Archive

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Abstract The archive is the place for the storage of documents and records. With the emergence of the modern state, it became the storehouse for the material from which national memories were constructed. Archives also housed the proliferation of files and case histories as populations were subjected to disciplinary power and surveillance. Behind all scholarly research stands the archive. The ultimate plausibility of a piece of research depends on the grounds, the sources, from which the account is extracted and compiled. An expanding and unstable globalizing archive presents particular problems for classifying and legitimating knowledge. Increasingly the boundaries between the archive and everyday life become blurred through digital recording and storage technologies. Not only does the volume of recordable archive material increase dramatically (e.g. the Internet), but the volume of material seen worthy of archiving increases too, as the criteria of what can, or should be, archived expands. Life increasingly becomes lived in the shadow of the archive.

Keywords digital, everyday life, *flâneur*, legitimation, nation-state, research, surveillance

The term archive refers to the place where government records are stored. It was initially conceived as the site where official records were guarded and kept in secrecy. The archive was part of the apparatus of social rule and regulation, it facilitated the governance of the territory and population through accumulated information. At the same time, alongside home territorial governance, there were also archives on foreign affairs to sustain the state in relation to other states and empires. State intelligence became more important and formalized in the intensifying and globalizing power struggles for hegemony. Information gathering on the part of the British Empire, for example, required something broader than an institution. It needed a whole epistemological complex to gather together not only statistical data generated by the central administration, but also the various sorts of local knowledge of the Empire and its borderlands, along with detailed knowledge of the structure of its rivals, which included material taken or pirated from Chinese, Indian and other archives (Hevia, 1999). From the perspective of the emerging European nation-states as they became drawn together and then locked into a globalized power struggle, the construction of archives can be seen as furthering governmentality and the regulation of internal and colonial populations, as well as providing foreign policy information about the strategies and globalizing ambitions of rivals.

The European state-formation process was accompanied by the quest to gather more systematic and measurable information on the population and territory. The growth of population in the 18th century was accompanied by the growth of disciplinary power, both in the sense of the emergence of new disciplines to record and analyse the characteristics of populations (statistics, demography, penology, criminology, etc.), along with the sites and institutional complexes in which this knowledge was applied to discipline and normalize bodies (in prisons, schools, clinics, hospitals, asylums, barracks, etc.) This process, while aiming at normalized, regimented and docile bodies, also individuated bodies (DeLanda, 2003). People's characteristics were observed, recorded and stored in the files. Each individual was distinguished from others by his or her case history. The individual was formed as a category of knowledge through the accumulated case records (the file) which documented individual life histories within a particular institutional nexus such as a school, prison, hospital or more

generally through governmental welfare or security agencies. Foucault's (1978) discussion of the notorious case of the multiple murders of Pierre Rivière in mid-19th century France and the ways in which this individual archive was constructed and investigated by a wide range of experts, can be seen as a significant step in this process of case history and archive formation. People's lives became seen as singularities. They were identified and individuated through their records or file, which were stored as part of a series in the archives. In effect, this was a new form of power, based not on the ideology of individualism, but the actuality of individuation, as whole populations, their bodies and life histories became documented, differentiated and recorded in the archive. In the 20th century, with the expansion of state power in the context of strong international rivalries and world wars, the state defined its situation as a permanent 'state of emergency'. States not only sought the greater mobilization of populations but also sought through surveillance and monitoring to amass archives and databases which could provide the information that would allegedly protect it against its enemies and subversive influences.

Yet while states possessed extensive archives, which were the accumulated records of monitoring its population, archives were also important for the other part of the nation-state couplet, the formation and legitimation of the nation. The archive, then, was also a crucial site for national memory. It was the building that acted as the sanctum, the place in which the sacred texts and objects were stored that were used to generate collective identity and social solidarity. Various European archives came into being in the 18th century in order to solidify and memorialize first monarchical and then state power. With the formation of the modern state we have the establishment of The National Archives in France in 1790 and the Public Record Office in England in 1838 (Steedman, 1998). In the 19th century, the archive became seen as the repository of the national history and national memory. The development of the discipline of history through figures such as Ranke in Germany and Michelet in France helped to generate the sense that it was possible to 'tell history as it was' through careful scrutiny of the treasure-house of material from the past, accumulated in the archive awaiting the historian's gaze to bring it to life (Ernst, 1999). The archives along with museums, libraries, public monuments and memorials became instruments for the forging of the nation into the people, into an 'imagined community'.

