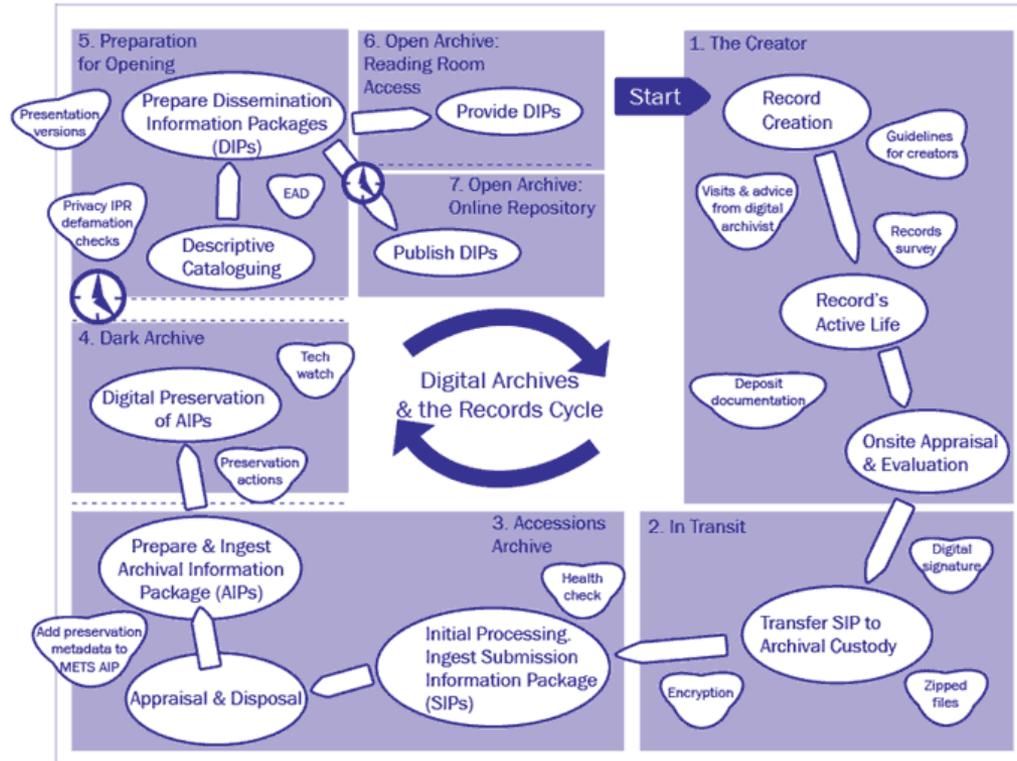


Performing the Archive

Archivists as Editors of Knowledge

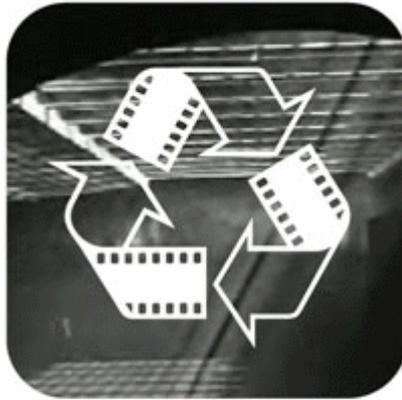


Julia Noordegraaf, University of Amsterdam

<http://www.celluloidremix.nl>



**CELLULOID
REMIX.NL**



**CELLULOID
REMIX.NL**

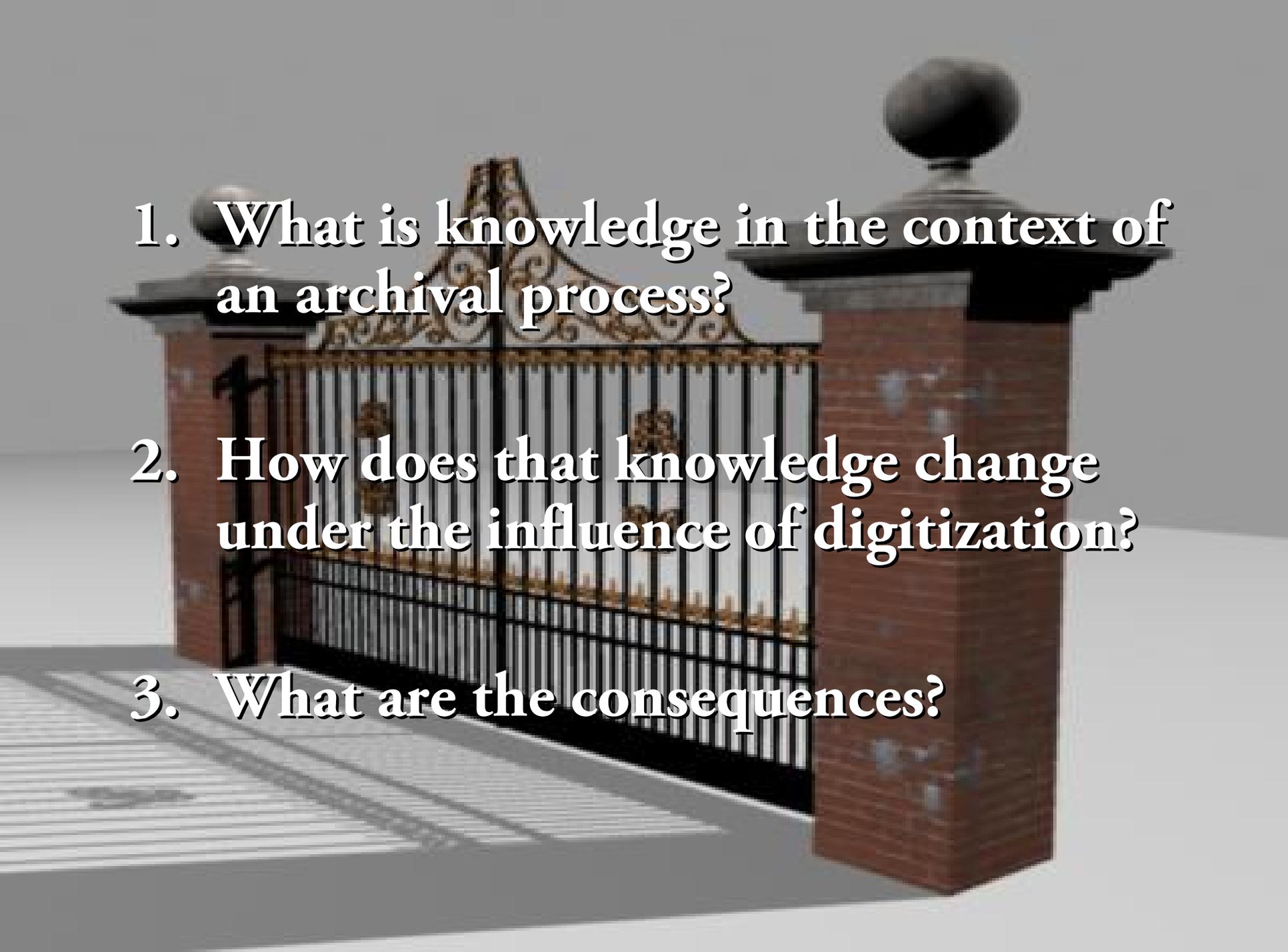


