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ARCHIVES: SOCIAL DYNAMICS IN TRANSFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

This article is based on a historical stratum before and after the consolidation of archival science as a scientific field. Through a critical reflection between classical and contemporary authors, it analyzes the relationships and tensions that cross the archival field throughout its existence. From a theoretical approach, it reflects on archives as social constructions. It argues that this dimension is sometimes covered by the stimuli of the positivist current, which presents them as free of social or political influence. By acting as mediators of memory and agents of meaning, archivists become active in the dispute over what should be remembered or forgotten. In conclusion, archives are social dynamics in transformation based on situated and politically implicated processes, requiring the archivist to act ethically, critically, and attentively to changes.

Keywords: Archival Science. Archives. Social dynamics.

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INTRODUCTION

In many countries, archives still represent something fixed and unshakable. This view has roots in the origins of the archival discipline, marked by the function of archives in serving the modern European State and sustaining national memory. In this logic, the archives validated the State itself (Jardim, 2012), which led to the centralization of practices in acts and formal records.

This conception has been replaced by a more dynamic and relational approach in contemporary times. McKemmish (1994) proposes that archives be understood as part of a continuum, not as isolated entities. Cook and Schwartz (2002) reinforce that archives reflect power relations and are not neutral. For Nesmith (2018), they are social assets shaped by cultural contexts.

This new perspective requires rethinking the role of archives and archivists, previously seen as neutral (Jenkinson, 1922) and impartial (Schellenberg, 1956). The proposal is for a more engaged performance, guided by responsibility, truth, and memory, in tune with the social conflicts of each era (Delgado Gómez; Cruz Mundet, 2010). After all, archives do not represent an objective reality. They are built on values, norms, and interests. As Thomassen (2006, p. 15, our translation) states, “documents and archives do not replace the real world, but represent what people and societies decide to remember”.

This theoretical article reflects on archives as social constructions. It argues that this dimension is sometimes covered by the stimuli of the positivist current, which presents them as free of social or political influence. From a historical perspective, before and after the consolidation of Archiving as a science, it explained how social and cultural changes shape the production, organization, and reading of archives.

BEFORE THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD

People produced, used, and kept documents long before the consolidation of the scientific method. These practices forged techniques that, centuries later, would become the foundations of Archival Science. However, until the French Revolution (1789), a theory capable of unifying this work was lacking (Schmidt, 2012).

In Antiquity, from the rise of the first civilizations to the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman societies created archives to protect records. Rousseau and Couture (1998) show that these documents were kept in temples and palaces in many forms, such as clay tablets, papyri, and scrolls.

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These archives reveal how much the preservation and order of records already mattered to culture and social organization. Scholars from the Nile Valley and Mesopotamia describe archives with various accounting and legal texts, reflecting the commitment to law and justice (Silva et al., 1999).

There were public and private archives. In Egypt, for example, individuals “[...] not only used records as a management tool, but also contributed to making record awareness integral and important in the lives of the people" (Posner, 2003, p. 71). Even then, “archive” was already distinguished from “library”, as evidenced by the Ebla Palace, which separated administrative documents from literary texts (Silva et al., 1999).

In Athens, the Archeion; in Rome, the Archivum; both gave rise to the term “archive” (Reis, 2006). The Greek language "[…] contributed to the formation of internationally widely accepted terms for referring to official documents" (Posner, 2003, p. 91, our translation). This influence favored archival networks and the notion of public access. On the other hand, archives suffered from the prevalence of orality during the Middle Ages. The Church assumed the custody of the records, without separating administrative documents from literary works. The "[...] custody exercised by the ecclesiastical powers brought new realities to the archives since they began to be stored interchangeably in libraries.” (Schmidt & Mattos, 2020, p. 29, our translation).

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the written document again gained prestige thanks to a “resumption” of Roman Law. This right reaffirmed that records guarantee authenticity and reliability (Silva, 2017). Documentary volume grew from the Middle to the Modern Ages, and the State became more complex. In the Renaissance, the “first theoretical knowledge of Archival Science" appeared, when "[...] interest in human production, the study of its history and its political and economic evolution, resurfaced.” (Araújo, 2013a, p. 52, our translation). Archives came to support the legitimacy of monarchs and control government routines during absolutism (Schmidt, 2012). With De Re Diplomatica (1681), Jean Mabillon introduced textual criticism criteria and laid the formal foundations of the discipline (Duranti, 2015).

