful about suggestions that records comprise information about their subject-matter but can also be employed to garner *other* information. Instead, my preferred perspective sees records as complex instruments of social interaction, and information as an affordance that they can supply. Records have a distinctive and vital role in performing as well as representing human activities. As Eric Ketelaar has said, they do not contain information, but they "make it possible" (Glaudemans et al., 2017, p. 301). Our minds can derive information from using records intelligently.

Conclusions

Finally, some concluding thoughts. In my presentation in March 2024, when I discussed concepts of information in relation to our discipline, I chose to speak about connections between information and *records*, rather than those between information and *archives*. To some degree, this allowed me to sidestep the thorny issues of how far, or in what respects, records and archives might be deemed to relate or to differ. Nevertheless, in emphasising the active character of records, their relationships to activities and events, and the roles they play in society, I have sought to raise issues that are also very relevant to our understanding of archives. In particular, I see common ground between my thinking on these subjects and the views expressed in 2015 by German scholar Markus Friedrich, when he spoke of the need for those of us who study archives to "shift our focus from archives as institutions to archives as arenas for and elements of human behavior" (Friedrich, 2015, p. 471).

Some commentators on my work have tried to smuggle in ideas that reinstate information as a central component of records. In 2017, for example,

Dutch archivist Frans Smit claimed that my characterisation of records as socially active representations fails to specify "what the representation consists of"; Smit affirmed that, in his view, such representations "consist of information" (Smit, 2017, p. 252). I disagree: I would argue that, historically, they consisted simply of objects, or marks made on objects, which human minds interpreted as representations of phenomena in the wider world. Today, besides written characters and inscriptions, they also include digital signals that can be read by a computer. Unlike Smit, I do not believe that ideas about information are needed to explain their structure.

That said, I accept that in my writings about records I am merely expounding understandings that I personally have found helpful. I welcome others who have chosen to adopt my ideas, or have adapted them for their own purposes; but I willingly acknowledge that my way of looking at these questions is not the only possible way. I know, for example, that many archivists with backgrounds in librarianship or information science instinctively want to see records and archives in informational terms. It seems certain that, in the years ahead, there will continue to be different conceptualisations of what a record might be.

Nevertheless, I would urge archivists not to overlook the consequences of the growing tendency to emphasise information rather than records. Some may ask why this should be a matter of concern. I have often heard it affirmed that archivists must "go with the flow" and accept that *information* is the key term that needs to be used in twenty-first-century discourse. Pragmatists in our profession sometimes argue that we should stop worrying about terminology and simply concentrate on doing our daily work. My response is that this is not merely a topic for academic speculation; on the contrary, it has significant practical implications. In today's workplaces, information is undoubtedly a powerful concept. Advocacy of our professional concerns is rarely easy, but using the language of information can appear extremely effective in our dealings with colleagues and senior managers. However, failing to emphasise — or attempting to downplay — the distinctiveness of records and archives is a tactic that also brings dangers. It leads to confusion about the purposes that records serve and the vital roles they fulfil in organisational business and human life.

When archivists speak mainly or only about information, organisational power-brokers can easily assume that record-keeping has no distinct value, that specialist archival skills and practices are unnecessary, or that archival functions can safely be left to information technologists, data analysts, or others who claim to possess competencies in information management.

I believe that archival professionals must continue to promote and affirm the importance of *records* in the digital era, both as instruments of current social action and as bulwarks that support our ability to corroborate what was said and done in the past.

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"Archives, records, and information: Terms, concepts, and relationships across linguistic cultures" of Geoffrey Yeo: a commentary[1] [2]

"Arquivos, documentos e informação: Termos, conceitos e relações entre culturas linguísticas" de Geoffrey Yeo: um comentário

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the evolving and complex relationships between core concepts in Archival and Information Sciences, as analyzed by Geoffrey Yeo in his paper, "Archives, Records, and Information: Terms, Concepts, and Relationships across Linguistic Cultures". Yeo underscores the need for a historical and cross-cultural examination of terms such as *archives* and *records* to reveal conceptual nuances shaped by linguistic and cultural contexts.

Highlighting his recent works, *Record-Making and Record-Keeping in Early Societies* (2021) and *Records, Information and Data: Exploring the Role of Record-Keeping in an Information Culture* (2018), the paper addresses challenges in mapping these terms across languages, emphasizing the gradual expansion of archival terminology and practices. Yeo's approach sheds light on divergent interpretations across regions, advocating for more inclusive views that incorporate local archival traditions. In discussing the evolution of *archives* and *records*, he critiques modern Western influences, encouraging deeper consideration of non-Western perspectives. Moreover, the analysis of *records* as a distinct entity from *documents* raises questions about the ontological boundaries within archival studies, particularly in English-speaking traditions, as contrasted with Romance languages. This article also connects archival terminology with broader scientific discourses, specifically with Hispano-Lusophone vocabulary, reflecting on how contemporary shifts towards information governance, data management, and artificial intelligence are reshaping archival practices. Through this lens, Yeo calls for nuanced understandings of *records* and *information* to maintain their epistemic significance, especially amidst evolving digital environments. In this light, the paper provides a vital contribution to the field, encouraging ongoing dialogue about how cultural, linguistic, and technological factors inform archival science.

KEYWORDS: Linguistic and Epistemic Boundaries; Records, Archives, and Documents; Cultural and Terminological Evolution Digital Age and Information Governance.

RESUMO
Este artigo analisa as relações complexas e em evolução entre conceitos centrais da Arquivística e da Ciência da Informação, conforme estudado por Geoffrey Yeo no seu artigo "Archives, Records, and Information: Terms, Concepts, and Relationships across Linguistic Cultures". Yeo sublinha a necessidade de uma análise histórica e intercultural de termos como *arquivos* e *documentos* para revelar as nuances conceptuais moldadas pelos contextos linguísticos e culturais. Destacando os seus trabalhos mais recentes, *Record-Making and Record-Keeping in Early Societies* (2021) e *Records, Information and Data: Exploring the Role of Record-Keeping in an Information Culture* (2018), o artigo aborda os desafios no mapeamento destes termos entre diferentes idiomas, enfatizando a expansão gradual da terminologia e das práticas arquivísticas. A abordagem de Yeo lança luz sobre as interpretações divergentes entre regiões e comunidades, defendendo uma visão mais

inclusiva que incorpore as tradições arquivísticas locais. Ao discutir a evolução de *arquivos* e *documentos*, Yeo analisa as influências modernas do Ocidente, incentivando uma consideração mais profunda em torno de perspetivas não ocidentais. Para além disso, o conceito de *records*, enquanto conceito distinto de *documentos*, levanta questões sobre os limites ontológicos dentro dos estudos arquivísticos, especialmente nas tradições de língua inglesa, em contraste com as línguas românicas. Este artigo também relaciona a terminologia arquivística com discursos científicos mais amplos, especificamente com o vocabulário hispano-lusófono, refletindo sobre como as mudanças contemporâneas nas áreas de governança da informação, gestão de dados e inteligência artificial estão a transformar as práticas arquivísticas. Sob esta perspetiva, Yeo apela a uma compreensão mais detalhada de *documentos* e *informação* para manter a sua relevância epistemológica, especialmente face aos ambientes tecnológicos em evolução. Neste contexto, o artigo constitui uma contribuição vital para o campo, incentivando o diálogo contínuo sobre como fatores culturais, linguísticos e tecnológicos influenciam a Arquivística.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Perspetivas transculturais na terminologia arquivística; Governança de informação; Arquivos, documentos e informação; Práticas arquivísticas.

The paper, "Archives, Records, and Information: Terms, Concepts, and Relationships across Linguistic Cultures" by Geoffrey Yeo, emphasizes the significance of examining the fundamental concepts of Archival Science and Information Science from an evolutionary perspective. The proposed theme is particularly fitting for someone with extensive experience and a long-standing commitment to the study of these subjects, as demonstrated by his substantial scholarly contributions. In this comment, I will primarily reference the most recent publications by Geoffrey Yeo: *Record-Making and Record-Keeping in Early Societies* (2021) and *Records, Information and Data: Exploring the Role of Record-Keeping in an Information Culture* (2018).

While numerous publications worldwide have addressed these concepts, there are distinct interpretations of them, as emphasized by Yeo. However, analyzing these concepts across different linguistic cultures presents a particularly challenging task, as proposed by our speaker, especially when attempting to map the nuanced layers of thought associated with them. Yeo's contribution extends beyond merely acknowledging the significance of these concepts; it slightly transcends epistemic boundaries. This perspective is evident in various scientific communities that consider information

their primary object of investigation. However, I ask, is it valid to speak of epistemic communities within "Archival Sciences"? Is this concept defensible? When it comes to the sciences surrounding records or information, it may be acceptable, though it might lack sufficient justification.

Thus, his approach involves not only discussing the evolution of these concepts in distinct sections but also incorporating additional concepts that, in his view, help to clarify their relationships, contexts of use, and conceptual interdependencies. Similarly, I will aim to contribute by establishing connections with concepts in the Portuguese language, which have also evolved over time, marked by continuities, disuses, appropriations, and revitalizations. Yeo's paper clearly reflects a significant effort to address the contemporary issues that affect us across various contexts, and it does so in a very clear and admirable manner.

Thus, moving on to the commentary itself, regarding the section on Archives, our speaker examines the origins and evolution of the concept, shifts in the perception of archives, the expansion of the definition of the archive, and how debates and perceptions about archives have developed over time. The paper highlights key trends, ranging from perspectives focused on inclusion and respect for cultural diversity to issues of (re)appropriation, reactions from the archival community, and future trends.

It is well known that the ancient Greek word ἀρχεῖον [*archéion*] is the indisputable origin of the term "archive", which has influenced various languages. Etymological analyses of this term can be found in nearly all dissertations on archives, authored by scholars such as the Gerardus Johannes Vossius, Baldassarre Bonifacio, Albertino Barison, Gabriel Naudé, Ahasver Fritsch, Franz Neveu von Windschläg, Georg Radov, Georg Engelbrecht and many others from 17th to 19th century. Nevertheless, the Latin term *archivum* was not as common among the Romans. More frequently used were *Tabularium* — due to its metonymic relationship with the support, *tabulae*, as evident in Roman epigraphy and literature — or *Scrinium*. In the Greek world, the public repository was known as the Μητρῷον *[Mētrōon]* in Athens, but other denominations coexisted, such as γραμματοφυλάκιον [*grammatophylacium*], χαρτοφυλάκιον [*chartophylacium*], and *gazophylacium* — the latter derived from *Gaza* (אזג/gzʾ), a mixed Hellenic-Semitic term meaning "repository" or "treasure", associated with the ancient city of Gaza. According to Carl von Behaim's dissertation (1722), it suggests that Gaza could be interpreted as a "city of treasures" (i.e., of archives). The idea of treasure associated with archives is present in French as *Trésor des Chartes* or *Thesaurus chartarum*. In Portugal, the *Torre do Tombo* was also known as the "Tower

of the Treasure" since medieval times, accordingly to Azevedo and Baião (1905, p. 6). These terms were not only associated with the idea of the archive as a place, but also denoted its custodians: *custos*, reflecting the archive's role as a place of custody, or *phyllax* (in greek).

