

**A project in partnership between the
French Research Center in Social Sciences (CEFRES –
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PIs: Benedetta Zaccarello (CEFRES) and Muthukrishnan
Kannan (IFP)**

Whether the term is traced back to the ancient Greek *arche*, “the beginning”, the injunction and rule, the illustrious antiquity, or to the Latin *arca*, a box for safe-keeping, which preserves, transmits and protects, the notion of archive refers to the journey in space and time of any trace worthy of its name.

The archive is characterized by dynamics of *transfer*, passage and disparities, which conjure the various temporalities it spans, and thus melds different moments and cultural horizons. Hence, it is from the onset a *transcultural* phenomenon in so far as it makes connections and fosters a dialogue between various, displaced forms of the cultural and intellectual life. The archive therefore carries and conveys interrogating viewpoints toward an object constructed by these very same outlooks, as the archive is shaped by the interrogations are casted on it.

A matrix of meanings endlessly reassessed in the course of its history along the stratifications of classifications and the interpretations it stirs, the archive can be understood not only as a research object but also as a device, a technology and a network of practices. To create a new archive is an act pertaining to a choice: it brings light upon complex dynamics of selection and thus, value assignments (including economic and asset values). There is no such thing as a classification without an interpretation, and such documentary organism cannot survive without the will to bolster a constant dialogue between present times and the past questioned in the present through the scrutiny of the archive.

Seen from this perspective, the constituting of an archive, and its ensuing preservation, are as many elements allowing us to “deconstruct” the history or stories of our own civilizations. Indeed, such document-“organisms” embody the self-image produced by a period through the creative reading of its own past, as evidenced and founded in the archival heritage. Though one can read the cultural practice of the archive as the projection of a phantasy of an original source, an image of a past that would become a form of power or injunction, the intrinsic political value of the archives can be grasped whenever they allow us to face any ideological and instrumental appropriation of texts. For the latter’s documentary matrices virtually contain an infinite plurality of interpretations. As archives recall us of the impossibility to achieve an ultimate, objective truth (for they would be unvoiced without the interpretation process prior to any utterance), the archives point to the limits of hermeneutical possibilities themselves: the complexity of the documents and of their historical and cultural anchorage sets limits to reading games.

In the light of such interrogations, the archive cannot be reduced to a storage place nor to the array of preserved documents. It is understood here as a dialogical network of cultural practices which stretches in time and space, and whose core nature is to make this diachronical and transcultural dialogue happen. For such practices and deeds shape the very idea of archives and determine its semantic implications.

How could one deny for instance that the question of filing in the digital age has transformed our view on the archive as it draws considerable attention to a notion less widespread before the “digital turn”? Not only did digitalization change and reinvest the notion of archive, but the network of notions referring to the various deeds performing the life of an archive is shaped anew. What do filing, preserving, giving public access to, or interrogating mean? And if all these notions evolve in as much as they refashion the practices they are associated to on the one hand, and their relationship to knowledge and skills on the other hand, how should the notion of archive and its evolution be understood?

To answer such questions so as to intercross cultural horizons, Benedetta Zaccarello and Muthukrishnan Kannan have designed an interdisciplinary, international rotational seminar between Prague and Pondicherry. A kick-off workshop will be organized in India, at the IFP, in March 2019.

The idea is to explore the notion of archive from what one may call a stereoscopic point of view as two perspectives, Indian and European, will be brought together. What is an archive from the European and from the Indian points of view? How may these points of view tell a different history and rely on different traditions? How are these perspectives given shape in the filing practices, from preservation to the uses of archives in both cultural contexts?

Interrogating the various traditions surrounding the archives in India and Europe certainly means to understand how memory and its transmission are approached in both cultural contexts. Indeed, radically different medias are used in each, which reiterate a dissimilarity of paradigms and values. Whereas European culture trusted paper and writing to cross times, the Indian tradition tends to be orally transmitted and leaves to the performance of recitation the task to pass on the most valuable knowledge, in accordance with the primacy of hearing stressed by the Vedic tradition.

Yet, the *archive-function* is expressed in various cultural contexts through very different technologies and practices. Comparing them can help us understand their many layers. Should the archive be considered from the sole documentary practices it entails in the European context, it could be reduced to an imported colonizing tool in the Indian subcontinent. In this respect, the legitimacy of the archival practice in a post-colonial context has even been questioned. But such perspective already prescribes a Eurocentric conception that limits the archive to the forms shaped up by memory transmission in the West.

Such vision loses its ground when the notion of archive is considered as a network of practices and knowledge production. For the above-mentioned archive-function can be ensured in a multiplicity of manners, involving various techniques and technologies. If the archive is seen as an answer elaborated by the desire to cope with the short-circuits between various moments of a civilization, or between the various cultural forms they embody, then it becomes possible to observe *how* such aspiration unfolded in various times and places.

As they travel through time, archives end up creating bridges between distant spaces. Obviously, they do so as they keep the trace of knowledge circulation and intellectuals’ journeys across the world. But not only. Let’s consider, for instance, *oral* archives, which are growingly taken into account in Europe in different research disciplines, from anthropology to the history of philosophy and subaltern studies. Obviously the documents, objects of study and practices involved in the European context have little in common with the oral transmission of Indian sacred texts. Nevertheless, the various performative forms borrowed by oral memory and

uttered speech in both contexts can be compared on the basis of their common aim to give a tangible form to the archive-function.

The seminar thus aims to provide a survey on the live practices of archive and filing, along with the history of a few institutions where these cultural forms take shape. We would like to describe what such *function* yields in various cultural contexts and the common desire of memory transmission which are revealed.

To do so, we would like to interview the actors of the practices involved in the archive in both contexts: they will be invited to share their experience during the seminar. Their point of view may help better understand the various languages borrowed by the archive through times and spaces. What are its forms and modalities in two seemingly unremittingly distant cultural landscapes? These aspects are, in our view, crucial at a time when the transition to digital archives imposes a virtual *Koine* crossing all five continents, transforming radically the very medium of the transmission.

In practical terms, the seminar aims to:

- 1- study the notions of archive, classification, filing, cataloguing, and so forth, from an experimental observation of practices and technologies sustained by these notions
 - 2- observe the practices linked to manuscript archives, with a special focus on the composition of theory, marked by specific intercultural stakes as well as by a will of universalization
 - 3- lead a survey on the practices of filing in today's India
 - 4- foster a network of researchers and research institutions involved in the topic
- The seminar will be launched by a kick-off workshop organized in March 2019 at the French Institute of Pondicherry.
 - The outcomes of the seminar will be published in English in a monograph dedicated to the notion of archive in Europe and India, to be submitted to the editorial board of the "South Asian Perspectives" collection at the French Institute of Pondicherry.
 - The seminar will rely upon a partnership with the School of texts and records of the Jadavpur University in Kolkotta, with the Institute of Philosophy and the Masaryk Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences.
 - This seminar is encompassed within a broader project whose first step has been the creation of an international research network around the archives and their intercultural stakes.