Yet for formerly subjected peoples, the post-colonial nation-states, constructing the national memory from the archive was often problematic as the archives had generally been shipped to the European imperial centres. For example, the Cuban archive is in Madrid, the Haitian archive in Nantes, France. This means that scholars from ex-colonial countries have to travel to the old imperial capitals to research information on their own national histories. As the tendency is to see the archive as a fixed located entity, the emphasis is generally given to how it changes over time. But the archive has a spatial history too. It can be destroyed, stolen, purchased and relocated. Archives of less powerful groups or nations can be moved and re-established within the territory of the powerful, who can also muster the archivists and scholars who operate with their own dominant classifications and value hierarchies to produce their own official history. Archives like antiquities and objects of art can become purchased and displaced. Shifting balances of global power may ensure that formerly powerful imperial nations such as Britain see some of their archives migrate to their successor, the USA. If one wishes to study archival material on the English poet Ted Hughes or the English novelist Alan Sillitoe, one must go to the USA and consult the Emory University Library and the Indiana University Library, respectively. Set against those who advocate archival storage in the home locality, there are the alternative arguments that important archival collections will be better housed and taken care of in their new surroundings and made available for future generations or 'humanity'. Yet such displacement means the ceding of control over access and cataloguing, which along with the financial constraints on research in a foreign country, can lead the archive to slip away from the originating collectivity. This may not be a bad thing in itself, but it has implications for national memory and habitus formation.

This sense that the archive is a key source of the nation, the basis for the construction of the national tradition, then, raises the question of who makes the history, and the extent to

which there should be wider access to those who seek to search out counter-histories. The custodians of the archive, the trustees, archivists, librarians and curators are pulled in a number of contradictory directions. There is the conflict between storing and access: the view that the archive should be as exhaustive as possible and should collect and house as wide a range of significant documents, which clashes with the view that archives should be more open to the public. With regard to storage, should the focus be on received traditions and the canon, or on local knowledge and diversity? How are decisions on what to collect, what to store, what to throw away and what to catalogue to be made? Today this is not just a question of which material to put on shelves in the stack and which to leave in unlabelled boxes in the back-rooms, but how to deal with potentially unstable electronic archives. This can be illustrated by the US Government National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, DC, which faced the problem of how to preserve, organize and catalogue the 16–24 million electronic messages accumulated by the Clinton Administration.

The accumulation of transnational information and the movement into the virtual realm of digital flows beyond the nation-state through the Internet offers further problems. Who should have the responsibility to produce an archive of the Internet? Although such a project has already been discussed and explored by a private institution, how are questions of selection, classification and access to be decided? If it is to be a global archive, would it not best function through some broad commitment to the people of the world along with a body of institutions dedicated to housing new forms of collective memory and records? Yet the current commercial domination of the Internet and the 'click and purchase' and *caveat emptor* principles would seem to pull in the opposite direction. The same problem occurs with the downsizing of the public sector within nation-states since the 1980s, which has led to commercial sponsorship of archives being sought to fill the funding gap. The problem here is that the commercial logic revolves around the need to get good returns on investment: high profile archives of the good and the great would then be preferred by sponsors to those of lesser known figures or local interest.

The capacity for the archives to yield up significant material to the researcher depends upon the modes of classification adopted by the archivists. While a simple method is to give new materials and data an accession number based upon date of arrival (Ernst, 1999), more complex cataloguing and indexing become necessary to facilitate more complex searching. Many of the classification systems in use in archives derive from the cataloguing systems that emerged with the development of the library in the 19th century. These are systems which favour disciplinary classifications and taxonomies derived from the divisions of the arts and sciences that emerged in early modern times and became refined in the 18th century European Enlightenment which had a preference for binary divisions and branching tree structures. Inter- and trans-disciplinarity and new subject areas do not fare well in such systems (Cubitt, 1998). Yet if many of these cataloguing systems are direct descendents of classification theories such as Linnaeus, and derive from a particular time, place and world view, how relevant are they in the 21st century in a world viewed through different tropes derived from flows, non-linearity and singularities with new meta-theories such as complexity theory and neo-vitalism etc.? Yet to re-classify existing material in terms of new taxonomies is always excessively time consuming. In comparison to libraries, archives usually have weaker classifications and greater amounts of material that is boxed or shelved under chronological or general headings. Hence the archive contents and relevance always contains potential surprises as the life history trajectories by which material travels backwards and forwards between the known and the unknown, between rubbish, junk and sacred priceless records and icons have a high degree of contingency.