Illuminism broke the foundations of absolutism by promoting more democratic and progressive ideas. In this new vision, documents became essential sources for understanding the past, organizing knowledge, and preserving history (Porto, 2013). Thus, the redefinition of what to keep, who keeps, and for what is clear. When illuminism came to

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see the written record as rational proof of the past, it created the environment that propelled the first paths for Archival Science to form as its own field.

TESTIMONY TO HISTORY

In 1789, France witnessed the outbreak of a revolutionary movement whose impacts also influenced the archives, reinforcing their role in historical understanding. The Revolution generated transformations in the organization and access to archives, involving the creation of a centralized system for state documents, the recognition of government responsibility in their preservation, the opening of archives, and the guarantee of rights through them, as well as their accessibility to the public (Posner, 2013). Although the first National Archives, established in Paris in 1790, represented a breakthrough, many countries developed archive systems that reflected the State's administrative structure (Posner, 2013).

In these systems, the archives received documents from the respective provincial offices. Rousseau and Couture (1998) explain that State Administration changed after the French Revolution: documents ceased to be only legal evidence and became instruments of popular power. Creating a national archive secured their custody, and nineteenth-century nationalism came to see them as historical, not just legal, testimonies.

These transformations resulted in a greater documentary volume in the French archives, from which organizational challenges emerged. Such circumstances implied the fusion of records from several entities, in addition to the formulation of specific government guidelines, by which these collections would be organized (Schmidt, 2012). In the light of this panorama, the “Principle of Respect for Funds” was established in 1841, an archival principle according to which documents produced by the same institution remain grouped in coherent sets (Duchein, 1986).

Schmidt (2012) identifies the emergence of other principles in Prussia, among which are “Provenance” and “Original Order”. As the Principle of Provenance developed, an archival vision was formed in the face of the archives. The fundamental principles came to emphasize an articulated organization capable of providing subsidies for constructing and understanding history. This can be seen in early texts by theorists dedicated to reflection on archives.

Thus, these elements are found in manuals that have emerged progressively, through which the identity of Archival Science as a discipline was consolidated. Therefore, a

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distinctive identity for Archival Science began to manifest in Europe. Thus, at the end of the nineteenth century, the definition centered on documents officially received or produced by administrative bodies, to remain in their custody. As early as 1922, Jenkinson expanded this understanding by considering as an archive any document created or used in administrative transactions, provided it was preserved by its original guardians. A few years later, in 1928, Casanova emphasized the role of archives as organized collections of acts linked to individuals or institutions, aimed at achieving political, legal, or cultural goals. Finally, in 1953, a vision emerged that associates archives with preserving documents generated by legal activities, appreciating their role as a historical source and testimony to the past. These transformations indicate a shift from the emphasis on institutional custody to a growing appreciation of documents' social, legal, and cultural context.

In this scenario, which Schmidt (2012) identifies as typical of the so-called Classical Archival Science, archives are considered public institutions entrusted with preserving historical memory. The definitions expressed in the manuals demonstrate the archive built from the dominant administrative and legal practices in their respective eras. Thus, they reveal a functional and normative vision of the archive, which privileges institutional custody, legal authenticity, and the probative value of documents. Although there are openings for the notion of archives of individuals (as in the manuals of 1928 and 1953), these are discrete and subordinate to the logic of institutional power.

ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT

After World War II, there was a global expansion in the production of documents, which created challenges regarding record storage and management. In such circumstances “[...] there is a reorientation of the profession of archivists in the face of the documentary volume produced: it enters the agenda, more specifically in North America, from where it reverberates to other Western countries [...]” (Rodrigues, 2006, p. 103, our translation).

According to Sousa (2023, p. 56, our translation), “the methods of document treatment were enough to meet the needs of organizations, but they did not adapt to the new situation being configured”. Thus, new techniques were considered, which, although different, did not exclude the assumptions of European Archival Science, giving rise to the view of archives as an administrative service.

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In the United States, on July 7, 1943, the government enacted the Records Disposal Act, reflecting the need to manage the growing volume of records produced. In the late 1940s, the figure of the records manager emerged. In this same period, the term “records management” became more accepted, demonstrating the recognition of management concerning government records (Moreno, 2008).