However, it is unrealistic to assume that the archives and repositories of these ancient civilizations — serving as places of custody, stewardship, and preservation of records — functioned in the same manner as contemporary archives. As astutely noted by Yeo in his book *Record-Making and Record-Keeping in Early Societies* — a perspective with which I concur — care must be taken when drawing parallels between contemporary archival management concepts and those employed by ancient civilisations. Although our understanding of these collections is indebted to the work of archaeologists and experts who study specific ancient civilisations, there is often a tendency to incorrectly classify these collections as either archives or libraries. Additionally, archival terminology is sometimes used less critically to describe the management practices of these records from the distant past. This aspect reflects the caution expressed by our speaker regarding the considerable evolution of the concept of archives: from the notion of a repository (as previously mentioned), a place, or an institution, to a more complex hierarchical representation. This evolution encompasses not only public and private archives but also various types of records, formats, and supports, resulting in an increasingly diverse field.

Yeo further notes that many 20th-century Western perspectives on archives, particularly those rooted in English and American traditions, are now being scrutinised and challenged. Efforts are underway to highlight and integrate alternative approaches. Concepts such as provenance and context are not exclusive to Archival Science. They are shared with other fields including museology, law, library and information science, computer science, visual analytics, digital humanities, as well as anthropology, ethnology, archaeology, genetics, art, and various other scientific disciplines, as highlighted by Lemieux (2016). Furthermore, it is noted that the concept of the archive has been extended across various epistemic domains. For instance, in computer science, an archive might refer to a backup, as mentioned by Yeo. In the realm of visual arts, the archive — and its Derridean counterpart, the *anarchive* (Derrida, 1995) — can manifest as a performative artistic expression, such as an ephemeral art installation.

Although there is a shift in Portugal towards exploring alternative approaches, this change is occurring quite cautiously. For example, decolonizing Portuguese archives should not be a *uexata quaestio* or a wicked

problem within the academic and professional community. This indicates that there is still a significant journey ahead.

Despite efforts to standardize archival terminology at the international level, as noted by Duchein in his article "Les archives dans la Tour de Babel" (1985), the current approach is less prescriptive than in the past. Instead, it has become more descriptive and inclusive, reflecting post-modern perspectives. In my view, a substantial portion of the terminological resources available in Portuguese tends to focus on operational and technical concepts related to institutions or entities with a bureaucratic apparatus, with minimal attention given to emerging archival concepts, primarily concerning post-modern archival concepts.

Allow me to add that, in the case of Portuguese, a Romance language, it includes the concept and term *arquivo*, also spelled *archivo* prior to the 1911 orthographic reform. However, it has not been frequently used in Old and Modern Portuguese. Without any intention of conducting a philological analysis here, we can compare, for example, in the famous *Report* of Cristóvão Benavente, dated 1583, where the *Torre do Tombo* is mentioned as the "Archiuo Real" (Dinis, 1968, p. 157). In the *Dictionarium latino-lusitanicum* (1592) by the Portuguese humanist Jerónimo Cardoso, the Latin term *archivum* is translated into Portuguese as "cartório dos tombos" (p. 18), and "tombos do Reino" is translated into Latin as "monumenta" (p. 80). This means that the Portuguese word *archivo* was not widely used at that time. We possibly find for the first time, in Rafael Bluteau, in his *Vocabulario Portuguez e Latino* (1712, pp. 476-477), the terms *Archivo* and *Archivista* (archivist): where *Archivo* has two meanings, "The place where papers or titles of a family or community are kept", and metaphorically, "as a memory". That is, the archive as memory, as found in the *Records Continuum* model, is nothing new. On the other hand, *Archivista* has a dual meaning: it can refer to someone "who is in charge of the archive", and it can also denote "the Indian who was singing, he was the archivist of the Village", as quoted by the Jesuit father Simão de Vasconcelos in his *Noticias curiosas, & necessarias das cousas do Brasil* (1668, p. 199). In fact, Vasconcelos actually cites a work by Alonso de Ovalle in his *Historica relación del Reyno de Chile* (1646), where he stated that, freely translated here, "that Indian was the archivist, or better said, he is the archive of that people" (Ovalle, 1646, p. 93). This introduces indigenous knowledge into Portuguese and Castilian Spanish, highlighting the concept of oral archives — a notion that, after being long dismissed, has recently been revalued. The term also underscores how singing by indigenous people served as a means of communicating

information, emphasizing the role of oral transmission through memory rather than through written records or documents. We also have in the Bluteau's lexicon *registro* or *resisto* (record/registration), *tombo* (archive), and *cartórios* (registry offices). Document sets are sometimes represented as *monumentos* (meaning "monuments").

In Portuguese Royal Legislation, *tombo* appears more frequently than the word *arquivo* (archive). This raises the question of how extensively the term *archivo* (or *arquivo*) was used in Portugal from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries and whether its usage reflects a more recent introduction, potentially facilitated by scholarly influences in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries.

In Portugal, although research on archives does not have the same robustness observed among our colleagues in Brazil, who enjoy significant vitality in this area, it is noteworthy that, even sharing the same language, there are differences. These differences are evident not only in terminology — where concepts and terms are often adopted more readily by Portuguese-speaking countries than by European Portuguese archival concepts — but also in the capacity to explore archival themes beyond the predominant perspectives of bureaucratic, institutional, patrimonial, and custodial frameworks, as noted by Portuguese scholars such as Fernanda Ribeiro and Armando Malheiro da Silva (2002).

Regarding the "records" section of the paper, Yeo acknowledges the specificity of this concept and term, which is primarily confined to the English-speaking world. This is despite the fact that the concept is globally recognized and integrated into archival terminology in various countries. He clarifies that the term "records" derives from the Latin verb *recordari* (to remember), from which the medieval Latin term *recordum* originated (du Cange, 1678, p. 533). The term underwent various uses and evolutions from the 16th to the 20th centuries. In Portuguese, we inherited the term as *recordar/recordação*, which is associated with memory, but it has not extended beyond this context.

It is now undeniable that the concept and term "record" have spread and solidified across various recordkeeping traditions. Its application has become widespread not only in bureaucratic contexts but also concerning typologies and formats. A significant distinction highlighted by Yeo is between "records" and "documents": while documents are defined by their format or support, records are typically perceived as entities at the item level. I will refrain from discussing the use of terms in other languages, acknowledging my limitations. In Romance languages, particularly Portuguese, the term *documento* encompasses the meanings of both archival document and record,

which are typically distinguished in English. This could be attributed to the fact that the Portuguese archival tradition, like that of France, Spain, and Italy, inherited Diplomatics and extended it to its colonies. Consequently, the concept of *documento* in Romance languages, grounded in this diplomatic tradition, does not exhibit the same distinction as the one observed between "records" and "documents" in the English-speaking archival tradition.

On the other hand, some also translate "records" as *registo* or *registro* (from the Latin *registrum*, derived from the verb *regerere*, meaning to record), which is similarly polysemic and closely related to the concept of "register". In the context of diplomatics, *registos* are also considered documents, defined primarily by their format or support.

"Records management", for instance, is translated into European Portuguese as *gestão de documentos* and into Brazilian Portuguese as *gerenciamento de documentos*. Similarly, "records center" is translated as *arquivos em fase administrativa* (current or intermediate archives). In the English-speaking context, "the archives" corresponds to what is known in European Portuguese as *arquivo definitivo* or *histórico*, and in Brazilian Portuguese as *arquivo permanente*, as illustrated above. The term "records continuum" is translated as *modelo de continuidade documental* (referring to continuous document/information management, particularly in the electronic realm) or retains its original designation. Adjectival distinctions often help to clarify the various meanings and contexts of the term "archive" in Romance languages (C. G. da Silva, 2018).

I do not wish to overlook an important aspect highlighted by Yeo: it is crucial to acknowledge other archival traditions, as emphasized by Baldassarre Bonifacio in his reference to Caspar Ens's *Indiae Occidentalis Historia* (1612). Bonifacio not only introduced European audiences to the Inca *khipus* but also discussed Chinese typography, which was often erroneously attributed to Germanic invention in Europe. Undoubtedly, his recent book, *Record-Making and Record-Keeping in Early Societies* (2021), which has been subject to critical review (Macedo, 2021), offers a compelling analysis of the diverse forms of record production across various ancient civilizations. The crucial question is not merely how ancient these practices are but rather why they are considered an exclusively human characteristic, or to what extent they might be.

In the third section, Yeo examines the complex interrelationships between information, archives, and records. I am uncertain whether the perception observed within the English-speaking community aligns with that in other regions regarding the convergence of archives and information into a single

profession or academic discipline. It appears that this convergence stems not from the profession itself but from overlapping competencies. In Portugal, and similarly in Brazil, there has been a shift from Documentation science to Information Science, a transition now broadly accepted within the academic community in Portugal. However, it is unclear to what extent this shift is contested by those in the field of History, who often regard Archival Science as an ancillary discipline. Archival Science is increasingly recognized as an applied discipline within Information Science, akin to Library Science, Museology, and Information/Knowledge management. For example, Brazilian researcher Angélica da Cunha Marques (2016, 2017) has identified three perspectives on the relationship between Archival Science and Information Science: there are

(First) "authors who ignore the historical trajectory of archives and Archival Science and do not consider it scientifically", citing Le Coadic (1994) as an example;

(Second) "authors who conceive Archival Science as part of Information Science", exemplified by Pinheiro (1998) (Brazil) and Silva et al. (1999) (Portugal); and

(Third) "authors who demarcate the autonomy of Archival Science and recognize, to varying degrees, its relationships with Information Science", viewing them as parallel scientific areas, citing examples like Jardim and Fonseca (1992), Araújo (2010), and Cruz Domínguez (2017).