**CELLULOID
REMIX.NL**

<http://celluloidremix.blip.tv/file/2544324/>

Digitization and the Gatekeepers of Knowledge





1. What is knowledge in the context of an archival process?

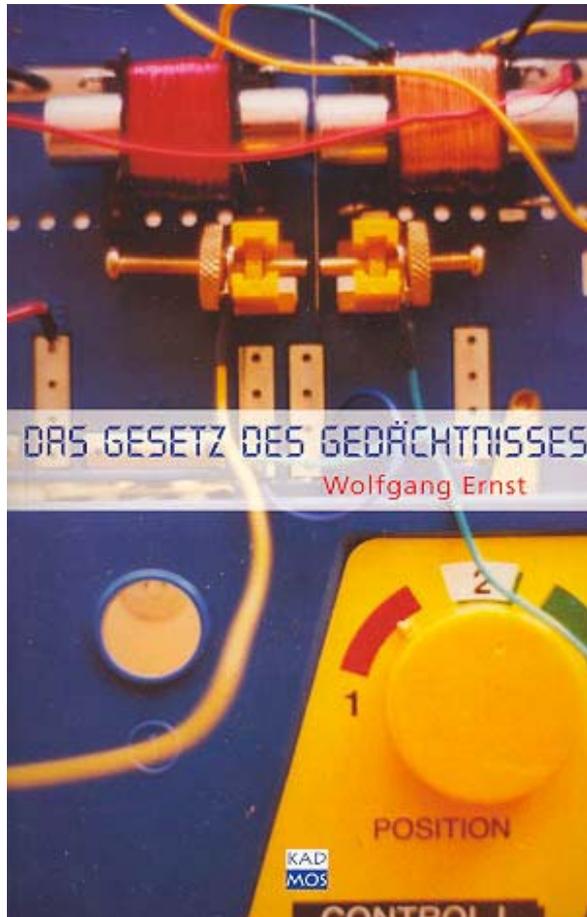
2. How does that knowledge change under the influence of digitization?

