

ARCHIVAL STATES

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Rationalization of the archive: The Weimar Republic and data processing in the Third Reich

Prussia in the archives

The post-war archive: Memory in the GDR

P.S.: New options for the German archive: audiovisual memory

Archival states

"Archival states" is a double-valued expression. On the one hand, the notion refers to the fact that the memory of the state (as different from the imaginary "national" memory) consists of institutionalized archives (the *archeion* since Greek antiquity) where it consists of symbols (alphabetic letters and more recently alphanumerically coded documents). On the other hand, in a country troubled by historical experience severely in the twentieth century both vertically (temporal discontinuities 1918/19, 1945/49, 1989/90) and horizontally (fourty years of division into GDR / FRG), historic memory has been replaced by a kind of "archival" state of memory which does not provide for an emphatic time line of national history but rather a spatial co-existence of different data sets which are equally near (or distant) to the present. In a third meaning, "archival states" refers to the mediatic essence of technical memories which consist from discrete data sets which are being discontinuously reconfigured or refreshed - like a Turing machine. It was Hegel who differentiated between a mechanic memory and organic re-membrance. The archival *apparatus* is hardware; ideology takes place in its very configuration already. Its software is narratives (historiography) which operate upon these data.

Rationalization of the archive: The Weimar Republic and data processing in the Third Reich

Already during World War One in a highly mobilized economy, the only way of reducing entropical complexity to order occasionally was the flat storage of documents by *numerus currens* (the pure temporal order of occurrence) or by key-terms, replacing meaningful archival structures by pure series, reflecting the order of the temporal real itself. It required sophisticated tools of inventories to link the information on files to the actual location of data, providing an address system (vital for all operations of memory) which is not unfamiliar to data storage in *computing* today.¹ In this way, the administrative memory

1 „1929 vermeldete der Jahresbericht eine Abgabe von 1232 Aktenstücken, 1930 338, 1931 2083, 1932 25 471, 1933 3078, 1934 16310, 1935 ca. 6000. <...> Dem war nur zu begegnen, wenn man ein neues Aufstellungsprinzip einführte, das sogenannte Akzessionsprinzip. Wie die Neuzugänge hereinkamen, wurden sie in direktem Anschluß

(Registratur) of the Berlin ministry of the interior during the Weimar Republic has been coupled directly with the *Reichsarchiv*.² The archival order became a function of the working present, with the records carrying their historic value from within.³

The archive receives its records from offices and is thus linked to the state. As long as the state (a non-discursive entity) is itself being treated metaphysically on the level of discourse (as "nation", which requires the historicistic approach), its archives can be interpreted as „organically coherent“⁴, resulting in the notion of the "archival body" (*Archivkörper*) in nineteenth-century Germany.⁵ When the nation-state is troubled, this metaphor of the "archival body", expressing a somewhat historicist idea of the archive, is being replaced by the machine. Indeed, archival data processing became mechanical - the very condition for the subsequent implementation of hardware systems like the punched card.⁶

The traditional archive so far had rather been a cultural technology, the engineering of administrative memory, than a technical medium in a well-defined sense. But with the introduction of punched-card tabulating machines, the Hollerith machines (operated by IBM), which were originally introduced around 1900 to speed up the calculations of the US census but since 1933 used to filter data of Jewish population in the National Socialist regime of Germany as well, the automatization of retrieving archival mass-data has been an issue which led to speculations on the cybernetization of archival memory.⁷

The archive becomes medium in a strict sense only when it is part of a circuit with feed-back options ("online"). Thus the title of the company journal of Dehomag Berlin (the German branch of IBM) is not just metaphorical: *Der Stromkreis* (The Circuit of Current). This corresponds with the memory model of capitalism; according to the systems theory of Klaus Krippendorff⁸, capitalism simply

an den jeweils vorhergehenden aufgestellt, wobei ihre Akten eine geschlossene Nummernfolge bildeten. <...> Eine Konkordanz sollte dann dafür sorgen, daß die Kluft zwischen Lagerung und Verzeichnung überbrückt wird, die Auffindung einer Lagernummer in einem Findbuch durch eine Liste, die ihm hinten angehängt wird und neben der Lagernummer die Seite, auf der sie steht, enthält, ermöglicht wird.“ Scriverius, 59f

