

Archivalisation and Archiving¹

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Educated as a lawyer and legal historian, he received his LLM and LLD (cum laude) degrees from Leiden University. He was General State Archivist (National Archivist) of the Netherlands 1989-1997. Previously he was assistant lecturer in legal history at Leiden University, Secretary of the Archives Council, Director of the Dutch State School of Archivists, Deputy General State Archivist and State Archivist for the province of Groningen.

He has served the Royal Society of Dutch Archivists as Vice President, President, and Chairman of the Steering Committee on Automation. In 1987 the Society awarded him the first Hendrik van Wijn medal for his work as editor of the series of 13 guides to the archival repositories in the Netherlands.

He was Secretary for Standardization of the International Council on Archives 1980-1984, and Secretary of the International Conference of the Round Table on Archives. In 1996 he was elected Chairman of the Program Management Commission of the International Council on Archives and Vice President of ICA. He has been a member of the European Commission on Preservation and Access since its foundation in 1994.

He has written some 200 articles in Dutch, English, French and German and written and co-authored several books, including two general introductions to archival research and a handbook on Dutch archives and records management law. Since 1986 he has been editor of a multi-author loose-leaf handbook on archives and records management methodology and practice (now more than 1000 pages). In 1997 *The Archival Image*, a collection of his essays in English, French and German, was published, including the paper, 'The Right to Know, The Right to Forget: Personal Information in Public Archives' originally published in 1995 in *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 23, no. 1.

Archives are created in an organisation to support and manage work, to record why, when, where, in what capacity and by whom what actions were carried out. Every citizen, every family is archiving too. Archiving is preceded by archivalisation: the conscious or unconscious choice (determined by social and cultural factors) to consider something worth archiving. Archivistics is concerned with questions such as:

- what makes a society, an organisation or an individual create and use archives the way they do?*
- will a better understanding of the way people create and maintain archives enable us to make statements about an efficient and effective way of creating records?*

Thirty years ago, Bob Sharman, in a paper on 'Causation in historical study' introduced Karl Popper to the Australian library and archives community.² Popper posited in *The open society and its enemies* that so-called historical sources 'only record such facts as appeared sufficiently interesting to record, so that the sources will on the whole contain only facts that fit in with a preconceived theory'.³ Sharman sneered: it is clear that Popper never worked with modern records. He continued on to say that clerks did nothing more than record mechanically, their personal choice being practically irrelevant. Yet Sharman had to admit that, for example, a colonial governor would have had certain freedoms of reporting, albeit within certain limits. He surely remembered Paul Hasluck's assertion that a 'file is the reflection of the purpose of the Minister, the officer or the department who makes it...a paper may be, not a statement of what happened, but a statement of what a Minister or a department would like to have others think had happened'.⁴

Silencing the Past

Archives are not neutral: some facts count, others are excluded. 'Even when straight from the dusty archive,' writes Alan Munslow, 'the evidence always pre-exists within narrative structures and is freighted with cultural meanings - who put the archives together, why, and what did they include or exclude?'⁵

The American anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot calls this process of exclusion 'silencing the past'.⁶ Silencing (as one silences a gun) happens during the different stages in which history is formed, each of these stages influencing the other: while facts are recorded, when creating archives, during historical research, while telling the story and lastly in the creation of history.

As an example of silencing the past, Trouillot mentions the slave registers which didn't include births, neither out of carelessness, nor to keep them secret or for ideological reasons, but simply because registration only made sense when it was sufficiently certain that the child would remain alive. It wasn't worthwhile to record everything, writes Trouillot, just as it isn't necessary for a sports-journalist to mention everything that happens on the field or around it. Today in The Netherlands, neither a birth certificate nor a death certificate is made when a baby dies before its birth has been registered. A certificate will be drawn up merely stating that the child wasn't alive at the moment of declaration. In this way, the fact that the child was *born* is silenced.