Therefore, the circumstances of the time pressed for a new perspective on the archives. In this sense, Indolfo (2007, p. 30, our translation) points out that “Document Management was, initially, more administrative and economic than archival since it essentially concerned optimizing the functioning of the administration, limiting the amount of documents produced and the storage period”.

Operational efficiency and rational use of resources became priorities due to the growth of bureaucracy and documentary production. Moreno (2008) discusses the influence of the Principles of Scientific Management by Frederick Taylor and Frank B. Gilbreth, who aimed at optimizing work to maximize production as strategies to mitigate the challenges arising from the increase in records. This influence is visible in the responses presented by the commissions created in the United States, reflected in the laws and guidelines drawn up to solve the problems.

This resonated in professional practice, especially in the American approach to document management, which suggests a distinction. Records managers deal with records - documents still in progress - while the archivists deal with archives, that is, documents of historical and cultural value (Araújo, 2013b).

The consolidation of this approach is based on the contributions of T.R. Schellenberg, widely recognized as one of the main responsible for the dissemination of the American perspective in Archival Science; in 1956, Schellenberg published the manual "Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques", in which he proposed the distinction between primary and secondary value attributed to archives, a conception that guides documentary evaluation by considering both the immediate use of documents and their subsequent use for research; in addition, Schellenberg introduced the theory of document life cycle, which consider them throughout their use and emphasises classification based on the action that generated them (Schmidt, 2012).

With this, administrative documents began to be highlighted as evidence, as initially proposed by Jenkinson (1922) and reinforced by Schellenberg (1956). Both contributed to creating a duality in the perception of archives, with Jenkinson representing the traditional

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European Archival Science and Schellenberg the North American administrative perspective (Moreno, 2008). In an analysis of this, Cook (2018, p. 34, our translation) highlights:

> Schellenberg explicitly denied that its "probative value" was linked to the Jenkinsonian concept of the archive as "evidence". For Schellenberg, probative values reflected the importance of documents for researchers, not administrators, because they documented producer functions, programs, policies, and procedures. Such values should be determined, after appropriate investigation and analysis, by the archivist and not by Jenkinson's administrator.

In addition to interpretations about "proof", Cook (2018) states that classic manuals, such as those of the Dutch archivists and Jenkinson's, define archives as those created and received by an administration. In contrast, the American perspective understands archives as a fraction of records, the “archives” – documents selected for preservation and intended for research. However, one cannot neglect the contextual influences of his time, which Schellenberg had at his disposal and used to propose adaptations, as highlighted by Lopes (2009, p. 338, our translation):

> One feels that the author was almost adrift in the search for a center between the theoretical inadequacies, pragmatic richness of records management, and positivist weight of a traditional archival science, conceived as an auxiliary science of history. This is perceived today. Was it possibly different in 1956?

As mentioned by Lopes (2009), the attempt to find a balance between these seemingly opposite approaches to the archives may have led the American theorist to a crossroads, hesitating to abandon what had been built until then. The American perspective influenced other theorists, some of whom challenged his proposals, while others agreed and adjusted them to their own realities.

Additionally, the approaches Schmidt (2012) classified as modern Archival Science were consolidated in the 1960s in Australia, when they sought solutions to manage modern documents under the influence of the perspectives of Jenkinson (1922) and Schellenberg (1956). In this country, according to the author, in 1964, Peter Scott proposed a focus on what he called “series systems.”

Thus, one perceives the direction of the archives with more emphasis on administrative management. They are composed of “modern” documents that can be both current and intermediate. They are distinguished from documents intended for preservation

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and historical research, known as permanent, which are governed by primary and secondary values and go through different stages.

(RE)READINGS FROM THE ARCHIVES

From the 1980s, the advancement of electronic technologies and the multiplication of documentary formats changed how we create, preserve, and access archives, and redefined Archival Science (Schmidt, 2012). The international debate began to challenge the European and North American models.

Thus, in Quebec, Canada, the “Integrated Archival Science" emerges, rejecting the division between "records” and “archives" and defending single management. As recalled by Lopes (2009, p. 156, our translation), "the proposition of Integrated Archival Science was born more from a criticism of traditional archival science and records management than a simplified synthesis of the two currents.”

Rousseau, Couture, and Ducharme reinforce the idea that the document's value must be determined from the source. Thus, information management becomes the axis of the entire documentary life cycle, linking production, use, and preservation (Schmidt; Mattos, 2020).