3. What are the consequences?

1. Knowledge in an AV Archive

- Audiovisual records are sources of the *mediated past*
- Knowledge is *constructed*

2. Impact of Digitization



- The object loses its exclusivity towards other forms of data object
- The object is latent and dynamic

Wolfgang Ernst, *Das Gesetz des Gedächtnisses: Media und Archive am Ende (des 20. Jahrhunderts)* [The Law of Memory: Media and Archives at the End (of the 20th Century)]. Berlin: 2007.

“The archival infrastructure in the case of the Internet is only ever temporary in response to its permanent, dynamic rewriting. Ultimate knowledge (the old encyclopedia model) gives way to the principle of permanent rewriting or addition (Wikipedia). The memory spaces geared to eternity are replaced by series of temporally limited entries with internal expiry dates that are as reconfigurable as the rhetorical mechanisms of the *ars memoriae* once were.”

Wolfgang Ernst, ‘Underway to the Dual System: Classical Archives and/or Digital Memory.’ In Dieter Daniels and Günther Reisinger, eds. *Netpioneers 1.0: Contextualizing Early Net-based Art*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010: 86.

Participatory Knowledge

The screenshot shows the Waisda? website interface. At the top, the title "Waisda?" is displayed with a television icon. Below the title, there are three instructions: "Kies een video." (Choose a video), "Vul woorden in die omschrijven wat je ziet en hoort." (Fill in words that describe what you see and hear), and "Je scoort punten als jij en iemand anders tegelijkertijd hetzelfde woord invullen." (You score points when you and someone else fill in the same word at the same time). The main content area features four video thumbnails, each with a "Kies deze" (Choose this) button. The thumbnails are labeled: "Bier doet meer lang in water", "Barenstien dop (1988 - 1999)", "Bier doet meer lang in water", and "Barenstien dop (1988 - 1999)". Below the thumbnails, the URL "http://waisda.nl/" is visible. The bottom section of the page is divided into four columns, each with a title and a list of items: "Waisda? hebben", "Eendagsvliegen", "Reegste troffers", and "Kotlofoe bloggers". Each column has a "Je uw positie" (Your position) label. The footer contains logos for "Waisda?", "KRO", and social media icons for Twitter and YouTube.

www.waisda.nl

Motivation for social tagging:

1. bridging the semantic gap;
2. enriching collections with factual and contextualized information;
3. strengthening the connection between the archive and (potential) users;
4. implementing user-generated metadata in the digital workflow.

Participatory Knowledge



<http://newspapers.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/title/35>

'Mode 2' Knowledge:

- socially distributed
- application-oriented
- trans-disciplinary
- subject to multiple accountabilities

Helga Nowotny, Peter Scott and Michael Gibbons, "Introduction. 'Mode 2' Revisited: The New Production of Knowledge." *Minerva* 41 (2003): 179–194.

The Archivist as Editor





Performing the Archive: Archivists as Editors of Knowledge

Julia Noordegraaf, University of Amsterdam

Paper presented at the conference *Reimagining the Archive: Remapping and Remixing Traditional Models in the Digital Age*. UCLA School of Film & Television, Los Angeles, 12-14 November 2010.

[title slide]

Introduction

[slide Celluloid Remix]

Last year, the Netherlands Filmmuseum, now Eye Film Institute Netherlands, organized a remix contest called Celluloid Remix. The museum chose 21 digitized film fragments from the period 1917-1932 and made them available online for creative reuse by professional and amateur filmmakers.

[clip Misja Jonker, Old&New: <http://celluloidremix.blip.tv/file/2544324/> [1'23"]]

What you see is one example of one of the 54 films made, Misja Jonker's view on how the old can be presented in new ways. Out of the 54 contributions the jury selected one winning film – a made by Jata Haan, a graduate from our master program and now employed at Eye as digital file manager.

Obviously, the digitization of audiovisual archival material allows for new types of interaction with this heritage. It can be made available online for purposes of entertainment, learning, and creative reuse.

[slide central concern]

In my book *Performing the Archive* I investigate the impact of these new forms of reuse on audiovisual archival practice.

My central concern is: how do these developments affect the status of the status of the audiovisual archive as a gatekeeper of knowledge?