Each classification system opens up new avenues in to the material, yet it also closes off others. It is impossible to approach the data in a way in which is can be 'made to speak' neutrally, objectively and once and for all. The archivist, librarian and professional researcher create the maps and record the journeys into the archive that produce the images we have of the possibilities of the material. Yet such classificatory schema and mapping devices can disintegrate under the volume of inchoate material which threatens to defy the impulse to order. This is the image which Borges (1999a) elaborates in his short story 'The Library of Babel', a library

in which all the books in the world in multiple translations are housed in an infinite number of galleries. A library in which it would be possible to destroy millions of volumes, yet the almost identical material would still be available in millions of others. This archivist's nightmare, in which the pattern of order is disorder, one in which scholars and archivists journey through the library in the search for some ultimate order or meaning, some mystical revelation.

This, then, is a powerful counter-image of the archive: the archive as the repository of material which has only been loosely classified, material whose status is as yet indeterminate and stands between rubbish, junk and significance; material which has not been read and researched. It has been claimed that 'archive reason is a form of reason that is devoted to the *detail*' (Osborne, 1999: 58). Yet it is clear that the archivist's gaze depends upon an aesthetics of perception, a discriminating gaze, through which an event can be isolated out of the mass of detail and accorded significance. A process of discovery, which can depend upon chance and be likened to divination. In short, the archive is the potential place of discovery, yet this discovery, the constitution of significant facts, or historical events, depends upon the contingent status of the fragments that found their way into the archive, while much of the fellow contemporary source material, the alleged key to the richness of lived culture and everyday life from which it arose as imperfect recordings, lies destroyed or at best undiscovered. Yet once in the archive, finding the right material which can be made to speak may itself be subject to a high degree of contingency – the process not of deliberate rational searching, but serendipity. In this context it is interesting to note the methods of innovatory historians such as Norbert Elias and Michel Foucault, who used the British and French national libraries in highly unorthodox ways by reading seemingly haphazardly 'on the diagonal', across the whole range of arts and sciences, centuries and civilizations, so that the unusual juxtapositions they arrived at summoned up new lines of thought and possibilities to radically re-think and re-classify received wisdom. Here we think of the *flâneur* who wanders the archival textual city in a half-dreamlike state in order to be open to the half-formed possibilities of the material and sensitive to unusual juxtapositions and novel perceptions.

In this sense 'the archive is also a place of dreams' (Steedman, 1998). It offers the delights of discovering records and truths that have been hidden or lost, of resurrecting the past. Here the archive is a place for the researcher both to be alone and at home. A place where the researcher can seek to find his or her identity through the process of historical identification, a place to search for images in the past which can summon up or confirm some sense of a lost self. A place where the strange and uncanny (Freud's *unheimlich*) can act as a substitute to lead us back to the homely (*heimlich*) and familiar. Hence the archive is a place for dreams and revelation, a place of longing where the world can turn on the discovery of an insignificant fragment: a place for creating and re-working memory.

This may not just be the activity of the solitary researcher wandering through the scholarly or official archives, but the activity of individuals in everyday life who seek to preserve documents, photographs, diaries and recordings to develop their own archives as memory devices. In short, the archive may become a project or an aspiration, a site for the production of anticipated memories by intentional 'post-national imagined communities' (Appadurai, 2003). The 'diasporic archive' or the 'migrant archive' can be seen as an attempt by migrant groups to engage in imaginative and creative work to form new collective memories, which are distinct from the official memories of the host and former home societies. Such an archive is seen as an active aspiration, a tool for reworking desires and memories, part of a project for sustaining cultural identities.

In addition to the sense that there will be attempts to construct archives as prosthetic memory devices for the re-constitution of identity, to invent a place to be at home, there is also the sense that this process will always escape us through the irruption of involuntary memories triggered off by the sedimented associational chains of the objects and images that occur as we move through the landscapes of the modern city. Hence Walter Benjamin (2000) focused on the fragments, the bric-a-brac and detritus of modern urban life which could all effectively be seen as recording devices for broken and incomplete memory traces. For

Benjamin the city was an archive, an archive already in ruins, in which the minutiae of everyday life (the decorations on buildings, ironwork, street signs, advertising bills, posters, window displays, etc.) all have the capacity to speak. Yet these fragments could only speak the language of broken, incomplete allegories, summoning up half-formed memories which appeared vividly as in a lightening flash and then were gone (Featherstone, 1998). Benjamin's method of montage and juxtaposition and the elaborate and original classification he devised for his collection of material in his unfinished *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project) were the results of his reflections on the architectonics of the archiving process.