We propose adding a fourth perspective: those who view Archival Science as an autonomous disciplinary field in its own right. This viewpoint, influenced by Diplomatics and the professional aspects of the discipline, is supported by authors such as Heredia Herrera (1991), Duranti (1996), Marques (2016, 2017), and others.

As observed, the connections between Information Science and Archival Science are deeply influenced by the paradigm through which these concepts are examined. This situation reveals emerging tensions between advocates of change and those who resist it. Presently, there is a discernible preference for information management over records management. This shift inevitably prompts a re-evaluation of the core focus of Archival Science: should it center on archives, documents, or information? Some argue that information pertains to other sciences, and one might also include humankind. Unlike in the 1990s, today a discipline is defined not by its object but by the perspective through which it engages with that object.

Certainly, as Yeo clearly indicates, the shift from the traditional role of the archivist to that of an information manager is closely tied to the proliferation and diversification of information technologies in the digital age.

Historically, our profession has undergone various renamings, with some terms falling into disuse while others evolve. It is evident that the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological influence of Computer Science currently dominates the discourse in Information Science. Furthermore, the predominance of Information Science, with its focus on IT and primarily English-speaking origins, often overshadows the European approach, which views Information Science as a social and human science. In today's context, it is inconceivable to remain disengaged from this discussion.

Indeed, as Yeo highlights, the trend in the United States towards emphasizing information governance and the decreasing use of the term "records" reflects a broader shift. Information ecosystems have not only diversified but also become increasingly complex, leading to a transition from traditional recordkeeping management models to data management approaches. In the realm of artificial intelligence, it is data — rather than records — that serves as the fundamental informational unit for process automation. This underscores the need to consider how the automation of information production will affect the future application of these concepts.

In the fourth section, an exercise is undertaken to relate "records" to information and data. Building on the etymological origins, as clearly presented by Yeo, it is evident that the concept of information is rarely used in traditional archival treatises. This is unsurprising, considering that the document or record is foundational to modern Archival Science, just as information is foundational to postmodern Archival Science. The term "information" is documented in Jakob von Rammingen's *Von der Registratur* (1571), where it appears in Latin in various sections of the monograph, such as *ad informationem et instructionem* (p. 34) and *ratio informandi* (p. 46).

It is indeed intriguing to consider the contrast that Yeo establishes between information and records. On one hand, information can exist in a passive or inert state, whereas records are active entities that document activities and events, persisting over time. Records serve as complex instruments of social interaction, with information being a potentiality they can provide. However, once records are imbued with meaning and subjected to interpretation, it is no longer the records themselves but the information derived from them that is present.

Recent developments in generative artificial intelligence (AI) introduce important considerations regarding data and its handling. The inability of AI to discern between true and false information, combined with its capacity to generate content without human oversight, raises significant questions. Perhaps the perspective of affordances, as suggested by Yeo, should focus

on understanding and critically analyzing how algorithms are structured to create records of this nature. This leads to a new question: when data is structured by algorithms, do we have records or information? The generated data comes imbued with meaning that it did not possess before, thereby complicating the traditional distinction between records and information.

To conclude, Yeo explicitly chose to focus on the connections and nuanced semantic distinctions between information and records, rather than between information and archives, and he deliberately avoided the debate surrounding records and archives. In my view, this debate might not only be redundant but could also add unnecessary complexity, especially since it is less of an issue in some Romance languages. Nevertheless, Yeo underscores the importance of preserving the distinction between records and information to prevent diminishing their ontological and epistemological significance. From a Portuguese perspective, records are more closely associated with documents than with information.

Many perspectives will coexist regarding the concepts of records, information, archives, and now, data and knowledge as well. This underscores the vitality that various epistemic fields, beyond Information Science and Archival Science, attribute to these concepts. However, if we closely observe current trends, we see that traditional archives are increasingly being replaced by new terminologies such as information centers, knowledge centers, Houses or Centers of Memory, and data centers, reflecting a trend towards hyper-specialization. These changes are not merely cultural; they often have political and economic motivations within a neo-capitalistic framework. The concerns highlighted by Yeo are also relevant to our professional and academic community in the Portuguese context.

In summary, Yeo's paper represents a significant contribution, reflecting the importance of his extensive body of scientific work. His passionate call urges us to reassess and realign these concepts within our broadening epistemic domains, which are increasingly transcending traditional boundaries.

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Building better archival futures by recognizing epistemic injustice[1]

Construindo melhores futuros arquivísticos através do reconhecimento da injustiça epistémica

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ABSTRACT

In 2024 University of Amsterdam's launched a new research priority area, "Decolonial Futures", which centers on transforming archives, museums, and cultural institutions to address colonial legacies. This article focuses on colonial archives managed by archival institutions. The central question is what forms of injustice are embedded within these archives and how can archival institutions build better archival futures based on the recognition of those injustices. Colonial archives are inherently problematic as knowledge resources, as they primarily reflect the perspectives of colonial authorities, often distorting and silencing the voices of colonized populations. Drawing

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[1] Conference delivered at the seminar "Rethinking the Archive(s)/ Repensar o(s) Arquivo(s)", organized by the VINCULUM project, based at NOVA FCSH, and the Institute for Medieval Studies, NOVA FCSH. National Archive of Torre do Tombo, Lisbon, 4 April 2024. Comments by Ana Canas Delgado Martins, AHU-DGLAB, published in this volume. VINCULUM (2024, April 19). *6.ª Sessão do Ciclo de seminários: "Rethinking the Archive(s)/ Repensar o(s) Arquivo(s)"* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swyWDnA2jZ8

on Miranda Fricker's concept of epistemic injustice, two main forms of injustice can be identified: *hermeneutical injustice* and *testimonial injustice.* Testimonial injustice occurs according to Fricker when a hearer gives "a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word", often based on the speaker's gender or race. Testimonial injustice frequently results from hermeneutical injustice, which involves structural identity prejudice. Fricker defines hermeneutical injustice as "the injustice of having (…) one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource". Using the lens of epistemic injustice offers valuable opportunities to better understand the problematic nature of colonial archives, while also providing archival institutions with guidance on how to avoid perpetuating injustices when creating digital archival spaces. This article shares experiences from a project initiated by the Dutch National Archives to map how representatives from affected communities, as well as those from the academic and heritage sectors, view the necessity and possibilities for archival institutions to engage with these archives in a different, decolonial way, with the aim of creating a more inclusive historical record and better serving communities marginalized by history.

KEYWORDS: Colonial archives; Epistemic injustice; Decoloniality.

RESUMO

Em 2024, a Universidade de Amesterdão lançou uma nova área prioritária de investigação, "Decolonial Futures", que se centra na transformação de arquivos, museus e instituições culturais para ter em conta os legados coloniais. Este texto foca-se nos arquivos coloniais geridos por instituições arquivísticas. A questão central é identificar quais são as formas de injustiça que estão incorporadas nesses arquivos e como podem as instituições arquivísticas construir melhores futuros arquivísticos com base no reconhecimento dessas injustiças. Os arquivos coloniais são inerentemente problemáticos enquanto recursos de conhecimento, uma vez que antes de mais refletem as perspetivas das autoridades coloniais, distorcendo e silenciando frequentemente as vozes das populações colonizadas. Com base no conceito de injustiça epistémica de Miranda Fricker, podem ser identificadas duas formas principais de injustiça: a *injustiça hermenêutica* e a *injustiça testemunhal*. A injustiça testemunhal ocorre, segundo Fricker, quando um ouvinte dá "um nível de credibilidade reduzido à palavra de um orador", muitas vezes com base no género ou na raça do orador. A injustiça testemunhal resulta frequentemente da injustiça

hermenêutica, que envolve preconceitos estruturais de identidade. Fricker define a injustiça hermenêutica como "a injustiça de ter (...) a experiência social de alguém obscurecida da compreensão coletiva devido a um preconceito estrutural de identidade no recurso hermenêutico coletivo". A utilização da lente da injustiça epistémica oferece oportunidades valiosas para compreender melhor a natureza problemática dos arquivos coloniais, ao mesmo tempo que fornece às instituições arquivísticas orientações sobre como evitar a perpetuação de injustiças ao criar espaços de arquivo digital. Este texto partilha as experiências de um projeto iniciado pelo Arquivo Nacional dos Países Baixos para mapear a forma como os representantes das comunidades afetadas, bem como os dos sectores académico e do património, percebem a necessidade e as possibilidades de as instituições de arquivo se envolverem com estes arquivos de uma forma diferente, descolonial, com o objetivo de criar um registo histórico mais inclusivo e de servir melhor as comunidades marginalizadas pela história.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Arquivos coloniais; Injustiça epistémica; Descolonialidade.

Introduction

In the spring of 2024, the University of Amsterdam defined a new research priority area (RPA) titled "Decolonial Futures", focusing particularly on archives, museums, and cultural practices. This RPA conceptualizes 'coloniality' as a form of power that emerged in the modern period to categorize people, distribute power and wealth, and enforce social exclusion. Decoloniality refers to recognizing and redressing the systemic injustices produced by colonial power and its legacies[2]. The central question I aim to address is whether, and to what extent, archival institutions have a role and responsibility in promoting decoloniality, and how they can contribute to this process. In this essay, I will examine the critiques and dilemmas faced by traditional archival institutions in fulfilling such a societal role. My focus will be on a particularly contested genre of records: colonial archives. While concentrating on the situation in the Netherlands, I will situate these archives within the broader societal and scholarly debate commonly referred to as 'decolonizing the archive'. I argue that applying the lens of epistemic injustice provides valuable insights into the problematic nature of colonial archives

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2   University of Amsterdam, 2025.

and can help archival institutions avoid perpetuating injustice as they develop new digital archival spaces.

The Problems of the (Colonial) Archive

The colonial archive is an inherently problematic space for knowledge-making and memory. As Achille Mbembe points out, museums, and the same applies to archives, are not dumping places where history's waste is recycled, but are primarily epistemic spaces (Mbembe, 2015, p. 4). Spivak emphasized that the colonial administrative archive was a hall of mirrors reflecting European interpretations of India. The colonial empire was governed based on these fictions (Spivak, 1985, pp. 247-272). These distortions, misinterpretations and fictions are not without consequences for how these archives are used today. Miranda Fricker coined the term epistemic injustice to describe various forms of injustice in knowledge production. She identifies two types: hermeneutical injustice and testimonial injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs when a hearer gives "a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word", often based on the speaker's gender or race. Testimonial injustice frequently results from hermeneutical injustice, which involves structural identity prejudice. Fricker defines hermeneutical injustice as "the injustice of having (…) one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource" (Fricker, 2007, pp. 154-155). Hermeneutical injustice relates to how people interpret their own lives and how others understand those lives and experiences. Some societal groups have limited or distorted resources at their disposal to interpret their experiences. Access to hermeneutical resources is crucial as they provide a frame of reference and meaning to one's experiences. However, if others shape those resources with their own logic, ontologies and categories, issues arise.