In the book I take digitization as a starting point, but argue that its effects on the status of audiovisual heritage as a source of knowledge also occur in older forms of reuse of archival material, such as artists reusing archival footage in compilation films and film and video installations, or media producers reusing archival footage in new radio or television programs.

Today: I will limit my presentation to the effects of digitization. I will start with two questions:

[slide questions]

1. What is knowledge in the context of an audiovisual archive?
2. How does that knowledge change under the influence of digitization?

After that, I outline the consequences of these developments for the archival process.

1. What is knowledge in the context of an audiovisual archive?

[slide knowledge AV archive]

1. When talking about 'knowledge' in relation to audiovisual archives, I mean that audiovisual recordings are sources about the past *as constructed and distributed by audiovisual media* – we preserve audiovisual records because they are sources about our mediated past.
2. I take a view on knowledge not as universal, timeless and independent of the observer but as constructed and situated – that is, bound to a certain agents, times and places; and as produced in relation to specific social processes, infrastructures and events. For me, the knowledge related to audiovisual archival sources is constructed not only through the media, but also throughout all phases of the archival process, from acquisition, selection, appraisal, description, preservation and restoration to the various forms of access and reuse.

2. How does that knowledge change under the influence of digitization?

[slide book Ernst]

The German media scholar Wolfgang Ernst in his book *Das Gesetz des Gedächtnisses* of 2007 investigates the implications of digitization for the way we conceptualize archives from a technological and archaeological perspective.

With digitization archival documents are transformed into binary code. According to Ernst, this has two effects:

1. the object loses its exclusivity towards other forms of data object – at the level of materiality, all digital files look the same;
2. the object is latent and dynamic, in that every time it is retrieved it is recreated.

As a consequence, the object of archiving changes fundamentally. What is actually archived is the source code, resulting in a 'latent archive' – a collection of source codes from which the content can be recreated.

A key change in the archival process is that it no longer focuses on the content of the files, but rather on creating meaningful links between them, what Ernst calls their 'logical interlinking.' This obviously has a great impact on the knowledge created by and stored in the archive, and I quote: [slide quote Ernst]

The archival infrastructure in the case of the Internet is only ever temporary in response to its permanent, dynamic rewriting. Ultimate knowledge (the old encyclopedia model) gives way to the principle of permanent rewriting or addition (Wikipedia). The memory spaces geared to eternity are replaced by series of temporally limited entries with internal expiry dates that are as reconfigurable as the rhetorical mechanisms of the *ars memoriae* once were.¹

This uncertainty about the value of these document, about what they *mean*, exactly, is also fed by the at least potentially **participatory nature of knowledge and metadata** on archival material that results from the various experiments with social media. I give you two examples of this:

1. [slide Waisda?] **Waisda? Roughly translates as ‘What’s that’**: Video Labelling Game, developed by the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision (national broadcasting archive); players watch same clip of TV program and assign keywords or tags to it. Points for each tag chosen by others, and bonus points if your tag is picked up by others shortly after.

[slide motivation] Motivation of cultural heritage institutions like S&V for engaging in social tagging:

1. bridging the semantic gap between the terminology used by professionals and the search terms of end users;
2. enriching collections with factual and contextualized information;
3. strengthening the connection between the archive and (potential) users;
4. implementing user-generated metadata in the digital workflow.

This involvement of various other actors in production of metadata on archival content has significant consequences for status of AV archives as gatekeepers of knowledge. If these user-generated metadata are actually implemented it entails a **shift from authoritative knowledge** – metadata created and managed by professionally trained cataloguers – **to participatory knowledge**: the Wikipedia model.

That brings me to my second example, directly related to Wikipedia: **GLAM-WIKI** [slide **GLAM-WIKI**]. GLAM-WIKI is a collaboration between the cultural sector – summed up in the acronym as Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums – and Wikipedia. Previous projects: at the Smithsonian, the British Museum, and the Children’s Museum of Indianapolis. This fall, Europeana, the European Digital Library, has invited one of the so-called Wikimedians, Liam Witty, to think about possible contributions of Wikipedia to their online archive of cultural heritage.

Example of what that could be like: <http://newspapers.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/title/35>.

[slide **Mode 2 knowledge**]

These are clear examples of what Helga Nowotny, Peter Scott and Michael Gibbons have called **‘Mode 2’ knowledge**: knowledge that is

- socially distributed
- application-oriented
- trans-disciplinary
- and subject to multiple accountabilities.

