
make a “curriculum tree” where the programs or the fragments are organized according to the subject and the textbook used. Schoolteachers participated and helped to select materials. For universities we also started to deliver thousands of programs online. Here it is the universities’ staffs themselves who search the database, view programs and develop new meanings and entries to make the programs useful for their students. We started a dedicated YouTube channel, and we started a 24 hour theme channel. For our theme channel we have worked with a group of editors who develop the format and select the programs for the TV audience.

I am not suggesting that every archive has to develop new services for every group of users, as we did in Hilversum. Listen to Google: try to be really, really good at one thing. That is difficult enough. And it will change your outlook on your own archive. If you decide that you want to concentrate on the general public, this is what I recommend most: try to think of the archive as a physical place that is open to the public and where the public would want to come. Try to imagine what that archive would look like.



This is the Media Experience we built in Hilversum. It has a provokingly beautiful building and inside is a carnival of colour and experiences. People walk through pavilions filled with radio, film, television and music. They look at old programs, play games, shoot their own little television programs, present radio shows and experience special effects. It is a great success and it completely changed the way people in Holland looked at our archive. This is what they really, really want, and now they can find it.



The future for archives is in understanding the meaning our archives have for different users. Listen to your users, and all else will follow. Begin by making your collections searchable on the web; if they can't find you out there, they will go somewhere else in a heartbeat. And if you really want them to enjoy your archive: build them an experience.

Sunrise or Sunset? The Future of Audiovisual Archives

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This article is an adaptation of a PowerPoint presentation given at the 2009 IASA Conference.

We have analogue attitudes in a digital age...people consume content in a very fluid way. What were once separate media are now increasingly interconnected and exchangeable. We no longer have a TV market, a newspaper market, a publishing market. We have, indisputably, an all-media market.

We must have genuine independence in news media. It is essential that a fair price can be charged for news to people who value it. The only reliable, durable and perpetual guarantor of independence is profit.

Thus the views of James Murdoch, who had this and much more to say in the McTaggart lecture, delivered at the Edinburgh International Television Festival a few months ago.

Convergence is real. Daily we are presented with new ways in which words, images and sounds intersect through a widening range of devices.

Constant change is here to stay. The pundits say that broadcast television and newspapers are dying. Our mobile phones now have so many options that an old fashioned voice call seems a rather quaint minor function. Our desktops have shrunk to netbooks, the Goliaths compete to control tomorrow's optical and satellite networks, while the world's entire printed heritage, it seems, is being digitised by Google. The long predicted demise of radio and cinemas may be slow in arriving but the modes of delivery are increasingly digital.

The commercial gatekeepers of the public memory, like Mr Murdoch, are confronting the champions of free access. As the duration of copyright control stretches ever further into the future, they seem to be winning. So why would there still be a need for public institutions when commercial providers offer such vast data banks – for a nominal fee, of course? Does the new world of digital convergence mean public archival institutions are outmoded? Who still needs to go to a library when it's all downloadable at home?

Several people in recent years have seriously put this case to me. Mr Murdoch places his trust in profit and regards public institutions like the BBC as a menace. Right now, it's an interesting sentiment as the world climbs out of a greed-induced financial meltdown.

Lord Puttnam, British film producer and Chair of Patrons of FOCAL, the Federation of Commercial Audiovisual Libraries, has a slightly different take on the topic of convergence. Speaking at a FOCAL event in 2006, he looked into his crystal ball:

All national archives will be 'under one roof' one day... I don't expect that to happen in my lifetime – the forces of reaction are just too powerful – but it will happen one day, because you cannot continue to make a coherent intellectual or economic case for artificially dividing archival responsibility by the technology with which it was recorded. Sooner or later the National Film Archive should fall under the organisational auspices of the British Library.

If archive is not 'democratised', Microsoft, Time Warner AOL and Google are gearing up to 'own' history. Left to itself the 'market' is far more likely to close down than open up optimal pathways to knowledge for those without the money to pay for access.

Lord Puttnam is possibly not on the same page as Mr Murdoch when it comes to the profit motive, despite the commercial nature of FOCAL's membership. But he sees the future of public institutions, and specifically audiovisual archives, as one of *organisational* convergence – in the case of the UK, under the umbrella of a powerful British Library. He sees no intellectual or economic alternative.