The focus is on organic information, linked to the institutional mission. Rousseau and Couture (1998, p. 65, our translation) note that “the production of recorded information gives rise to the archives of an organism”, covering all documents, whatever their form or age.

Another approach to archives also begins in Canada, in the Anglophone part, the "Functional Archival Science" or Post-Modern Archival Science. It questions classical principles and analyzes how archives, people, and social contexts shape each other. Cook (2018) highlights that this view offers a critical and current reading of archives in contemporary society.

> The origins of a Functional or Post-Modern Archival Science lie precisely in the identification of the new paradigm enunciated by Taylor and have their in-depth studies in the texts of Terry Cook, who also admits the obsolescence of archival principles and methods generated in the nineteenth century, defending its rethinking for the survival and adaptation in current days (Tognoli; Guimarães, 2011, p. 30).

The focus is on the social and cultural context in which documents are generated. The analysis focuses on the relationships between the document creators, their functions,

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and the narrative conventions involved. Therefore, there is a transition from “[...] product to process, from structure to function, from archives to archiving, from record to record context, from ‘natural’ residue or passive byproduct of administrative activity to consciously constructed social memory [...]" (Cook, 2012, p. 5, our translation).

Post-modern assumptions encourage reflection on these transformations, for which Nesmith (2018, p. 157, our translation), “defends that documents and archives, as means of communication, are conditioned by various influences and factors, and that such limitations, in turn, condition what we can know through them.” Archivists, therefore, assume an active role in the archive constitution and organization process. As mediators between documents and their future interpreters, these professionals directly influence the representation, access, and interpretation of documentary records (Kaplan, 2018).

With the post-modern reinterpretations of document, provenance, and archive concepts, Nesmith (2005) understands them as social constructions mediated by inscription, transmission, and contextualization processes, which attribute meaning, continuity, and accessibility to documentary records. Thus, these concepts are dynamic mediators of knowledge. Additionally, various social, cultural, and technical processes profoundly influence the genesis, transmission, and contextualization of documentary records.

In addition to the "Integrated Archival Science" and "Functional or Post-Modern Archival Science" approaches, a third strand stands out, called “Diplomatic Archival Science”, which emerged in Canada during the 1980s. Based on the methods of Classical Diplomacy, focused on the study of historical and legal documents, this perspective adapts its principles to contemporary measures, especially in the treatment of digital documents (Tognoli; Guimarães, 2011).

According to Schmidt (2012), Diplomatic Archival Science enables the critical re-reading of classical authors, such as Jenkinson (1922), by emphasizing documentary origin and typology, which reveal documents as material evidence and results of specific activities. The analysis prioritizes documentary series over isolated records, promoting an in-depth investigation into the authenticity and reliability of documents, with special attention to the challenges posed by the digital environment.

According to Tognoli and Guimarães (2011), Canadian archival science approaches understand the archive in different ways: as an integrated information system (Integrated Archival Science), as a social construction mediated by discourses and power relations

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(Functional or Post-Modern Archival Science), and as material evidence of actions, focusing on the authenticity and truth of records (Diplomatic Archival Science).

Still in contemporary lines, considering information and interdisciplinary dialogues with other areas of knowledge, the “Post-Custodial” perspective stands out in Portugal in the late 1990s. In this approach, according to Silva et al. (1999, p. 210, our translation), “archives emerge as information systems, whose complexity is not always limited to the material order of documents and whose organicity surpasses the vicissitudes of their custodial tradition”.

The authors view the analysis of archives from a new perspective, which they call the scientific and post-custodial phase. In this phase, Archival Science is inserted into the field of Information Science, and the archivist is considered an information scientist, with “social information” as the object of study (Schmidt, 2012).

> [...] Archival Science is a social information science that studies the archive as a (semi-) closed system, not through a fragmentary methodological device focused only on the functional/service component, that is, information transfer and retrieval, but through a cohesive, retrospective, and prospective device capable of problematizing the human and social activity involved in the archival informational process around formal laws or general principles (Silva et al., 1999, p. 2011, our translation).

The archival tradition in Portugal reflects the social influences highlighted by Armando Malheiro da Silva and Fernanda Ribeiro, proponents of this perspective. When analyzing the studies and statements of these authors, Silva and Barros (2017) observe that the first proposes the approach of archival problems in articulation with information science, from the formulation of new concepts for the archival field. On the other hand, the second defends this integration, considering the complex challenges imposed by the informational context in contemporaneity.