Although Fricker is not very specific about what constitutes hermeneutical resources, I argue that archives are significant yet contested hermeneutical resources. Archival institutions often present themselves as guardians of collective memory, a claim that is itself debatable. If we use the collective memory metaphor for archives, it is a flawed, selective, and often distorted memory. This is why it is crucial to view archives as objects of research rather than mere resources for research and knowledge production. In her attempt to portray the lives of enslaved women in Bridgetown, Barbados from their own perspective, Marisa Fuentes writes that

[c]onfronting sources that show only terror and violence are a danger to the researcher who sees her own ancestors in these accounts. To sit with these sources requires the capacity to hold and inhabit deep wells of pain and horror. One must persist for years in this "mortuary" of records to bring otherwise invisible lives to historical representation in a way that challenges the reproduction of invisibility and commodification. (Fuentes, 2016, pp. 146-147)

This is an example of archival power, which is a mix of unequal presences, silences, and absences in the sources. Archival power, shaped and defined by white voices with the power to name and categorize, to break and create identities, resulting in malicious archives that are nevertheless constitutive of knowledge production (Trouillot, 1995, pp. 48-49; Fuentes, 2016, p. 15). This form of archival power equals to yet also reflects archival injustice and is a clear form of hermeneutical injustice.

My focus is on what archivists and archival institutions could, or perhaps even should do to mitigate hermeneutical injustice. This question is particularly relevant as archives increasingly become digital spaces, utilizing new technologies and creating new infrastructures for interactions with users. It is notable that only a few authors, such as Melanson (2020, pp. 89-112), Wouters (2022, pp. 491-508), and Landström (2021, pp. 379-394) have explored the applicability of Fricker's concepts to archives.

The colonial archive contains written deposits of colonial thinking, acting, and observing. In the perspective of Fricker's concepts of hermeneutical and testimonial injustice it is important to dissect who the speaker and who the hearer is. The archive holds the testimonies of past speakers and hearers while also speaking to present hearers. Wouters, for example, describes how a testimony by Mrs. Konile for the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1996 was not valued and misunderstood by the commissioners. Her testimony was considered incoherent and therefore of little use. Mrs. Konile and the commissioners lived in different worlds, and the commissioners knew little about the region and culture she came from. This case illustrates how epistemic injustice mechanisms operate. However, because mrs. Konile's 'other' way of experiencing and reporting became part of the TRC archive, this gave opportunities for later redress (Wouters, 2022, *passim*). In many instances archives lack direct testimonies from those wronged. At best, they can be heard indirectly via the observations of those who were in power. Colonial archives often contain indirect testimonies through observations by those in power. Ann Laura Stoler provides an example by examining the

correspondence of assistant resident Valck with various colonial agents following the murder of the Luhmann planter family in his administrative district Deli (in Sumatra, Dutch East Indies) in 1876. In his attempts to explain what was going on, Valck took a position that went against colonial common sense, causing the credibility of his testimony to be disputed by his contemporaries. Some voices (the various letter writers) are heard directly while others (indigenous people) can only be heard indirectly and are distorted, reflecting varying degrees of testimonial injustice. Stoler seeks to uncover the mechanisms that determine the level of credibility that hearers at the time attributed to the speakers involved in this case. The hearers, who responded to the speaker, become speakers themselves in the archive. Stoler (2009, p. 233) accentuates that "[w]hat matters are the details of ethnography: who spoke to whom, who heard and repeated what or chose not to; who imagined what, when, and where". Melanson (2020, p. 105) argues that enslaved people were victims of hermeneutical injustice as their voices were silenced, and their testimonies are missing from the archive. He contends that the injustice is "preserved in archival materials and transmitted via archivist's complacency" (Melanson, 2020, p. 105). Melanson seeks to find answers to the question of what responsibilities this injustice entails for archivists. In his opinion, archivists should attempt to include more testimonies from marginalized groups in the archive, but he realizes that this is only possible to a limited extent for the simple reason that such first-hand testimonies often do not exist. He also criticizes the widely held principle of archival institutions to treat all archive users in the same way as this further relegates the marginalized. He argues, following Valderhaugh, that archivists "should ensure users have an equal ability to benefit from the archives" and that requires that users are sometimes treated differently. Furthermore, archivists should recognize that they are part of the domain of research and should play an active role in explaining what records can and cannot attest (Melanson, 2020, pp. 107-108). This paper endeavors to advance Melanson's exploration of archivists' ethical responsibilities and opportunities by critically analyzing the persistent influence of the colonial past and the colonial archive on Dutch society, considering the ways in which these legacies continue to resonate in the present. In this context, I will critically examine an initiative undertaken by the Dutch National Archives, which can be interpreted as a reflective endeavor to reassess its institutional role and social responsibility concerning the colonial collections under its stewardship, especially in an era where the colonial past is subjected to heightened scrutiny and critical evaluation. I will conclude with a call for archival institutions to act as active witnesses and

commentators on the hermeneutical issues of archival resources. The colonial archive holds inscriptions from a colonial past, and I agree with James Booth (2006, p. 90) that traces of the past exist independently from those who reveal them, meaning that "traces without witnesses remain mute and languish in the shadows of forgetting". To bear witness involves actively illuminating, preserving, and transmitting these traces (Booth, 2006, p. 90). To effectively bear witness to a skewed and one-sidedly documented colonial past, archival institutions must serve as active commentators on historical records, thereby bridging the past with the present. Not as passive providers of sources, but in conversation and engaging with hearers, users, co-creators as equal stakeholders according to the model of the contact zone.

The transition from analog to digital archival spaces creates new interfaces, which, in line with Drucker's view, should be seen as "a dynamic space of relations" and not as a thing (Drucker, 2011, p. 3). This shift underscores the urgency of addressing epistemic injustice and creating archival interfaces based on principles of social justice. The digital space may appear as if users interact directly with documents without archivists' intervention, yet the archivists' role in shaping the interface remains crucial but often invisible.

As mentioned, the colonial archive as a hermeneutical resource is a speaking entity to present hearers — the users, readers, researchers. It is a problematic hermeneutical resource. Researchers and users of the archive largely determine which stories from the archive will be told or kept in darkness, while archivists make choices in descriptions that can emphasize or obscure certain elements. Listening to the archive without knowing and understanding the anxieties, silences, prejudices, fears, misinterpretations, animosities, interests, rumors that permeate the speakers' texts — the archives — makes them dangerous and unreliable witnesses. It is important to know and understand the cultural code, the logic of those who recorded the inscriptions at the time, but equally important of those who transmit, interpret, and illuminate the inscriptions in the present. Archival institutions are traditionally focused on preserving the traces from the past, but increasingly play a role in transmitting them through digitization. Significant portions of Dutch colonial archives have been digitized and made available online, including materials held by institutions in formerly colonized countries such as Indonesia and Suriname. Handwritten Text Recognition (HTR) techniques offer new avenues for search and are welcomed as a big promise for users of the archives. As archival institutions, functioning as agents or perhaps more aptly as brokers of the past, strive to transform into meaningful cultural institutions accessible to all citizens without barriers, it becomes

increasingly urgent to critically examine their role in addressing hermeneutical injustices of the archive. Equally, it is essential to ensure that these institutions foster equitable relationships with all stakeholders, particularly the descendants of marginalized, ignored, and commodified communities. Think how a responsible role in engaging with the selective and distorted witnesses from the past may look like.

Until recently, archivists often relied on the myth of impartiality and neutrality, believing their role was technical and free from political interests. In 1977, historian Howard Zinn (p. 20) already called the supposed neutrality of the archivist a fake and he argued that "the rebellion of the archivist against his normal role is not, as so many scholars fear, the politicizing of a neutral craft, but the humanizing of an inevitably political craft". In the late 1990s archival scholar Terry Cook (1997, p. 46) echoed this sentiment, stating that "the traditional notion of the impartiality of the archivist is no longer acceptable — if it ever was". Archivists have gradually come to realize that they are co-creators of archives as they make choices in every area of archival work, be it collecting, preserving, describing, or giving access. Influenced by Foucault and Derrida, archival scholars have examined power mechanisms in the archive: who had the power to document, to archive, to determine the narrative? What interests and intentions are behind the archive? With which eyes was reality captured by the record-makers? Which mechanisms determined which slivers of the past were allowed to end up in the archive? Postmodern scholarship has focused on understanding these power dynamics, but the current data-oriented turn risks allowing archivists to once again hide behind a 'technical character' of their work, promising optimal access to the data while neglecting deeper ethical issues of archival power and responsibility.

The Archival Decolonization Debate

The archival debate and archival practices in countries like Australia, Canada, the United States, and New Zealand differ significantly from those in the countries from which colonization originated. In settler societies, activist Indigenous archive movements are vigorously pursuing existential and cultural recognition, as well as self-determination. Their efforts respond to the long history of colonization, exploitation, dispossession, cultural annihilation, and the covert removal of Indigenous children from their families (O'Neal, 2015, p. 4; Thorpe, 2016, p. 906; Bak et al., 2017, pp. 1-12) with

the intent to "kill the Indian/Aboriginal and save the child"[3]. First Nations communities are reclaiming their Indigenous cultural identities and undergoing processes of cultural resurgence. This cultural and archival self-awareness among First Nations peoples, combined with the increasing recognition by mainstream archival scholars and professionals of the enduring power of colonial structures, has led to initiatives and experiments aimed at developing a decolonial archival praxis. For instance, protocols have been established to help archives, libraries, and tribal communities build constructive relationships (Underhill, 2006, pp. 134-145; McCracken & Hogan-Stacey, 2023, pp. 13-29); participatory description projects have been initiated (Thorpe, 2016; Thorpe et al., 2024, pp. 1-22; Haberstock, 2020, pp. 125-138) and research projects have been launched to identify obstacles and tensions in traditional archival theory and practice (McKemmish et al., 2020, pp. 21-49). For example, the FAIR data principles, now globally embraced, have faced resistance due to their perceived fairness, which does not adequately account for Indigenous peoples' rights and interests. This has led to the development of the "CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance" (Carroll et al., 2020, pp. 1-12). Recently, the Indigenous Archives Collective released a manifesto demanding Indigenous peoples' right to reply regarding the "inherent biases associated with record making and collecting paradigms that silence and subjugate Indigenous peoples' voices and knowledges" (Indigenous Archives Collective, 2021; see further in United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007; ATSILIRN, 2012; International Council on Archives, 2019; Janke, 2019).