2 Gerhart Enders, Probleme des Provenienzprinzips, in: *Archivar und Historiker* (Festschrift H. O. Meisner), Berlin 1956, 27-44 (33f)

3 Jörn Rüsen, Geschichte sehen. Zur ästhetischen Konstitution historischer Sinnbildung, in: Monika Flacke (Hg.), *Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen Staat. Die Kunst der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR*, Berlin 1994, 28-39, Abschnitt „Das historische Manko sinnlich präsenter Vergangenheit“ (31)

4 S. Müller / J. A. Feith / R. Fruin, Anleitung zum Ordnen und Beschreiben von Archiven, für deutsche Archivare bearbeitet v. Hans Kaiser, mit e. Vorwort v. Wilh. Wiegand, Leipzig (Harrassowitz) / Groningen (van der Kamp) 1905, 4, Kapitelüberschrift § 2. On a media archaeology of archives see W. E., *Im Namen von Geschichte: Sammeln - Speichern - (Er)Zählen. Infrastrukturelle Konfigurationen des deutschen Gedächtnisses*, Munich (Fink) 2003

5 Vgl. Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, Princeton 1957

6 Pankraz Görl (München) untersucht die Automatisierung deutscher Administrations- als Informationssysteme der Zwischenkriegszeit unter dem Leitmotiv der „Rationalisierungsintelligenz“ anhand der Nachlässe von Figuren wie Erhard Dirks und Karl Eicke im Deutschen Museum (der etwa die Registratur des Kommunalarchivs in Ludwigsburg in den 20er Jahren gemäß der Ästhetik betriebswirtschaftlicher Kontenprogramme organisierte).

7 See Edwin Black, *IBM and the Holocaust*, New York (Crown) 2001

8 Klaus Krippendorff, Principles of information storage and retrieval in society, in: *General Systems* vol, 20 (1975),

demands for a memory system of *reverberating circuits* which are permanently refreshed and fed back into the system operations - as opposed to totalitarian societies based on "memory involving records", demanding for permanent archives and the storage principle. Here we come to a critical point: as long as the general data from the Reich census of May 17 were registered and calculated separately from the additional data on racial matters (genealogical origin) in the single households, the tabulating machines were not directly coupled with the deportation program.⁹ It was the head of statistics at the SS who asked for a punched card technology equipment for his department, referring to the successful use of such machinery at the Statistisches Reichsamt, Reichsbahn, Reichspost, Reichsbahn, and research institutions like Rasseforschung. Here comes the difference, which separates automated data processing from archival procedures: "The organization of file keeping today excludes any possibility of fast, time- and work-efficient data processing. In order to answer a single aspect of racial data retrieval, it would take a months-long search."¹⁰ As opposed to the old archival system, data processing by the medium of punched cards technology could answer any question almost immediately - the archive became time-critical within the frame of the Nazi genocidal program.

Prussia in the archives

Michel Foucault's very distinctive use of the term „archive“ in his *Archéologie du savoir* (Paris 1969) does not mean the totality of all received documents (since „the archive cannot be described in its totality“¹¹) nor its institutions but, more abstracted, the systems which governs the emergence and the processing of enunciations - cybernetics indeed, dealing with acts rather than files. The archive is a metonymic device that formalizes experience. According to Jacques Derrida, the tectonics of the archive is an active rather than passive medium of historic memory: "The technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event."¹² This is true for the operating system which has governed the German archive since late 19th century: the *provenance principle*, regulating that bureaucratic records keep their procedural coherence when being transferred from the offices to the state archives, as opposed to the "pertinence principle" which re-groups documents according to a systematic aspect, thus dis-membering the