Still in the course of the new interpretations for the archives, one can point to the “Documentary Typology and Identification”, an approach that presents itself as a methodology to manage large volumes of documents accumulated from the 80s. Developed mainly in Spain and Brazil, it integrates Diplomatic Science and Documentary Typology to define documentary sets and series through research on the origin of records (Rodrigues, 2023), aiming to identify what Duranti (1997) called “archival bond”, that is, the relationship that one document maintains with another within the set.

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The last approach, purposely left to the closure of this section due to the discussions and perspectives it raises, refers to the Australian experience. Faced with the growing demand for methods capable of addressing the complexity of electronic documents, Australia faced challenges that imposed the need for conceptual revisions of archival foundations.

Thus, movements of critical reinterpretation of the principles of the discipline, regarding the categories of time, space, and the plurality of subjects, emerged from that territory. The traditional dichotomy between administrative and historical archives, widely practiced in the United States, was incompatible with the specificities of Australian reality. In this scenario, inspired by the concept of "series systems" formulated by Peter Scott in 1964, the Records Continuum model, which, uniting with others, redraws the contours of contemporary Archival Science, takes shape around the 1990s.

Upward (1997), creator of the model, argues that this is the result of the intersection between Archival Science, post-modernism, and the Structuring Theory of Anthony Giddens. The Records Continuum establishes a connection with digital documents. Documents coexist in many spaces and times, maintaining a continuous value to fulfill different purposes, such as administrative, legal, and social demands, met simultaneously (Costa Filho, 2019). According to Meckemmidh (2019, pp. 140-141, our translation), this model:

> [...] is explored as a tool for perceiving and analyzing complex realities. It is capable of providing multidimensional and multilayered views of records and archives in different space-times and is particularly relevant for understanding the complexities and pluralities of the archival multiverse in the digital age.

The author highlights the varied traditions of record keeping in Australia, from the pre-colonial to the contemporary era. In this context, she explores the theory of the "records continuum," starting from the need to decolonize Australian archives and transform practices and spaces so that they are more representative of diverse voices and perspectives.

The dimensions of space and time influenced the formulation of Archival Science concepts, such as provenance, the life cycle of documents, and documents. When considering the impacts of new technologies and contemporary social transformations, new approaches provoke a critical review of these foundations, opening paths to more plural and dynamic perspectives aligned with the complexity of the present (Cassio Filho, 2024).

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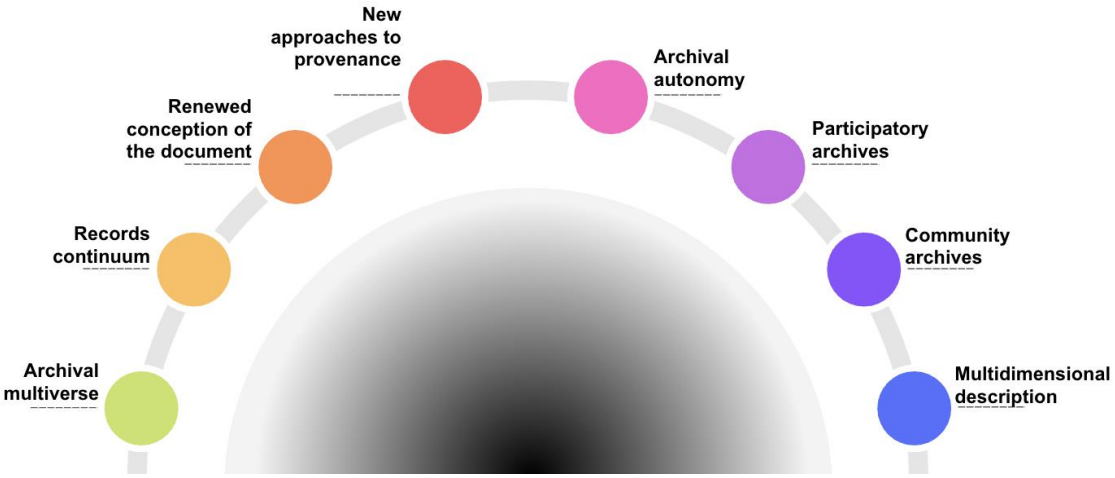
Figure 1 - Contemporary Archival Perspectives



Source: Prepared by the authors based on Cassio Filho (2024).