At first glance, the physical distance from the colonial crime scene may enable people in Europe to 'forget' the shameful episodes of colonization. In 1970, Dutch historian and archivist Meilink-Roelofsz (1970, p. 4) observed that the emotional response in the Netherlands to the loss of the Dutch East Indies led to a desire to erase the colonial past from collective consciousness. This exemplifies what Aleida Assmann (2016, pp. 53-57) characterizes as defensive and complicit forgetting. Rose-Mary Allen (2020), Professor of Culture, Community, and History at the University of Curaçao, rightly noted that the Dutch have "filed away" their colonial past. Limpach (2016, p. 19) uses the term "phantom pain" to describe how the Dutch experienced losing the Dutch East Indies. Authors such as Scagliola (2002), Oostindie et al. (2022),

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3   Quote attributed to Richard Henry Pratt, founder of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, which became a model for boarding schools which were focused on the cultural immersion and assimilation of Native Americans (see Churchill, 2004).

Zweers (2013) and Limpach (2016) have highlighted the gaps in Dutch knowledge of its colonial past, noting that information conflicting with a positive self-image was systematically suppressed. Sociologist De Swaan (2017) refers to this as postcolonial absence, meaning the mechanism of not wanting to know what we know. This results in a Dutch East Indies past that has become a national secret, "a secret that is revealed time and again and then hidden again. Again, and again the nation falls into absence, failing to reflect on the past". This is reflected in the double standards applied, for instance, in assessing war violence. The Dutch government has consistently separated injustices related to the Second World War from those of the colonial period. For example, after 1971, war crimes from the Second World War were exempt from statutes of limitations; however, this exemption did not extend to crimes committed by Dutch soldiers in Indonesia between 1945 and 1949 (Veraart, 2012, pp. 255, 259). The framing of violence also differs; for instance, the decolonization war between Indonesia and the Netherlands (1945-1949) was euphemistically termed *politionele acties* (police actions) in the Netherlands, and atrocities committed by Dutch soldiers were systematically considered as excesses and deviations from both the normative standards and customary practices. Despite institutionalized silencing and downplaying intended to activate mechanisms of forgetting, the colonial past continued and continues to haunt the present. As Verne Harris (2021, pp. 35-36) argues, "[w]hen oppressive pasts are allowed to live on, when ideas like transformation and decolonization are treated only as metaphors, then societies are necessarily and unavoidable filled with (…) living ghosts". Similarly, historian Eelco Runia (2007, p. 317) writes that the Netherlands "kept being haunted by the 'police actions' in the Dutch East Indies as long as it maintained that the cruelties committed were just 'incidents' perpetrated by some unrepresentative 'rotten apples'" and argues that coming to terms with historical trauma requires self-exploration and answering the commemorative question "who are we that this could have happened?"

Gradually, the discourse is shifting from suppressing the problematic colonial past to adopting a more investigative and reflective attitude. In 2012, the Dutch government refused to fund an in-depth study into the nature, scope, causes, and impact of the violence used by the Netherlands in the decolonization war. Following the publication of Limpach's dissertation, which detailed the extent of structural violence committed by Dutch troops, the government relented at the end of 2016 and funded a large-scale investigation. The results of this extensive investigation, conducted by 25 scholars over five years, were published in 2022. The investigation concluded that

extreme violence by Dutch military forces was widespread and that those responsible, including politicians and judges, could have been aware of the systematic use of extreme violence. They were willing to tolerate, justify, disguise, and leave the violence unpunished (Oostindie et al., 2022, p. 4). Nevertheless, the researchers hesitated to classify the extreme violence of Dutch soldiers as war crimes, fearing it would equate the Netherlands with Nazi Germany or Japan during the Second World War (Oostindie et al., 2022, p. 476). Changes are also occurring in other areas. Cities such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, and The Hague, as well as banking corporations like De Nederlandsche Bank and ABN-AMRO, which built their wealth on colonial exploitation, are investigating their roles in the slave trade and slavery during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. During the Keti-koti commemoration[4] on July 1, 2021, Amsterdam's city council expressed deep regret over the city's active involvement in the commercial system of colonial slavery, followed by similar expressions from Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht, and finally the Dutch government in 2022 and the King in 2023.

Heritage institutions are also experiencing changes in how they are questioned about the stories they tell and the objects they have in custody and exhibit. In 2020, the Dutch Council for Culture, which advises the Minister of Culture, issued a report on handling cultural objects from former colonies that came into Dutch possession against the will of their original owners, through theft or military operations. The scale of what are termed colonial collections is estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands of items. The Council for Culture made several recommendations, including acknowledging the wrongs inflicted upon the original populations — described as "'historical injustice' that until today is still experienced as a 'living injustice'". — and demonstrating a willingness to rectify this by unconditionally returning cultural objects when it can be reasonably shown that they were lost involuntarily (Adviescommissie Nationaal Beleidskader Koloniale Collecties, 2020, p. 72). Additionally, objects of special significance to the country of origin should be returnable even if involuntary loss cannot be proven (Adviescommissie…, 2020, p. 72) In January 2021, the Minister of Culture informed Parliament of her willingness to adopt these recommendations. However, archives were excluded from this advisory report and policy proposal, as "archives concern

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4   In Sranantongo Keti-koti means 'broken chains' and commemorates the 1st of July 1863 when slavery was formally abolished, however with the stipulation that the freed people had to continue to work on the plantations on a contract basis for another 10 years. Therefore, not 1863, but 1873 is the year in which slavery came to an end.

not only the documents themselves but also the information they contain and (the right to) access to them. Therefore, archives require a specifically tailored approach which is beyond the scope of this advisory report" (Adviescommissie…, 2020, p. 15). For this reason, at the minister's request, the Council for Culture has prepared a similar advisory report on the policy that should be adopted regarding looted archives and documentary heritage in Dutch institutions originating from former colonies, which was presented in 2024. The report broadly followed the earlier advice on colonial objects. Requests for the restitution of colonial archives should certainly be made possible, including the option of returning documents to individual persons. However, the Council also noted that unconditional return of colonial archives and documentary collections is problematic due to the shared cultural ownership of the materials. Therefore, minimal conditions must be established, such as retaining access to and making copies of the items available, as well as including metadata in access tools, to safeguard the interests of all parties involved. Interestingly, the Council also stated that

> [i]njustice related to colonial archives involves much more than just the question of whether their physical location is legitimate or appropriate. Rectifying this injustice requires not only (the willingness to engage in) restitution, but also, and more importantly, ensuring good, accessible, and equitable (digital) availability and usability of colonial archives and documentary collections, with space for multiple perspectives. (Raad voor Cultuur, 2024, p. 11)

Round Table Initiative at the Dutch National Archives

Under the pressure of shifting societal dynamics, some traditional mainstream archival institutions feel an urgent need to reassess their roles and positions in the ongoing debate. Concepts such as inclusiveness, diversity, and multivocality are readily embraced, partly because these institutions see opportunities to engage audiences they have previously overlooked. However, it is crucial to approach these terms with a degree of skepticism, especially when used by institutions historically focused on preserving the documentary legacy of those in power. Sara Ahmed critically examines why the term "diversity" is often more palatable and less threatening within institutions compared to terms like "equity work" or "social justice". Diversity is associated with positivity, a feel-good factor, and cooperation rather than confrontation. It is not

tied to the need for changing institutional values and is often considered inclusive in itself. However, there are risks: diversity can be used as a smoke-screen to avoid addressing what is necessary for creating equal opportunities. It may obscure underlying problems, and the 'buzz of diversity' might even drown out the realities of racism (Ahmed, 2012, pp. 61-72). Fatima Elatik, a Dutch politician and leading expert on diversity programs, emphasizes the difficulty of becoming truly diverse: "[b]ecoming more diverse is not pleasant. It's about healing. About repairing what went wrong. That means you first must acknowledge what went wrong, and that hurts because it requires self-examination and creating space for change" (Papaikonomou, 2020).

This need to confront and acknowledge mechanisms of pain as a pre-requisite for becoming relevant to people who view the archive as an unsafe, colonial space was a recurring theme in the discussions at the roundtables organized by the Dutch National Archives. Inspired by the international debate on decolonial praxis, societal calls for justice for marginalized and silenced archival subjects, and growing awareness of bias in archival work, the Dutch National Archives initiated a project in 2019-2020 to reconsider its approach to colonial archives and develop principles for future practice. Instead of immediately changing archival practices, the National Archives chose to first engage in dialogue with communities to avoid making decisions based solely on internal beliefs. In 2020, the National Archives began hosting "decolonization tables", involving five to six participants at each session, totaling 45 participants. The initiative aimed to gather diverse perspectives from stakeholders with various backgrounds and interests. Participants included individuals from formerly colonized communities (Indonesia, Suriname, the Caribbean), scholars, and archivists from the Netherlands and former Dutch colonies. Key questions for reflection included the participants' under-standing of "decolonization" and "decolonization of archives", the relevance of these concepts, and recommendations for addressing the colonial archives held by the Dutch National Archives. The goal was to determine how a state institution like the National Archives could or should evolve to better address the interests of different communities.

Participants evaluated the National Archives from two perspectives: the organization itself and its handling of its collections. While most par-ticipants responded positively to the round table initiative, some were skeptical about the feasibility of decolonizing colonial archives or European archival institutions, which are deeply entrenched in colonial legacies. The "de" in decolonizing implies undoing something. It is essential to clarify from which perspective decolonization is being considered and what exact-

ly institutions claiming to decolonize mean by that. What needs to be undone, and what can and will be undone, and by whom? Without answers to these questions, decolonizing risks becoming an empty concept, some respondents argued. The difference between actions taken by a European/ Dutch institution versus a postcolonial institution in a formerly colonized country is significant.