Today, the will to archive is a powerful impulse in contemporary culture. This could be stimulated by the same impulse that encouraged the development of modern Western encyclopaedias: the sense that the modern world is generating new experiences, new tastes and new recording technologies, at a rate that defies organization. Encyclopaedias were both a symptom and an attempt to manage this flood, to impose some classification and ordering on potentially disturbing chaos. Yet the balance is by no means an easy one to achieve, as Borges (1999b) suggests in his short story 'Funes, his Memory'. Ireneo Funes, a Uruguayan youth, suffers a fall from his horse which alters his memory. He then experiences the opposite of memory loss, so that he now sees everything and remembers everything indelibly in full transparency. The detail of every leaf of every tree and the shape of every cloud in the sky at each moment in his life can now be subjected to recall. The richness of the difference of each particularity experienced at each moment suggests that every thing deserves to be granted a different name each time it is noticed. To simplify the resultant complexity Ireneo decides to develop a new particularistic numbering system to classify his various experiences in life. Yet he then calculates that if he started with his childhood, to make this numbering classification and retrieval system would take many times his life time to complete. This is the paradox of an imbalance between subjective and objective culture that Simmel (1997) referred to at the turn of the century. To record and archive a life becomes a theme in modernism as we find in the writings of Marcel Proust's *À la Recherché du temps perdu*. We also think of the French installation artist Christian Boltanski, who sought to collect and display all the documents pertaining to his life (Hobbs, 1998).

Archive reason with its thirst for detail sees everything as potentially significant and archivable (Featherstone, 2000). Today the new information technologies expand our capacity to record everything: to be is to record and to record in volume means to classify, index and archive. Yet the will to archive runs up against the speed and flexibility of the technologies which undermine stable classification and indexing and threatens to pile classificatory systems onto classificatory systems on the one hand, and provide immediate access to un-formed, or de-formed, life and information flow as against form, on the other. Knowledge distributed in information flows and networks differs in many ways from the ledger on the shelf in the archive. Meaning ceases to be contained in a bounded physical textual form, the page or document, but is able to flow through network nodes. With hypertexting the document ceases to be the archivable reference point and the searcher can jump rapidly across a whole range of documentary sources and produce novel inventive juxtapositions (Lynch, 1999). The archive ceases to be physical place, housed in grand buildings such as national libraries, and informational control and formation ceases to be in the form of the panopticon with its bureaucratic forms of control and surveillance. Rather the decentralized digital archive takes the form of a database in which, depending on the access coding, knowledge becomes freer to flow through decentred networks. The danger is that their knowledge will no longer be contained in a singular system in which all the elements are articulated into a unified corpus. The danger is of unperceived degradation – that what has been referred to as 'a cancer culture' will develop within the digital archive, as dissociated cellular elements are re-associated into linear distributions and one cell's identifying code is transcribed into others in a generative chain (Lynch, 1999).

With the digital archive we see a move away from the concept of the archive as a physical place to store records, so that culture depends upon storages (libraries, museums, etc.), to that of the archive as a virtual site facilitating immediate transfer. The notion of immediate data

access and feedback replaces the former data separation (the file in the box on the shelf) which created the differences out of which an archive order was constructed and reconstructed. The digital archive then should not be seen as just a part of the contemporary 'record and storage mania' facilitated by digital technologies, but as providing a fluid, processual, dynamic archive, in which the topology of documents can be reconfigured again and again. The digital archive then presents new conceptual problems about the identity, distinctiveness and boundaries of the datum and the document. Like the earlier shifts in the balance between life and form, the shifts in the digital archive between flows and classification take us to the heart of the questions about the constitution, formation and storage of knowledge in the current age.

The decentred digital archive parallels the development of theoretical writings on the archive by Foucault and Derrida. Here the emphasis is upon the radical instability and contingency of the archive, the archive as a decentred structure, which generates signification. Foucault (1972) reformulates the archive as archaeology and shifts the meaning of the archive away from the unifying structure we find in traditional humanist accounts to a system in which a multiplicity of discourses are created from a given set of data. The emphasis moves to fluid and complex archival traces, in which the archive cannot provide a direct access to the past, but only a textual refiguring of it. The archive fever is the attempt to return to the lived origin, to the everyday experience which are the sources of our distorted and refracted memories whose transience and forgetting makes us uneasy (Derrida, 1996). The notion of the archive is endorsed by theories of the centrality and knowability of the subject: here archives can be seen as 'encyclopaedic image repositories' (Kemp, 1998: 37). The archive can be regarded as a paradigmatic entity as well as a concrete institution.

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