In the illustration, each colored dot in the semicircle symbolizes reformulations of the theoretical and methodological foundations of Archival Science, based on Costa Filho (2024). According to the author, such reformulations are aligned with the spatio-temporal conception and contemporary reality. From the renewal of the concept of document and the expanded perspectives of provenance to archival autonomy (including participatory and community archives), each element reflects transformations in producing, organizing, and interpreting documents and archives.

In view of this, the Australian tradition is vigorously inserted in the debates that tension the classic foundations of Archival Science by establishing an epistemological break with the linearity of the life cycle through the simultaneity of times and the plurality of document creation from more horizontal practices shaped by shared memories and continuous acts of social participation.

SOCIAL DYNAMICS IN TRANSFORMATION

Reviewing the previous sections shows that Archival Science keeps pace with technological, social, and cultural changes. These changes generate ruptures, reinterpretations, and sometimes rescues previously rejected or adjusted ideas. Terry Cook defends this return to the past to think about the future. In the 1977 article, he takes up the Dutch Manual (1898) and asks how power disputes shape the “houses of memory” — the

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archives. By asking “What past is our prologue?", he highlights the transition from the state model to a sociocultural vision that transforms the archivist from guardian to active agent.

In 2012, Cook identified four structures of thought that cut across the archival discipline: evidence, memory, identity, and community. They overlap and sometimes conflict. Memory and identity change according to context; evidence and memory form a pair that requires balance in practice; community is still under construction.

The debate over memory is the most tense. Although recurring, the term remains vague. Bastian (2017) indicates three fronts to mature it: organizational culture, trust and evidence, and social justice. For her, the field of memory must still be cultivated within Archival Science.

> The increasing emphasis on memory as an active component in many disciplines of the humanities and social sciences suggests that expressions of memory — whether oral, textual, material, or performative — are today as vital as traditional documents in understanding and analyzing the diverse social and cultural manifestations of our global community. The tools of memory have acquired their own legitimacy and probative weight. If archivists wish to remain relevant in documenting society, it is critical that memory — and its expressions and traces — be incorporated into both archival practice and theory (Bastian, 2017, p. 285).

The incorporation of new approaches often creates friction, especially in the memory debate. The discipline broadens its scope, but rarely explains how this expansion translates into concrete tasks. Archives are often treated generically, like memory, without linking the concept to professional routines. Jimerson (2009, p. 309, our translation) warns: “Equating archives with memory leads to serious conceptual difficulties and false metaphors. Documents and records serve as substitutes for the vestiges of memory, but they are not the same as human memory itself.” The same author also draws attention to the risks of confusing these spheres and diluting the function of archives.

The past is not "kept"; it is constantly remade. Archivists participate in this reconstruction by facilitating the access and use of documents. We do not create memory directly, but we do not stand on the sidelines of it either. Bastian (2017) asks us to rethink this relationship, while Cook (1977; 2012) shows the clash between memory and evidence. Other disciplines also study memory and often rely on archives. Jimerson (2009) explains that it takes various forms in social life. Each form preserves, narrates, or represents the past in its own way, but they all intersect and influence each other. Figure 2 shows these configurations.

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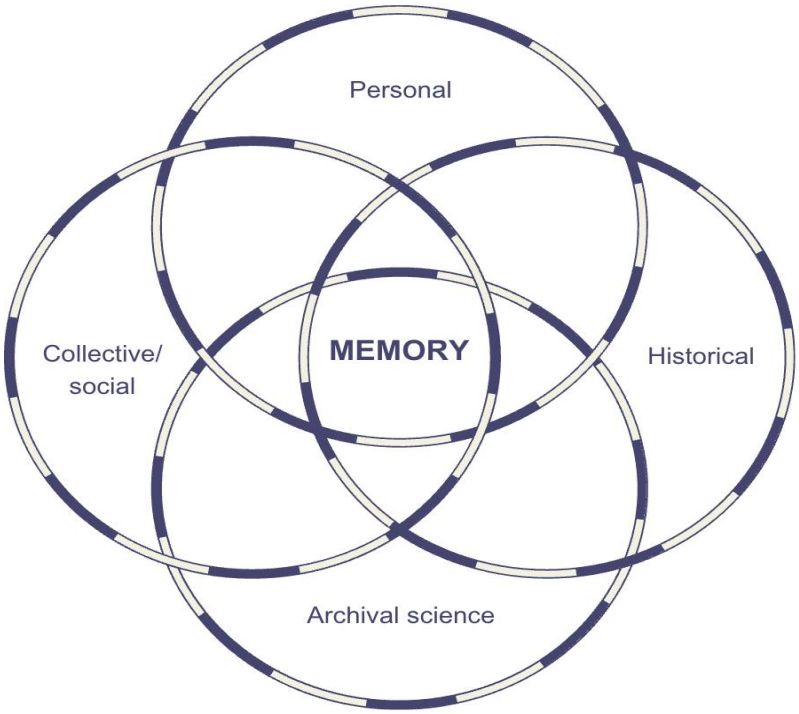
Figure 2 - Articulations between forms of Memories