The roundtable participants offered various reflections and suggestions. Generally, they criticized the lack of diversity among the staff, noting that people of color were mostly confined to low-paid positions such as security guards and depot staff. Some commentators were blunt: if an institution's staff remains predominantly white, it cannot fundamentally change how it organizes and pluralizes its collections. Hiring people of color in positions of power is seen as essential for such change. The National Archives was criticized for its mission statement, which claims to "serve everyone's right to information and provide insight into our country's past". Some participants argued that the scope of "everyone" and "our country's past" is not truly realized. Both "everyone" and "our" are selectively defined. Certain groups are privileged, have left behind their own documentation, and have had the power to document the other from their privileged perspective, while other groups have left few traces and often cannot see or recover their own history. State archives should be more modest about their claims of being the nation's memory. They are, after all, government archives representing the hierarchical structures of the oppressive colonial power. Archives, participants noted, are perceived as intimidating and unsafe by those marginalized by history, and often in the present (Pattikawa et al., 2021). This is a key reason why Caswell and Cifor advocate for an archival approach grounded in radical empathy and an ethics of care that prioritizes those who have suffered the most. They propose transforming the reading room space from a cold, elitist environment into an affective, user-oriented, community-centered service space (Caswell & Cifor, 2016, p. 24).

One of the participants shared her personal experience with the archive:

> Imagine being a visitor already distrustful of government institutions, confronted daily with prejudice and stereotypes. For them, it is a significant barrier to first pass through security checks before even starting your research into a painful past described through language of race, power, and colonialism. Despite the difficulty and discomfort, you must read through racist colonial language to glimpse

snippets of your history as recorded by Dutch colonials. This can be physically nauseating, forcing you to take breaks to gather the strength to continue. But why must I engage with the same colonial frame and racist language to be able to identify documents and search through archives using tools provided by the National Archives? (Statement of one of the participants of the decolonization tables, in Dutch National Archives, 2021)

This poignant feedback should remind archival institutions that inventories, indexes, and catalogues are more than mere neutral finding aids. As Brent Hayes Edwards points out

we often take finding aids for granted — it's just a tool; it's the listing that tells you where to find materials stored in a given collection — but a finding aid is a textual subgenre in its own right, with its own protocols, even its own poetics. (Mazza, n.d.)

Participants reflected on how archival institutions could present their collections in "a more ethical way". Suggestions included: demonstrating that colonial archives are products of power dynamics; incorporating this awareness into the language and perspectives of finding aids, which are constructs of archivists; making transparent the missing data and information due to colonial biases; involving and compensating people from communities in reparative work; and acknowledging the indispensable role of non-textual sources not managed by archival institutions.

There was also criticism of the mass digitization of (colonial) archives, which European institutions promote as a solution for accessibility issues. Digitization may increase the availability of materials but does not equate to accessibility. Digitization must be approached carefully to avoid reproducing or amplifying epistemic violence in digital form. The large-scale, often international digitization projects were critiqued for being primarily driven by European/Dutch interests, determining what is digitized based on their resources and criteria. This positions archival institutions in former colonies as mere suppliers of raw materials refined in Europe/the Netherlands. The main concern is ensuring that archivists' tools do not perpetuate the epistemic violence of the archives. As archives transition to digital spaces, machine-generated transcriptions, while offering technical search capabilities, can reinforce the problematic colonial frameworks within which users interact with the archives.

Concluding Remarks & Reflections

Dutch archival institutions are gradually recognizing their role as co-creators of the archives they manage, yet they remain uncertain about the responsibilities this entails regarding their collections and the users they serve. They are still in the early stages of addressing these challenges. Before concluding, it is important to further explore whether it is possible to reduce hermeneutical injustice in the colonial archive.

Let us revisit Fricker's concepts of hermeneutical and testimonial injustice. Initially, I emphasized the importance of clarifying the roles of both the speaker and the hearer. Viewing the colonial archive through a narrow (and traditional Rankean) lens, which treats it as merely a repository of past testimonies of the speakers to the hearers of the past, overlooks the fact that these records communicate with today's hearers through the intervention of archival institutions. Authors like Melanson, Cifor, and Caswell, as well as participants in the roundtables, stress the need to acknowledge and address the hermeneutical injustice embedded in the colonial archive and offer suggestions for action. While these contributions are valuable, more action is required.

Archivists and archival institutions must recognize their role as agents of mediation, continually re-mediating archival testimonies from the past. A recent form of mediation involves digitizing historical testimonies and making them available online through technologies like HTR-software (Handwritten Text Recognition). However, there are fundamental issues with this approach: documents are digitized and made available with the same minimal metadata that originating from a time when archivists still believed they were acting as agents of neutrality. Although there are some efforts to address problematic language in descriptions, the archive generally remains a monolithic entity that is difficult to engage with from diverse perspectives.

Governments are increasingly acknowledging that those recorded in archives also have rights (Johnson, 2017, p. 152), but these rights are generally limited to living individuals. For example, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) recognizes rights such as rectification and erasure for personal data in temporary records. For records that have been transferred to an archival service for permanent preservation, this is not an option. However, according to the Dutch Implementation Act of the GDPR, it is possible for someone who is confronted with incorrect personal data in an archival document to add their own viewpoint, which then becomes part of

the file[5]. Nonetheless, nothing can be added or corrected on behalf of the deceased, which means that archives will continue to dictate "what can be said about the past and the kinds of stories that can be told about the persons cataloged, embalmed, and sealed away in box files and folios" (Hartman, 2007, p. 17).

Thus, I argue for a fundamental rethinking of the roles, responsibilities, and opportunities for both speakers and hearers in the archival domain. Archival institutions should not merely act as mediators of the colonial archive; they should also facilitate "talking back" to the colonial archive and the mediating archivists. bell hooks explains that

> [m]oving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side, a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life, and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of 'talking back' that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of moving from object to subject, that is the liberated voice. (Hooks, 1986, pp. 8, 128)

This "talking back" could be easily organized and facilitated in the digital realm. It should become part of the metadata, perhaps we should call it "afterdata" of the colonial archive. Although archival institutions are accustomed to communicating with users through metadata, this tool is not currently used to enable the archive to fulfill its role as a mediator. Users of the archives lack direct means to respond to what they encounter through these remediated archives.

Temi Odumosu, a scholar and curator at the Information School at the University of Washington, proposes transforming the metadata of the colonial archive into a counter-record of colonial. In her article "The Crying Child: On Colonial Archives, Digitization, and Ethics of Care in the Cultural Commons", she focuses on the digital reproduction of enslaved and colonized subjects in archival, particularly visual, collections. Precisely because the ghosts of the past manifest when witnessed injustices are not sufficiently recognized and named, it is necessary to take action to prevent the mechanisms of injustice from remaining intact and unchallenged. She suggests transforming metadata into a repository of necessary tension, allowing users to "return" to

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5   Uitvoeringswet Algemene Verordening Gegevensbescherming [Implementation Act General Data Protection Regulation], article 45 paragraph 3 says: "Concerned parties have the right, in the case of incorrect personal data, to add their own account to the relevant archival documents".

colonial moments and create "a counter-record of that history". Odumosu envisions a digital object that could do all the speaking that the original could not do? What if the digital object could say on behalf of persons represented: "Look, here is my story. I've experienced pain, and now you are part of it; tell me what you intend to do with me?" (Odumosu, 2020, p. 299).

Such an approach would foster a completely new relationship between speaker and hearer. These "afterdata" could serve as powerful annotations to expose the hermeneutic resources embedded in colonial archives, and to amplify the voices of those who suffered the most under colonialism and slavery, and whose perspectives have always been suppressed and ignored. It could be a first step in enabling marginalized communities to gain control over how these archives will be integrated into the cultural memory of society.

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Mediating colonial archives: Notes from Charles Jeurgens' "Building better archival futures by recognizing epistemic injustice"[1]

A mediação dos arquivos coloniais: Notas sobre "Construindo melhores futuros arquivísticos através do reconhecimento da injustiça epistémica" de Charles Jeurgens

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ABSTRACT

The commentary on "Building better archival futures by recognizing epistemic injustice" by Charles Jeurgens begins to approach some of the ideas and concepts that he analyses, namely "epistemic justice" and, in special, "hermeneutical injustice". Follows a mention to diverse researches and initiatives revisiting colonialism in Portugal and a critical

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1   Critical commentary produced and delivered for the 6th session of the seminar "Rethinking the Archive(s)", organized by the VINCULUM project, based at NOVA FCSH, and the Institute for Medieval Studies, NOVA FCSH. National Archive of Torre do Tombo, Lisbon, 4 April 2024. VINCULUM (2024, April 19). *6.ª Sessão do Ciclo de seminários: "Rethinking the Archive(s)/ Repensar o(s) Arquivo(s)"* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swyWDnA2jZ8

mention on the extensive use of the term decolonisation applied, for instance, to the archives. The "myth of impartiality and neutrality" of the archivists deserves a specific attention, as well as the difficulties surrounding their practices' transparency. The uniqueness of the colonial archives is questioned, in comparison with other archives equally demanding a rigorous study. Finally, doubts are raised on the role of archivists and archival institutions regarding the colonial archives as a matter of justice.

KEYWORDS: Colonial archives; Epistemic justice; Decolonisation of knowledge; Archivists; Historians.

RESUMO

O comentário a "Construindo melhores futuros arquivísticos através do reconhecimento da injustiça epistémica", de Charles Jeurgens, começa por explorar algumas das ideias e conceitos analisados pelo autor, nomeadamente a "justiça epistémica" e, em especial, a "injustiça hermenêutica". Segue-se a menção de diversas investigações e iniciativas que revisitam o colonialismo em Portugal e uma crítica ao uso extensivo do termo descolonização aplicado, por exemplo, aos arquivos. O "mito da imparcialidade e neutralidade" dos arquivistas recebe uma atenção específica, bem como as dificuldades que envolvem a transparência das suas práticas. A singularidade dos arquivos coloniais é questionada, em comparação com outros arquivos que também exigem um estudo rigoroso. Por fim, são levantadas dúvidas sobre o papel dos arquivistas e das instituições arquivísticas em relação aos arquivos coloniais, tratados como uma questão de justiça.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Arquivos coloniais; Justiça epistémica; Descolonização do conhecimento; Arquivistas; Historiadores.

The reading of "Colonial archives: spaces of knowledge and power" authored by Prof. Charles Jeurgens was really stimulating. It also gave me the opportunity to pay attention to different areas of study, and namely to revisit chapters of the always suggestive *Processing the past* (Blouin Jr. & Rosenberg, 2011).

My commentary — or, I should rather say, my notes — on the text reflect my experience as an archivist and as one responsible for a Portuguese

public archival institution with mainly governmental colonial holdings. They also reflect a historian's point of view.