Archival research is mostly confined to the derivation of meaning from the *contents* of the documents, while neglecting what is expressed by the *form* of the archival documents and the *fonds*.⁷ This may be illustrated by the headings under which information was collected, recorded, summarised and reported (eg. gypsies under 'police administration', contagious diseases under 'admiralties', explosives under 'railways'). This continues right up to our time. According to the latest Dewey decimal code used in libraries, documents about handicapped children have to be filed under 'children with disabilities'; 'sick and infirm' are now 'persons with illnesses and disabilities'; 'gypsies' can be found under 'Romany people'. But there is a great difference between the classifications employed in libraries and Internet on the one hand and archives on the other.⁸ In the former documents are classified according to abstract schemes. For archives it is not today's 'political correctness' that determines the classification, but the original context in which the creator of the records captured the information. In the colonial archives of The Netherlands Indies, the American anthropologist Ann Stoler found information about the 'danger' of contact between white children and *ayats* in reports - classified secret - concerning the political situation in the Netherlands Indies.⁹ The form and structure of the reports and their classification reveal contextual information, giving meaning to the documents.

Socio-technology

Archives are also determined by technology. If our ancestors could have used email, not only would their archives have looked quite different, the archived events would have taken another course, as the French philosopher Jacques Derrida shows in his *Archive Fever*.¹⁰ Someone writing a report with a pen puts down his feelings and thoughts in a different way from someone writing an email.¹¹ The knowledge that an email arrives within seconds, that it may immediately influence a situation, that it can elicit a direct

answer - all this influences decision-making. It transforms the process from the time when the sender - in Batavia for example - knew that an answer from The Netherlands could take several months to arrive.

Archives, writes Derrida, do not only serve to preserve an archivable account of the past. Rather, life itself and its relation with the future are determined by the technique of archiving. The photo taken of your family makes a record of that little group, but it also occasions it. To bring up Trouillot's example again: when the slave register doesn't have a column for births, these don't exist. For the registry office in The Netherlands, children who die before being registered, were never born.

Archivalisation

'The archivization produces as much as it records the event'. Derrida invented the French term *archivisation*, his English translator used *archivization*. I coined the phrase archivalisering (archivalisation). Archivalisation is the conscious or unconscious choice to consider something worth archiving: Steve Stuckey's 'moment of truth', Terry Cook's 'creative act or authoring intent or functional context behind the record'.¹² Archivalisation should be seen not only in the technological sense, as Derrida understands it, but also (and especially) in the socio-cultural sense, as in the examples by Trouillot and Stoler. In one culture, the birth of a baby is an archivable fact and is recorded; in another, it is not. *Quod non est in actis, non est in mundo* - what is not in the records, does not exist, as an old legal maxim says. Archivalisation therefore precedes archiving. In the Popperian metaphor, the searchlight of archivalisation has to sweep the world for something to light up in the archival sense, before we proceed to register, record and file it (in short, before we archive it). By distinguishing archivalisation from archiving we gain an insight into the social and cultural factors, the standards and values, the ideology, that, as Jackson Armstrong-Ingram writes, infuse the creation of archivalia.¹³

This insight is of the greatest importance, especially as changing technology alters the way records are created and controlled. In the new arena, we have to intervene at the front-end of electronic record-keeping. If we don't take archivalisation into account at that stage - what, why and how is something filed in a computer - hardly any records will be created and only little will be kept for posterity.

People and Organisations

Archivalisation is not the only factor determining whether and how actions are recorded in archives. In the following stages of records and archives

management and archival usage, socially and culturally determined *software of the mind* plays a role too.¹⁴ People - and that includes archivists ! - create, process and use archives, influenced consciously or unconsciously by cultural and social factors.¹⁵ People working in different organisations create and use their records in different ways. Even within the same organisation, different professionals - for instance, accountants, lawyers, engineers - create their records differently, not only because of legal requirements, but because they have different professional (that is, social and cultural) standards and requirements.

Richard Cox and Wendy Duff, who are involved in the important Pittsburgh Electronic Recordkeeping Research Project, write that we must 'extend our understanding of how organisations work, and how records fit into this work-environment and culture'.¹⁶ Therefore Archivistics, together with other disciplines, including organisation-sociology and organisation-anthropology, not only has to research social, religious, cultural, political and economic context, but also into organisational cultures and the people in these organisations.¹⁷ Such research will have consequences for our strategies and methodologies regarding every stage in the records continuum, where we have to look 'through the record' to the people.