This is a type of knowledge that, in their view, replaces the old paradigm of scientific discovery, labeled ‘mode 1,’ with its emphasis on the hegemony of theoretical or experimental science, an internally-driven taxonomy of disciplines and by the autonomy of scientists and their host institutions, the universities – and, I would add, other gatekeepers of knowledge such as archives and museums.

In my view, it is not a question of *whether* ‘mode 2 knowledge’ will be the future, but *when*.

3. Consequences

This does not mean that in the near future anyone will become an archivist [as Rick Prelinger seems to suggest in his keynote lecture]. First, the infrastructures of ‘mode 1’ knowledge are pretty hard-wired. Besides, I believe there will still be a need for arbiters of taste: people that can separate sense from nonsense and have an important role in the valuation of audiovisual archival material.

In fact, with digitization the role of metadata as a site for the validation of the material will only become more important: in digital environment, to know what something is, one has to rely on the metadata. Wolfgang Ernst argues that in a digitized archive, metadata are in fact the only true archival elements, since the traditional archival principles of evidential and information values, provenance, and levels of arrangement and description are primarily located in these metadata.

[slide Archivist as Editor]

In each case: **the model of the archivist as the creator and guardian of these metadata yields to a model whereby the archivist acts as an editor of knowledge and information generated by others.**

To some extent this has always been the case: use of program schedules for data on television or radio programs, for example. But nowadays the range of incoming metadata has grown:

- there are data generated by non-human actors, such as cameras and other recording equipment that generate data on the time and place of a recording and attach it to the digital file.
- and there are new metadata generated by various groups of users – the Wikipedia model.

Conclusion

In my book I argue that we should rethink the archive as dynamic, performative – conceiving of the archive as a process rather than as a collection of documents with a fixed meaning.

If we think of archives as performative, we can acknowledge that:

1. Archival records go through lifecycles of use that influence their status as sources of knowledge about the mediated past. In order to know what these records mean, to understand what they evidence, we need to track and map out these lifecycles of use in new metadata schemes;
2. Besides, this view allows us to acknowledge that the attribution of meaning and value is a dynamic, active process, involving various human and non-human actors. In order for an archive to perform up to par, it should take this into account – it should have a clear answer to how this fact can be accounted for in the various steps of the archival process.

So for me, the future role of the archivist is not a gatekeeper but rather an *editor of knowledge*.

[slide confusing road sign]

I do not believe that the validating role of information professionals will disappear; we still need arbiters of taste who can assess the quality of digital content and information – perhaps now more than ever before. At the same time: archivists should acknowledge that their

appraisal decisions are not objective and based on ‘universal truth’ by documenting the motivation behind those decisions, and by acknowledging the trajectory of the performance of archival material.

Thank you for your attention.

END

¹ Wolfgang Ernst, ‘Underway to the Dual System: Classical Archives and/or Digital Memory.’ In Dieter Daniels and Günther Reisinger, eds. *Netpioneers 1.0: Contextualizing Early Net-based Art*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010: 86.

Abstract Performing the Archive: Archivists as Editors of Knowledge

Julia Noordegraaf, Universiteit van Amsterdam

The proliferation of digital technologies has changed the way we perceive of and use audiovisual archives and their holdings. As Rick Prelinger, founder of the online collection archive.org recently pointed out, YouTube has become the standard of what people expect audiovisual archives to be – unlimited online access and active user participation have become crucial for an archive’s visibility and public existence. Although the institutions still function as the principal gatekeepers – if only because of copyright restrictions – the emergence of virtual archives and online portals is changing the relation between the keepers and users of audiovisual heritage. Every presentation adds new layers of meaning to the material and users are becoming experts, challenging the role of the archivist as principal expert on the knowledge the collection represents.

In my book *Performing the Archive* I investigate the implications of this reframing of audiovisual heritage for the epistemology of the archive. The aim is twofold: first, to provide insight into the consequences of reframing audiovisual heritage for the knowledge the objects represent and second, to propose a re-conceptualization of the audiovisual archive as a space that acknowledges the dynamic, changing meaning of its holdings. I study a number of cases that demonstrate the various shifts in power and knowledge related to the displacement audiovisual heritage, from virtual portals of film and television archives to the reuse of archival holdings by artists and filmmakers. The approach is archaeological in that the exploration of virtual portals and archives serves as a starting point for exploring earlier examples that had a similar effect, such as the reuse of colonial film in compilation films and multimedia installations. The theoretical framework comprises ideas from Film and New Media Studies on the meaning of audiovisual heritage, debates from Archival Studies on the power of the archive and studies from the field of Epistemology on the shifts in knowledge that the displacement of audiovisual heritage entails.

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