Are they right? Do we face a future of mega-institutions? Or will tomorrow belong to the profit-takers: the Murdochs, the Googles and the Microsofts?

In the face of change, our institutions have not been entirely idle. Let's consider a few indicators.

UNESCO's growing Memory of the World program is based on a *philosophical* convergence: the concept of "documentary heritage", which embraces any deliberate recording of information on any carrier, from papyrus to clay tablets to audio discs to digital files, and encourages both their preservation and their accessibility on the internet. In UNESCO's view, the documentary heritage is distinct from the built or environmental heritage (covered by the World Heritage Convention) and orally transmitted culture and memory (the Intangible Heritage Convention), although all three programs are complementary and can at times coincide or overlap.

Everywhere, the collections of individual collecting institutions are being virtually, if not physically, brought under a single roof as catalogues and inventories, and both digitised and born-digital documents of all kinds, become web-accessible. Dispersed collections are being reassembled as a virtual whole.

Organisationally, we see libraries, archives, museums and galleries grouping together in councils or forums for advocacy, promotion and self protection. And while inter-institutional rivalries will always be with us, there's a greater acceptance of the need to share resources and facilities, to complement each other, to show economic and practical common sense.

What, then, of the mega-institutions envisaged by Lord Puttnam? There have been organisational mergers and realignments in recent years, as there have been for centuries. There has also been divergence – divisions, splits and new creations. To evaluate them, one has to consider the specific circumstances of each. It's never exclusively a question of practicalities or economics or even rationality. In the real world, politics, ideologies, shifting government policies, transitory circumstances and even fashions play a part too – sometimes the major part.

In an audiovisual archive we may find several distinct professions: librarianship, archival science, museology and audiovisual archiving itself – the youngest profession, and in part, a convergence and amalgam of its older sisters. And we can add a range of sometimes arcane technical, IT and scientific skills. Each field has its own sense of identity, its own professional association, code of ethics and formal qualifications.

Memory institutions have evolved, sometimes painfully, into distinct organisational types. The difference lies less in the physical or intrinsic nature of the formats they collect, than in the worldview, policies, methods and ethos they bring to their operations.

Consider a typical film or a sound recording. It may be perceived as a "government record" within a records continuum by a national archives, as a "historical document" by a library, as an artefact by a museum, or as a work of art by an art gallery. These can all be valid perceptions. Yet in an audiovisual archive it is simply a film or sound recording, in which *all* these attributes are recognized in both its intellectual and physical nature. It is perceived holistically, *in its own right*, and not as a subset or manifestation of something else. It is defined by what it is – not by what it is not. It also means that terms like "special materials" or "non-book" or "non-print", which suggest deviation from a norm, are just philosophically inappropriate.

Specialisations and depth of knowledge flourish in sympathetic environments. An institution is only as good as the quality, motivation and knowledge of its staff. And only *content* can be digitised. If users are to study, understand and enjoy the whole character of the audiovisual media, and see and handle its artefacts, the archive has to be a *place* they can come to.

Audiovisual archives come in many styles, with varying motivations and mandates, and different levels of autonomy.⁶⁸ They have widely varying technical capabilities and facilities. They have different specialisations and serve different clienteles. The field embraces, for example:

- For-profit and non-profit organisations
- A focus on part or all of the AV spectrum
- Varying geographic mandates: for example – city, provincial, regional, national
- Different legal personalities and governance
- The presence or absence of enabling legislation
- Differentiated clienteles: broad, narrow, specialized, public, private.

Or viewed typologically, we recognize

- Broadcasting archives – radio and television
- Programming archives – such as cinematheques
- Audiovisual museums – focusing on objects, technology, costumes, environments
- National audiovisual archives
- University and academic archives
- Thematic and specialised archives – for example, oral history and ethnographic
- Studio archives – subsets of production houses
- Departments or sections of general archives, libraries, museums, galleries, institutes.

Organisationally we are a very varied lot. Some archives are the holders of corporate assets. Some are independent organisations with distinct mandates of their own. Some are departments or sections of larger bodies, reflecting an aspect of the parent body's mandate. Some serve a broad public clientele; others serve very focused audiences or specialised purposes.

Case examples

Collecting institutions are specific to countries and contexts: generalizations or analogies aren't always valid. The following case examples of amalgamation, division and creation might serve to illuminate any discussion on convergence.