Recordkeeping is a Social Activity

Yes, also study the people.¹⁸ Recordkeeping is a social activity, as Michael Piggott recently stated. Everybody creates archives, keeps, registers, selects. Everybody maintains relations with the state, province, municipality, church, school, company, hospital and family - all these relations result in records. 'Never before has so much been recorded, collected; and never before has remembering been so compulsive.'¹⁹ Every citizen is his own records manager!

The French sociologist Claudine Dardy studied housekeeping manuals that show how a household has to organise itself to produce the right paper for the right authority at the right moment. Of course, France is a society known for its focus on registration, where illegal people are called 'les sans-papiers'. But such research should be carried out in other countries and cultures too, examining the archivalisation that determines how people create their own archives. The same *people*, as Sue McKemmish has stressed, in their jobs or functions form the institutional archives that are traditionally the object of archivistic interest.²⁰ And the more often record-keeping is done by the individual employee on his or her personal computer, the more important it becomes to investigate the archivalisation process of the individual.²¹

This research will enable us to make statements about efficient and effective records and archives management.²² That is of special importance in our information society. We must also pass on this understanding to future users of archives and make them understand in turn *why* the archives were formed in a certain way and not only *what* happened.²³

Endnotes

1. The following is a revision of a chapter of my inaugural address at the accession to the Chair of Archivistics at the University of Amsterdam on Friday, 23 October 1998: F.C.J. Ketelaar, *Archivalisering en archivering* (Alphen aan den Rijn 1998). This chapter has benefited from research during the author's participation in the 1997 Research Fellowship Program for Study of Modern Archives administered by the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan and was funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities and the University of Michigan.
2. R.C. Sharman, 'Causation in historical study', in *Proceedings of the 15th Biennial Conference of the Library Association of Australia, August 1969* (Sydney 1971) pp. 369-381, reprinted in P. Biskup et al. (eds), *Debates and discourses. Selected Australian writings on archival theory 1951-1960* (Canberra 1995) p. 102.
3. K.R. Popper, *The open society and its enemies*, 2 (London 1949) p. 252.
4. P. Hasluck, 'Problems of research on contemporary official records', in *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand* 5 (1951) pp. 1-13, reprinted in Biskup et al. (eds), *Debates and Discourses*, p. 23.
5. A. Munslow, *Deconstructing history* (London-New York 1997). See also T. Nesmith, 'Archivaria after ten years', in *Archivaria* 20 (1985) pp. 13-21.
6. M.R. Trouillot, *Silencing the past. Power and the production of history* (Boston 1995) pp. 26-27, 48, 51-53.
7. A.L. Stoler, *Colonial cultures and the archival turn*, paper presented at a conference on archives and social memory, St. Petersburg, 27-29 May 1998. An earlier paper by Stoler is cited by G. Cuthbertson, 'Postmodernising history and the archives: some challenges for recording the past', in *S.A. Archives Journal/S.A. Argiefblad* 39 (1997) p. 10. See also R. Brown, 'Records acquisition strategy and its theoretical foundation: the case for a concept of archival hermeneutics', in *Archivaria* 33 (1991/1992) p. 50; C. Heald, 'Is there room for archives in the postmodern world?', in *American Archivist* 59 (1996) pp. 93-95; T. Nesmith, *Seeing with archives: the changing intellectual place of archives*, paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Canadian Archivists, Ottawa, 6 June 1997.
8. 'It is not acceptable under any circumstances to impose systems devised for the classification of library books on archives,' according to paragraph 17.2.5 of the *Standards for the development of archives services in Ireland* (Dublin 1997).
9. Another example occurs in B. Russell, 'The White Man's paper burden: aspects of records keeping in the Department of Indian Affairs, 1860-1914', in *Archivaria* 19 (1984/1985) p. 72.