15-34

9 See Friedrich W. Kistermann, Locating the Victims: The Nonrole of Punched Card Technology and Census Work, in: IEEE Annals of the History of Computing, vol. 19, No. 2, April-June 1997

10 "Vorschläge zur Erfassung des im RuS-Hauptamt ruhenden erbwissenschaftlichen und bevölkerungspolitischen Materials", 11. November 1941, p. 2., Bundesarchiv Berlin, NS 48/6

11 Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, New York 1972, 130

12 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 16-17.

generic blocks of data.

The provenance system counts for the specific German-Prussian aesthetics of the archival state: The archive belongs to the state; any other use of the term is metaphorical or mis-use. On the other hand, this implies that the essence of the Prussian state can be literally read from the structure of its archival records. Here it makes sense very directly, not just as a theoretical alternative to narrative historiography, to write the German past *archivologically*.

The post-war archive: Memory in the GDR

The challenge is not simply an ideological one, but has to be read in media-archaeological terms as well. The collapse of the East Berlin regime after autumn 1989 suddenly confronted the West German state archives with a mass of unreadable electronic data from the GDR, coinciding with a growing transformation from paper records to digital memory in West German administration itself. The return of history in 1989 on the political level coincided with the end of the traditional recording system of historiography - the alphabet.

„The experience with securing East German data files showed that the creating organizations were not the best custodians of machine-readable archives. Many data files were no longer legible and data documentation was at least incomplete or missing in most cases. Federal offices only cared for these electronic records in so far as they could use them for their purposes.“¹³ Luckily (for preservation of electronic memory), electronic data from the GDR were kept in modes close to the machine (having been written in Assembler code); unluckily, this implies a strict dependency on *Robortron* hardware which is museum pieces now. Which state archive keeps the relevant hardware for reading such a new type of documents as well? All of the sudden, parts of the memory of the GDR are not legible any more. Electronic data from former GDR computers without accompanying program description are virtually worthless (since unreadable); without code which teaches to cut streams of bytes into meaningful sections, such lists are useless and illegible. In case such a description has been preserved, the Federal Archives try to preserve these data independent from both hard- and software for future use, as "flat files", that is: sequential strings of data, accompanied by the necessary minimum of metadata. In the future, special programmes for rendering data which are at present not legible may be written; so far they can be read, but not be understood - a literally media-archivological

13 Michael Wettengel, German Unification and Electronic Records: The Example of the „Kaderdatenspeicher“, Vortragstext Annual Meeting of the Society of American Archivists, Washington, D.C., 2. September 1995, session 59: Bit by Bit: Perspectives on Managing Electronic Records; publiziert demnächst in: Seamus Ross / Edward Higgs, Electronic Information Resources and Historians: European Perspectives, Oxford UP 1996. Hier zitiert nach dem TS, 2

situation, re-addressing the question of information access, the ultimate „postmodern“ challenge (according to Lyotard), on the electronic level.¹⁴

P.S.: New options for the German archive: audiovisual memory

It was general von Seeckt who drew the consequences from World War One and successfully proposed to supplement the new Imperial Archive by visual records as well.¹⁵ The essential role of photography and film in military reconnaissance broke the absolute dominance of scriptural documents.¹⁶ But the governing system of the archive, its *arché*, prevailed - ordering images by provenance. Later, the function of the film archive was broadened to document social and cultural functions as well, being supposed to „represent in its specific way the modern German type of state“¹⁷. Most archivists thought remained sceptical and conservative when confronted with the new medium of German memory. It was the National Socialist regime which has not only been tactically aware of the new media of memory control but in fact institutionally implemented them for propaganda by centralizing the German film archive.