Library and Archives Canada (LAC)

This may be the future as Lord Puttnam sees it. It was created by the merger, in 2004, of the National Archives, the National Library and the Portrait Gallery of Canada to create “a new kind of knowledge institution”. Previously there had been at least one other merger, when the National Archives took over the Canadian Film Institute collection back in the 1970s.

There are obvious economies of scale under a single administration, with over 1100 employees and a huge state-of-the-art preservation centre at Gatineau, Quebec. LAC has adopted what some regard as radical policies, aiming to remove “arbitrary barriers and distinctions”, focus on digitisation of records through private sector and other partnerships, and reduce on-site services in favour of increased off-site services. Audiovisual archiving activities or collections are not specifically identified in its published organisation structure.

These policies have reportedly been accompanied by the elimination or downgrading of specialist librarian positions (such as music and rare books) and a move to career bureaucrats taking over management roles previously filled by archivists or librarians. Not everyone is happy. The Canadian Library Association has expressed alarm over the loss of professional expertise in top management, while others have cited declines in the currency and physical condition of parts of the collections

⁶⁸ Source: Audiovisual Archiving: Philosophy and Principles UNESCO 2004

National Film and Sound Archive, Australia (NFSA)

By contrast, Australia – which has many cultural and political similarities to Canada – has moved in the opposite direction. Over time, the original Commonwealth National Library (created in 1901) has become five separate institutions:

National Library of Australia (1960)
National Archives of Australia (1960)
Commonwealth Parliamentary Library (1960)
National Film and Sound Archive (1984)
National Portrait Gallery (1999)

This did not happen without pain or controversy. There is evidence to suggest, though, that these progressive divisions have increased, rather than diminished, the profile and collective resource base of Australia's documentary heritage.

Through an accident of history the National Film and Sound Archive didn't get its own Act of Parliament until last year. On the way, it went through a confusing name change – for a while it was known as ScreenSound Australia – and then, for five years, it was forcibly amalgamated with the Australian Film Commission to benefit from unspecified "synergies". That the NFSA emerged largely intact from this destructive marriage owed much to politics: in this case, the sustained advocacy of outside constituency groups including the Friends of the NFSA, Archive Forum and Australian Society of Archivists.

The NFSA is now a statutory authority with the same legal character as the National Library, National Museum, National Gallery and so on. It has a mandate to collect, preserve and provide access to the nation's audiovisual heritage, broadly defined. It complements the other memory institutions and it symbolises the fact that the audiovisual heritage has a cultural status equal to older forms of expression.

Hellenic National Audiovisual Archive (HeNAA)

HeNAA is a new creation – possibly the world's newest national audiovisual archive. Its activities and structure demonstrate that it occupies a position in the institutional spectrum in Greece similar to that occupied by the NFSA in Australia. Like the NFSA, it has a mandate defined in law, and it complements the roles of other institutions with which it cooperates. It was created to fill a need – to bridge a gap which was not a natural area of operation for its peers. Unlike the NFSA, it begins life with the proverbial clean sheet of paper, and without the legacy of a lengthy evolution, so its experience in developing its role will be different.

Asian Film Archive (AFA)

Set up in 2005, the AFA is a new, independent non-profit body with multi-national scope. It preserves and provides access to Singaporean and, more broadly, Asian cinema. It complements the policy and practice of the audiovisual division of the National Archives of Singapore, as well as of archives in neighbouring South East Asian countries. It has a regional, rather than simply national, perspective and thereby it fills a need. The character of Singapore as a city-state and regional hub matches this purpose. AFA works closely with the National Archives (part of the National Heritage Board) and uses its excellent collection storage facilities. It likewise works closely with the well-endowed National Library, using its public facilities for events as well as its user access mechanisms.

I pass on from collecting institutions to two international bodies that audiovisual archivists should know well.

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation)

UNESCO has given a particular privilege to the audiovisual archiving community - the World Day for Audiovisual Heritage, 27 October every year. It's a platform for advocacy: for promoting the needs, character and work of audiovisual archives and to celebrate the audiovisual heritage worldwide. It is **specific** to our field, and was established despite pressure to subsume the concept into a general World Day for archives, within which the AV heritage could never have achieved a separate profile. It was a significant gesture to our profession and our field, and we neglect its potential at our peril.