Finally, they are not impermeable to personal concerns with respect to two issues:

- Firstly, on what appears to be a certain disjunction between, on the one hand, the academic research and debates and the relevance of the acquisition of knowledge and, on the other, the archivist's professional practice (as shaped, among other factors, by the need to give quicker public access to records and, in smaller organizations, by the variety of activities which he or she has to undertake);

- Secondly, a difficulty in widening and updating the ways of representing archival resources corresponding to the variety of today's users and the search behaviour supported by new technologies (the artificial intelligence posing a formidable challenge in this regard).

First note, on some ideas and concepts

At the very outset, I would like to stress the richness of contributions from different areas of knowledge and authors. Prof. Jeurgens's work intersects areas such as Anthropology, Philosophy, History, Literature, Post Colonial Studies, Information and Archival Studies and Sociology and appeals to ideas and concepts from several scholars (over 44). I will mention just a few:

- Ann Laura Stoler, an anthropologist, and her study *Along the archival grain: Epistemic anxieties and colonial common sense* (Stoler, 2009) — probably better known in the Portuguese academia, namely among anthropologists and historians concerned with the archives and researchers of information studies than by professional archivists.

- Achille Mbembe, a philosopher and political scientist, in his analysis of museums as epistemic spaces and the "decolonizing of knowledge".

- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a literary theorist and feminist critic, with her reading of the British colonial administration records on India while studying a relevant Indian woman of the nineteenth century, Rani of Sirmur. Her theory on the heterogeneity of subaltern groups and the impossibility of dialoguing with authorities due to their subaltern position in the social hierarchy is, likewise, important. Jeurgens points out that she considers the colonial administrative archives as a mirror of a European view of India, and that "these distortions, misinterpretations and fictions

are not without consequences for the later use of these archives" (Jeurgens, 2025, p. 152)[2].

- Michel-Rolph Trouillot, an anthropologist, and the attention which he advocates must be paid to silences generated by power in history, in archives, as well as in society more generally.

- Marisa Fuentes, a specialist in African-American Studies, and her questioning of the ways in which one can use "archival fragments to bring into focus the lives of individual women in eighteenth century Bridgetown in Barbados" and to give visibility to enslaved women (Jeurgens, 2025, p. 152).

But the newest to me, and I am sure to many in the archival field, not only in Portugal, was the key concept of epistemic justice as employed by Miranda Fricker, a philosopher[3] and especially Jeurgens' idea of reflecting it in the "new digital spaces" so as "to help archival institutions" avoid further injustice (Jeurgens, 2025, p. 152). Explaining what Fricker understands by testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice, Jeurgens centres himself on the latter. It seems worthwhile to quote his explanation: "Hermeneutical injustice is connected to the way people interpret their own lives and how others are able to understand those lives and experiences". And he goes on: "Some groups in society have few or only very distorted resources at their disposal" extending these resources, Fricker's "hermeneutic resources", to the archives. At the same time, Jeurgens observes that these resources are often shaped using categories not shared by groups with which they are related. This leads to the notion of archival power. It makes us aware also of the limits of the conception of archival institutions as the "guardians of the collective memory" (a claim that, in Jeurgens words, "is in itself debatable"; Jeurgens, 2025, p. 152). I agree that they are not the only providers of past information or the owners of this social memory. Instead, however, they may contribute to its construction — as they collect, preserve and give access to archival documents.

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[2] Apropos, it is interesting the different use of this theory made by the Polish historian Agata Bloch in her recent study on the networks of the Portuguese empire. Bloch (2022) analyses how subaltern groups used petitions in the colonial administration in their favour. Africans. This kind of approach has some similarities with the studies of Catarina Madeira Santos (and initially also of Ana Paula Tavares) on the Ndembu / Dembos in Angola and their appropriation of "colonial power – writing and the bureaucratic culture associated with it". See Santos (2010), mainly 14-17, and bibliography cited.

[3] She defines herself as a philosopher in the areas of moral philosophy and social epistemology as well as a feminist philosophy. She serves as moral philosopher on the UK Spoliation Advisory Panel (Fricker, n.d.).

To the above I must add two further questions concerning the notion of archival power by Trouilllot and Fuentes, as mentioned here. I quote Jeurgens based on these two authors: "[a]rchival power which represents a space of domination shaped and defined by white voices who had the power to name and categorize, to break and create identities, resulting in malicious archives that are nevertheless, constitutive of knowledge production" (Jeurgens, 2025, p. 153). Archives and specifically archives created by the colonial administration certainly reflect the power, values and categories of those who governed, headed and served this administration. However, is it "malicious" — in the sense of "having or showing a desire to cause harm to someone" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) — a suitable or right term to characterize them? They are, to a certain point, one-sided archives and, therefore, often misleading. This, when they are not globally analysed, critically studied and confronted with other information resources. On the other hand, nowadays, in societies as divided as ours, will the expression "white voices" be operational in this debate — even if it is not interpreted literally? It seems to me that dismissing both expressions would not affect Jeurgens' equalling of "[t]his form of archival power" to "archival injustice" — which is to say, to "a clear form of hermeneutical injustice" (Jeurgens, 2025, p. 153).

2. Second note, on revisiting colonialism and "decolonising the archives"

In connection to the issues raised about "the archival decolonization-debate" some quick references related to Portugal become relevant.

Colonialism has been revisited in Portugal more intensely, probably within the last two decades[4], by social sciences and humanities researchers, namely historians[5] and anthropologists[6], political scientists[7], philosophers[8],

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[4]   The names mentioned in the following notes are just simple examples, a little random and more limited in areas with which I am less familiar.

[5]   Diogo Ramada Curto, Cláudia Castelo, Francisco Bethencourt, Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, José Pedro Monteiro Nuno Domingos, Pedro Aires Oliveira, Filipa Lowndes Vicente, Maciel Santos, Valentim Alexandre, António Hespanha, Pedro Cardim, Mafalda Soares da Cunha, Ângela Barreto Xavier, Ângela Domingues, Arlindo Caldeira, Catarina Madeira Santos, Dalila Cabrita Mateus, Aniceto Afonso, Carlos Matos Gomes, Fernando Rosas.

[6]   Ricardo Roque, Cristiana Bastos, Paula Lobo Antunes, Ana Paula Tavares (simultaneous fictionist).

[7]   Bernardo Pinto da Cruz, António Costa Pinto.

[8]   Eduardo Lourenço, António Pinto Ribeiro.

sociologists[9], and, in different ways, architects (generally in a more technical and less social approach[10]), specialists in cultural studies[11], artists[12] and writers[13], as well as film makers and curators or journalists, many of whom often cross disciplinary frontiers[14]. Phenomena like racism, slave trade, the colonial penal system and resettlement, colonial war or the African presence in Portugal became subjects more studied and visible in the academic and public spaces (Henriques, 2020; Curto, 2021)[15] and even within institutions like the Catholic Church (Gonçalves, 2024). Exhibitions in private and public organizations are more frequent[16]. Blogs appeared and go on disseminating texts and events on these matters[17].

Political apologies for the massacre of Wiryamu, in Mozambique, on 16 December 1972, during the Portuguese Colonial War, were made by the country's former Prime Minister António Costa in a 2022 visit to Maputo. One year later, the presidential speech during the 25th of April commemorations had as main theme the best and the worst of the Portuguese presence in the Empire, during the colonisation[18].

Within the field of history, for instance, the "decolonisation of knowledge" began to be debated clearly at least in 2020[19]. More attention is

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[9]   Cristina Roldão.

[10]   Ana Vaz Milheiro, among other architects, namely in research projects that she has led and leads to date.

[11]   António Pinto Ribeiro.

[12]   Ângela Ferreira, Grada Kilomba, Délio Jasse, Kiluanji Kia Henda (the two last ones from Angola, having exhibited in Portugal).

[13]   António Lobo Antunes, Lídia Jorge, Djamila Pereira, Isabela Figueiredo, Dulce Maria Cardoso.

[14]   Joana Pimentel, Marta Lança, Joana Pontes, Miguel Gomes, José Barahona, Joaquim Furtado, Sofia Pinto Coelho, António Louçã, Joana Gorjão Henriques.

[15]   The editing by the University of Lisbon of the translation into Portuguese of the *Atlas of the transatlantic slave trade*, (Eltis and Richardson) launched at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in March 2024, is one example.

[16]   For instance, in Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Museu de Arte, Arquitetura e Tecnologia, CulturGest, EGEAC-Padrão dos Descobrimentos, Museu Nacional de História Natural e da Ciência, Museu de Lisboa – Pavilhão Branco. The Museu de Lisboa has just been reorganized and presents "new narratives" including on slavery and African presence in Lisbon (Serafim & Gaudêncio, 2024). The exhibition "Deconstructing colonialism, decolonising the imaginary" is on display at the Museu Nacional de Etnologia until 31 November 2025.

[17]   For instance: Buala (n.d.).

[18]   These political acts were largely debated in the media. An analysis of the exchange of arguments regarding the apologies for Wiryamu by Cardina (2023) especially pp. 75-81.

[19]   Ramada Curto presenting the book of Henriques in the Padrão dos Descobrimentos.

being paid to those matters and even the "decolonisation of teaching" is being advocated and discussed at present[20].

The Portuguese university is not extraneous to subject of the so-called decolonisation of archives. The archivists, in general, still seem to be somewhat distant from this debate.

Decolonisation remains an unclear concept in this context, as Juergens recognizes[21]. I doubt its operability unless we consider it as a kind of label or tool to draw more attention to the complexity of colonial archives and to the need to acknowledge unpleasant aspects of our past.

3. A third note, on "the myth of impartiality and neutrality" of the archivists, as approached by Jeurgens

Archivists' work, like any human activity, has to be inserted into a range of cultural, social and political dynamics[22].

The technical dimension of archival procedures does not exclude making choices and taking decisions. Some of these decisions are political, at several levels, some organizational, some professional, collective and/or individual. They cover several areas of archival practice: the creation of records, archival appraisal (though in this area the responsibility is or should be shared with other protagonists), mainly arrangement and description and still access and reference.

Focusing on the arrangement and description of archives, efforts have been made, in the professional domain, to reach a degree of objectivity, establishing concepts such as respect for fonds or provenance, with its developments and variants, considering, or not, the principle of original order[23].

The use and adaptation of the General International Standard Archival Description – ISAD(G) and other standards, understood as a tool to facilitate

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[20] For instance, the training "Histórias difíceis, legados difíceis" on how to speak and teach on slavery and transatlantic slave trade in July 2024 (Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, n.d.). Or the article of João Moreira da Silva (Silva, 2022). The historian João Pedro Marques argues very differently, namely on teaching about slavery and the transatlantic slave trade (See, for instance, Marques, 2024).