10. J. Derrida, *Archive fever* (Chicago-London 1996) pp. 16-18; V. Harris, 'Claiming less, delivering more: a critique of positivist formulations on archives in South Africa', in *Archivaria* 44 (1997) pp. 132-141.
11. T. Hyry and R. Onuf, 'The personality of electronic records: the impact of new information technology on personal papers', in *Archival Issues* 22 (1997) pp. 37-44; B.J. van den Hooff, *Incorporating electronic mail. Adoption, use and effects of electronic mail in organizations* (Amsterdam 1997); E. Williams, 'Predicting E-mail effects in organisations', in *First Monday*:
http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue3_9/williams/index.html
12. S. Stuckey, 'Record creating events: commentary', in *Archives and Museum Informatics* 11 (1997) p. 270; T. Cook, 'What is past is prologue: a history of archival ideas since 1898, and the future paradigm shift', in *Archivaria* 43 (1997) p. 48.
13. R.J. Armstrong-Ingram, 'The givenness of kin: legal and ethical issues in accessing adoption records', in *Archival issues* 22 (1997) p. 33. See also H. Macneil, 'Archival theory and practice: between two paradigms', in *Archivaria* 37 (1994) p. 13.
14. G. Hofstede, *Cultures and organizations. Software of the mind. Intercultural cooperation and its importance for survival* (London 1991, 1994); D. Bearman, 'Diplomatics, Weberian bureaucracy, and the management of electronic records in Europe and America', in *American Archivist* 55 (1992) pp. 178-179; M.J.M.H. Tibosch - M.S.H. Heng, *Information systems in the context of organizational culture* (Amsterdam 1992); E. Ketelaar, 'The difference best postponed? Cultures and comparative archival science', in *Archivaria* 44 (1997) pp. 142-148.
15. N. Sahli, 'Social and cultural trends. Commentary', in *American Archivist* 57 (1994) pp. 100-104. Cook, in 'What is past is prologue', remarks: 'Archivists have become...very active builders of their own "houses of memory". And so, each day, they should examine their own politics of memory in the archive-creating and memory-formation process.'
16. R.J. Cox and W. Duff, 'Warrant and the definition of electronic records: questions arising from the Pittsburgh project', in *Archives and Museum Informatics* 11 (1997) p. 227.
17. R.C. Greer, 'A model for the discipline of information science', in H. Achleiner, *Intellectual foundations for information professionals* (New York 1987) pp. 3-25; R. Grover and R.C. Greer, 'The cross-disciplinary imperative of LIS research', in: C.R. McClure - P. Hernon (eds.), *Library and information science research: perspectives and strategies for improvement* (Norwood 1991) pp. 101-113. *Organizational informatics and social informatics* are rather technology driven, but cooperation with Archivistics might be fruitful. See R. Kling, H. Rosenbaum and C. Hert, 'Social informatics in information science: an introduction', in *Journal of the American Society of Information Science* 49 (1998) pp. 1047-1052.
18. M. Piggott, 'The history of Australian recordkeeping: a framework for research', in B.J. McMullin (ed.), *Coming together. Papers from the Seventh Australian Library History Forum...* (Melbourne 1997) pp. 41-45; K. Pomian, 'Les archives. Du Trésor des chartes au Caran', in P. Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire*. III.3. *De l'archive à l'emblème* (Paris 1992) pp. 220-221; C. Dardy, 'L'identité-papier', in *Pouvoirs du papier* (Les Cahiers de médiologie, 4) (Paris 1997) pp. 223-229; C. Dardy, *Identités de papier* (Paris-Montréal 1998).

19. J. Gillis, 'Memory and identity: the history of a relationship', in J.R. Gillis (ed.), *Commemorations: The politics of national identity* (Princeton 1994) p. 14.
20. S. McKemmish, 'Evidence of me...', in *Archives and Manuscripts* 24 (1996) pp. 28-45; Cox and Duff, op. cit., pp. 227-228.
21. D. Bearman and J. Trent, 'Research: towards testable specificity', in *Archives and Museum Informatics* 11 (1997) pp. 313-314.
22. F.G. Burke, 'The future course of archival theory in the United States', in *American Archivist* 44 (1981) pp. 42-43; T. Nesmith, 'Archives from the bottom up: social history and archival scholarship', in *Archivaria* 14 (1982) p. 26, reprinted in T. Nesmith (ed.), *Canadian archival studies and the rediscovery of provenance* (Metuchen-London 1993) p. 180.
23. Burke, op. cit., pp. 42-43; Nesmith, 'Archives from the bottom up', pp. 25-26, 179-180; P.M.M. Klep, 'About ethics of appraisal of archival records', in *Janus* 1992.2, p. 62.