CCAAA (Coordinating Council of Audiovisual Archives Associations – www.ccaaa.org)

CCAAA is the peak forum of our field. Like the other peak memory bodies – ICOM (International Council of Museums), IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Organisations), ICA (International Council on Archives) and so on – it gives us a distinct international presence and identity on equal terms with our sister professions.

But there's a crucial difference. Unlike the other peak bodies, CCAAA has no formal relationship with UNESCO, which therefore can't formally recognize, support or fund it. Historically that relationship belongs to each of its constituents, one of which is IASA, for whom – despite increasingly overlapping memberships – cooperation and convergence has come only in small steps. To achieve the cohesion and political muscle of our opposite numbers, CCAAA members must surrender some of their independence. Can we imagine IASA doing that? Or merging with another association to improve the strategic strength of the profession?

Is there a trend?

Digital convergence will continue, whether for fun, service or profit! We follow where technology leads; we should relish its possibilities but know its limits. They are economic rather than technical. Mr Murdoch may align to the virtues of the unfettered marketplace, and the capacity of companies like his own to be the gatekeepers of history, but that only works *while they make a profit*. What doesn't earn its keep won't be kept. And what would happen to all that data if Google or – God forbid – News Corporation were to go under in the next recession? But it wouldn't, would it? Have we not fixed the global economic system for good this time?

So the best hope for the survival of collections, protection of the public memory and for the maintenance of a professional ethos, is the continuity of public institutions. There is no perfect institution, nor one whose long term existence is unquestionably assured, and I've yet to find an archive that has too much money. Institutions will continue to take many forms: no one size fits all. They will be kept honest and viable by the constant advocacy of those who work in archives, and those who support them privately or through professional bodies like IASA.

I don't see any trend changing the varied typology of audiovisual archives. Constant technology and format change is a fact of life for us, but it's not the ultimate determinant shaping mergers, separations or creations. That's more a product of history, circumstance and politics, personalities and advocacy, and it is country specific. We don't collect audiovisual *formats*: we collect audiovisual *works*, whatever their format, with their associated materials, objects, technology, knowledge and skills. Our structures should reflect that. It's hard to imagine how an audiovisual archive *as a place* will ever be redundant. Its public activities, services, access to the analog parts of its collection – these make it real, not a phantom in cyberspace.

My proof? The evidence is only circumstantial. Here at an IASA conference we're sitting in the middle of it. IASA and its fellow associations are now larger than ever. Among us we

have graduates of, and teachers in, university courses that now give formal qualifications in AV archiving, and we have a global legacy of training workshops reaching back two decades and more. The number of archives and collections continues to multiply. And with all its unrealised potential, we at last have the CCAAA. UNESCO recognises us as a profession, a field and a phenomenon.

Historically our identity has emerged slowly and, like many professions, it's still fuzzy around the edges. We have a distinctive literature, ethos, vocabulary, skills base and sets of values. We love this field with a sense of vocation.

Audiovisual archives have been around for over a century. Whether they will be prospering in 2100 will depend on their continuing necessity. Where they have disappeared in recognisable form – as very nearly happened to the NFSA in Australia – that necessity may cause them to re-emerge.

No politics please, we're archivists

Archiving is a political act. Selection and preservation decisions are political statements. Think about it. Archiving can be a health hazard in more ways than one, and there are many people besides Mr Murdoch who would like to be the gatekeepers of history. The reported destruction of archives in Honduras, following the recent coup, is simply the latest tragic case in point.

Advocacy, too, is a political act. It is also a professional responsibility. We cannot expect our aspirations, visions, and standards to be honoured or our organisations supported if we do not actively lobby for them in the public interest: ethically, persistently, and with intellectual honesty. We owe it to the public we serve. It may be hard work and against our natural inclinations. We may not achieve all we want to. We may even be seen as troublemakers. But as we live in a world of competing agendas, the character and continuity of our institutions and our work depends, ultimately, on our commitment to this. We are not passive onlookers.

I think that our profession sits neither at sunrise nor sunset, but somewhere in the morning. It has a proud pioneering history, though there are more challenges than ever – political, technological, financial, legislative and otherwise. It needs, I think, to learn the lesson of convergence within its own internal politics, so its advocacy and cohesion as a field can grow and be more effective.

We still need the visionaries and the troublemakers. But above all, we should be encouraged by how far we've come, and where we're going.