[21] "It is necessary to formulate much more precisely from which point of view decolonization is considered and what exactly institutions that claim to decolonize mean by that. What needs to be done and what can and will be undone by whom? If you can't answer these questions, decolonizing remains a meaningless empty shell some respondents reacted [during the Round Table initiative of the Dutch National Archives]", p. 8. Beyond the archive, as Blouin Jr. and Rosenberg summarize (2011, p. 142).

[22] Beyond the archive, as Blouin Jr. and Rosenberg summarize (2011, p. 142).

[23] Society of American Archivists, 2005-2024c, and Society of American Archivists, 2005-2024a.

and accelerate the access to records, were also a major step in the attempt to convey an objective representation of said material.

Here, I am thinking mainly of Portugal, along the 90s of the last century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This adaptation occurred not without debate and, in parallel, with a subtle conviction, spread among several archivists, that ISAD(G) favoured or even guaranteed the impartiality of archival descriptions — surely a questionable belief.

In fact, this principle depends on various factors, one of which pertains to "the capacities and interests of the archivist, as well as the values reflected in the archive" (Blouin Jr. & Rosenberg, 2011, p. 147), and another being the scale of work vis-a-vis the extent of archives.

Strategies have been implemented to compensate for, or at least to draw users' attention to, the characteristics and limits of archival description, namely plans of archival description, diverse according to the nature and extent of records, conservation conditions, human resources, funding, user's needs (including citizens' rights and duties), institutional responsibilities or political priorities. It is true that the methodology followed remains most of the times internal, but more information on it is being conveyed to the public[24]. Transparency about archivists' practices involves additional work and can be quite time-consuming. There is a risk, however, that we consider it unnecessary to explain the archivist's methodology on the basis that this information is most probably not searched by the majority of users in the online databases.

4. Is the colonial archive unique?

The following note focusses on the colonial archive — "a highly contested genre of records", as Juergens refers.

I understand this focus, taking into account the negative weight and legacies of colonialism which are felt still today in various aspects of the people's daily lives[25]. These are difficulties occurring in the now-independ-

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[24]   See examples in the ANTT database (https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/) such as "Arquivo Oliveira Salazar, Sistema de Organização" (Reference code: PT/TT/AOS) or "Convento do Bom Jesus de Monforte, História Custodial e Arquivística e Sistema de Organização" (Reference code: PT/TT/CBJM) ; and even in the AHU database (https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/), "Conselho Ultramarino, História Custodial e Arquivística" (Reference code: PT/AHU/CU) and "Obras Públicas, Âmbito e Conteúdo" (Reference code: PT/AHU/ID-OP).

[25]   On racism and discrimination as legacies of colonialism see Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Human Rights – Office of the High Commissioner (1996-2024).

ent countries that were once colonised and often also within the former coloniser states, namely regarding communities or individuals originally non-European.

However, I allow myself to broaden the issue of the contestation of archives beyond the colonial archives.

This contestation seems to depend largely on the level of knowledge about them, on the understanding of all the layers and silences that they comprise, on the ways they were and are used or misused and, of course, on the recipients of this usage.

No record is innocuous, and neither is its usage. Some examples:

- Blouin Jr. and Rosenberg refer the paradigmatic case of the Enola Gay controversy.

  It happened during the planning and the selection of archival materials for the exhibition, in 1995, in the Smithsonian Institution's Air and Space Museum in Washington D.C., of the Enola Gay, the first aircraft to drop the atomic bomb in Japan. The organisers sought to "use a range of archival documents to describe the impact of the bombing on the end of the war, its aftermath, and the onset of the Cold War".

  Reactions from veterans of the B29 airplane and from members of the American Congress erupted. The first expressed that the airplane would not be displayed "proudly", the last "that the exhibit would portray Japan 'more as an innocent victim than a ruthless aggressor'. The support lent to the museum by some American historians deepened the divide, which ended in a political controversy and with the cancellation of the exhibition. This incident was followed by the creation of a "new digital Enola Gay Archive, [*i.e.* a digital repository] sponsored (…) by the Air Force Association (…) to allow the 'true' story to be properly told". Blouin Jr. and Rosenberg concluded that this controversy "reflected deeper and more complicated questions about sources and archives" such as "To what extent (…) is the meaning and value of sources created by the engaged historian and active archivist, rather than simple interpreted?" (Blouin Jr. & Rosenberg, 2011, pp. 116-117).

- The archives pertaining to the Portuguese Inquisition constitute another example.

  They demand a very cautious attitude regarding the interpretation and use of the correspondent information contents. For instance,

denunciations, indictments and convictions for Jewish practices of the so-called *New Christians* do not mean that these defendants were all Jews or that they observed Judaism. Their testimonies or voices, the "indirect testimonies" mentioned by Juergens, were intermediated by the Court of the Inquisition, which also nominated the lawyers ("procuradores"). Nor do the inquisitorial labels of Gentilism ("gentilidade") and Gentilic ceremonies in the Inquisition Court of Goa always cover the same type of individual or community beliefs, cultural values and codes[26].

Rather, their application differed according to the officers ("the hearers of the past" in the sense given by Jeurgens) and to the understanding that they had of people's practices and behaviour in the way these were conveyed to them. It differed also according to the colonial territory where the Inquisition was active, namely in the former Portuguese State of India, in Brazil or in Angola. Lourenço gives us examples of accusations of gentilism in India which, analysed in detail and crossing information, in some cases refer to Crypto-Hinduism while in other cases refer probably to Buddhism (Lourenço, 2011, p. 223).

The secrecy, the mental categories and the classifications embedded in the inquisitorial procedure, as well as the gaps and deliberated destruction of archives, especially in the case of Goa's Inquisition, are not amenable to literal or simplistic readings of the records.

A similarly rigorous approach must be had when dealing with the archives of Portugal's political police (PIDE/DGS) during the Dictatorship and up to 1974. People denounced as communist, for instance, could simply be opponents to the Regime and/or supporters of freedom and democracy, or indeed none of the former.

If these as other archives are not duly apprehended and studied, wrong narratives uncritically stuck to records and information, or built out of their context, may be reproduced and become dominant. Blouin Jr. and Rosenberg, again, remind us of Boris V. Ananich' discussion

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26   Lourenço analyses how the term "gentilidade" referring to the cultural-religious context of "Gentiles" (non-Christian, non-Jewish, and non-Muslim populations) was differently employed by the Holly Office in Goa. "The fact that the Portuguese employed the terms "gentilismo" and "gentilidade" to refer to religions beyond Judaism and Islam also raises difficulties when trying to achieve a definition of "gentilidade" as a religious offence. If it is taken to be an equivalent to crypto-Hinduism how should charges against defendants that lived in locations far from Hindu contexts be interpreted? Is it not possible for those who converted from the Gentiles of Brazil or Angola to also have committed crimes of "gentilidade" from the point of view of an inquisitor? (Lourenço, 2021, p. 217).

of the materials concerning the 1919-31 trial of Soviet academicians, where the fabrications of information (…) was made all the more problematic by the realities of the trial's victims asserting they were true, a set of issues that could only be understood by historians fully cognizant of the historical context. (Blouin Jr. & Rosenberg, 2011, p. 231, n. 6)

5. Fifth and last note on "On what the archivists and archival institutions could, or maybe even should do to mitigate hermeneutical injustice" (Jeurgens, 2025, p. 153)

I am not convinced that it is fruitful for archivists and archival institutions to consider their approach to the colonial archives as a matter of justice. Even if we are speaking precisely of hermeneutic justice or injustice, linked to the archives as a resource of knowledge and as an object of study.

My glance upon Portuguese colonial archives has until now been twofold: on the one hand, as guardians of an archival heritage that has an added value and implies an extra responsibility for Portugal and the Portuguese in terms its of preservation and accessibility, considering that it is also relevant to other countries and communities. On the other, as archives whose arrangement and description demands, like any, a study of why they were created and for what purposes, of how they were kept, organized (or not), of their implicit or explicit classifications, absences and uses. In several cases this should be done, if possible, at different levels and moments of the archival description.

There are some conditionings.

The sphere of activities of the public archival institutions reaches, as we all know, far beyond the colonial records.

The Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, for instance, is just one of these institutions (around 18) under the aegis of a General Directorate, and it is not the only holder of this kind of records. Restricting myself to this archive, there is still lot of work to do concerning simple arrangement and description[27]. A lot more is still on going to make available on line more finding aids. The same regarding digital images of the records, though there is the risk of mass digitisation of (colonial) archives becoming, sometimes, a

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[27]   Namely of three extensive main archival fonds and series (Governo Geral de Angola, Instituto de Apoio ao Retorno dos Nacionais, Conselho Ultramarino – India).

"panacea as "availability of materials [...] does not equate to accessibility" like Jeurgens states (Jeurgens, 2025, p. 163).

Funding is limited and specialized human resources are scarce — this, due to different reasons, and in spite of efforts of recruitment within the Public Administration sector.

On the other hand, many archivists on the job are insufficiently prepared to describe the colonial records from the critical standpoint described by Juergens. This requires deep historical knowledge on a great variety of communities and geographical areas, namely those covered by former Portuguese colonial administration. An example from my own experience: it is preferable to describe contents of records using their vocabulary, when there is uncertainty as to what it represented and which current terms should be applied, then to adulterate their meaning. This option should be clearly expressed for the user, something which does not always happen. Later on, it will be possible to improve and enrich the description, in projects in partnership, namely with universities and/or involving users[28]. Some speak about reparative description[29]. I would not go so far.

This said, I fully subscribe to the notion that archivists and archival institutions should be aware that they are mediators or "agents of mediations" as Jeurgens states (Jeurgens, 2025, p. 164).

I conclude with the following reflexion by Blouin Jr. and Rosenberg: "And if the authenticating practices of state archives serve to make certain kinds of historical understanding seem like the "natural" course of a society's development, should not state archivists confront this reduction and systematically work to minimize its effects? Our answer would be: not necessarily. What we think might be needed instead is for historians and other scholars themselves to come to the archive capable of "reading" it well" (Blouin Jr. & Rosenberg, 2011, p. 121).

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28   Including the use of tags.

29   "Remediation of practices or data that exclude, silence, harm, or mischaracterize marginalized people in the data created or used by archivists to identify or characterize archival resources" (Society of American Archivists, 2005-2024b).

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PRESENTATION NOTE
Rethinking the archive(s) / Repensar o(s) arquivo(s))

STUDIES