There had already been rudimentary projects around the MGH for a multi-media approach to the German archive (von Sickel's edition of photographic facsimiles of German medieval records and the proposed *Monumenta Germaniae iconographicae* by a former director of the German National Museum in Nuremberg, August Essenwein as a pictorial equivalent to the edition of the MGH¹⁸). What is still lacking, though, is a critical edition of audio-visual source material for the German memory of the media age (20th century and beyond). The 20th century has indeed added a new kind of memory to the German archive: the collections of audio-visual records which operate on the level of the imaginary in historic memory, while its historiographical conditions and narrative modes are still being "cybernetically" governed by symbolic media (the archival alphabetical inventories, providing order to disorderly remembrance).

While administrative memory of post-World War II Germany is still being taken care of by the Federal Archive (Bundesarchiv), the audio-visual memory of the Federal Republic which in parts is co-

14 „Die Öffentlichkeit müßte freien Zugang zu den Speichern und Datenbanken erhalten“: Jean-François Lyotard, *Das postmoderne Wissen. Ein Bericht*, Wien (in: *Theatrum machinarum* 3/4) 1982; 2. Neuaufgabe Wien (Passagen) 1993, 192 (frz. *La condition postmoderne*, Paris 1993)

15 His memorandum from 12th July and 3rd September 1919, kept in the files of the former Reichskanzlei (Imperial chancellery) in the Bundesarchiv (Federal Archive), R 43 I/886

16 *Findbücher zu Beständen des Bundesarchivs Bd. 8: Wochenschauen und Dokumentarfilme 1895-1950 im Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv (16mm-Verleihkopien)*, neubearb. v. Peter Bucher, Bundesarchiv Koblenz 1984, vi

17 Helmut Rogge: *Das Reichsarchiv*: In: *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 35 (1925), 119-133 (129f), zitiert nach Bucher 1984, vi

18 Theodor von Sickel, *Monumenta Graphica medii aevi ex archivis et bibliothecis imperii Austriaci collecta edita jussu atque auspiciis ministerii cultus et publicae instructionis caes. reg. Vindobonae*, 1859-1882; August Essenwein, *Reliquiae medii aevi*. Eine Denkschrift, Nürnberg (Literarisch-artistische Anstalt des germanischen Museums) 1884

existent with its collective memory stay with the broadcast corporations which - while partly being public rather than private enterprises - for pragmatic reasons treat this memory rather in terms of "production capital" rather than data open for public access. While France f. e. provides for a National Audiovisual Institute (INA) which is a supplement to the National Library, German audiovisual media memory stays within regional domains; plans for a central audiovisual *Mediathek* have been dwarfed almost to in-existence. The state - with the notable exception of a *Bundesfilmarchiv* in Berlin - almost exclusively takes care for paper archives and public libraries and museums, while the audiovisual (and now digital) memory still waits for a comprehensive "edition" - a new kind of *Monumenta Germaniae*, not based on books but in the online-format, *Media Germanica post-historica*.

In digital culture, the subject of the archive changes into "streaming data", that is new kinds of digital archives. Within this frame, the limitations of German Radio & TV archives for open or at least scholarly access become both a political and technical question, since not only large parts of World War Two and Third Reich memory, but essentially the GDR and FRG collective memory coincides with its recycling in audio-visual heritage. In county states like North-Rhine Westfalia, the historical memory of its newly constructed political identity is almost identical with the public recycling of documents in its public broadcast company (Westdeutscher Rundfunk for both radio and television). Ironically, only the audio-visual broadcast memory of a German state which broke down - GDR in 1989/90 - became public domain, being integrated into the German Broadcast Archive (Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv). There will be archives which are no longer controlled by the state at all - a new kind of dynamic archives. Once being digitally sampled, textual documents, images and sounds in German archives become calculable and capable of being subjected to pattern-recognition algorithms. Such procedures will not only media-archaeologically "excavate" but as well generate unexpected optical statements and perspectives from an audio-visual archive that can, for the first time, organize itself not just according to meta-data but according to its proper criteria - German memory in its own medium, endogenic.