Source: Prepared by the authors based on Jimerson (2009).

Jimerson (2009) points out that archives offer essential evidence for understanding the past. Memory takes four forms — personal, collective, historical, and archival — that blend and amplify our reading of the facts. For him, archival memory reflects power relations; it is up to the archivist to expose and correct biases that benefit dominant groups.

When we treat archives as synonymous with memory, we lose sight of the fact that people, institutions, and governments build this memory. Hedstrom (2016, p. 255, our translation), quoting Pierre Nora, comes to the same conclusion:

> From this perspective, archival documents are not representations of collective memory, and archival institutions are not repositories of collective memory. Rather, archives are sources for the potential discovery or recovery of memories that had been lost.

The evidence gains strength in the archives and shapes the memory they hold. Cook (2012) criticizes the idea that these institutions guard pure truths: documents, selection, and archiving are never neutral; they carry intentions and reflect power relations. Thus, archives are social constructions in constant dispute. In the same spirit, Brothman (1991) shows that the archivist recognizes documentary value and creates it by choosing what remains or disappears, mirroring social criteria and moving away from the myth of the “natural”.

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> The organization of information is social, not natural. The archival order does not emerge due to some inexorable imposition on us, something we are powerless against. The Edenic order in the archives is shaped through the practice of agglutination. These clusters of records are creations; they are, to take a term recently coined in the sociology of science, microworlds, outlined by boundaries chosen by us — individuals, institutional structures, etc. - and that disguise an abundant complexity by conquering, which also grows in governments and the world in general (Brothman, 1991, p. 84).

When the author states that clusters of documents are microworlds, he means that they are human constructions, with rules and limits of their own — they do not emerge naturally. Each group functions as a small universe, created to organize and make sense of information. Brothman proposes an invitation to archivists: to rethink their practices, going beyond concepts taken as absolute truths. He alludes that professionals reflect on “why" they make certain choices, "what" those choices represent in culture, and "how" archives contribute to the construction of what society considers important.

On the concept of microworld mentioned by Brothman (1991), when inserting himself in this discussion, although he does not directly adopt this term, Ketelaar (2001) describes the archival funds, documents, institutions, and systems as "repositories of meanings” and "constructions mediated and constantly transforming", marked by tacit narratives3 and by the possibility of multiple activations, in which each reading, use, or intervention alters its senses. These characteristics are close to the notion of microworld, a specific universe regulated by its own logics, with internal mechanisms of exclusion, selection, and reorganization. In this sense, by affirming that archiving constitutes a “regime of practices” that varies according to time and place, Ketelaar reinforces the idea of a particular microworld, shaped by historically situated norms, values, and decisions.

This microworld, like archiving, does not exist in isolation, but is embedded in larger sets. Based on the concept of “archivalization”, developed by Ketelaar (1999; 2006), one understands a stage before archiving, when something is considered worthy of being archived, influenced by cultural, social, and ideological factors. In other words, there is a set of ideas and choices behind the creation and keeping of documents.

3 Ketelaar (2006) discusses the concept of "tacit narratives" in documents, referring to implicit histories that are not explicitly expressed in records, but that can be revealed through an in-depth analysis of the administrative, social, cultural, political, and religious contexts related to the creation, maintenance, and use of these documents. By investigating the "semantic genealogy" of documents, it is possible to deconstruct and reconstruct these hidden narratives, enriching the understanding of the archives. He bases himself on Derrida (1995) in stating that each interpretation of a document broadens its meaning, transforming it into a "reservoir of meanings". Derrida (1995) introduced the concept of "*différance"* to describe how meaning in texts is constantly postponed and constructed through differences from other signs. Thus, the interpretation of a document is not fixed, but enriches and expands with each reading, revealing hidden layers of meaning.

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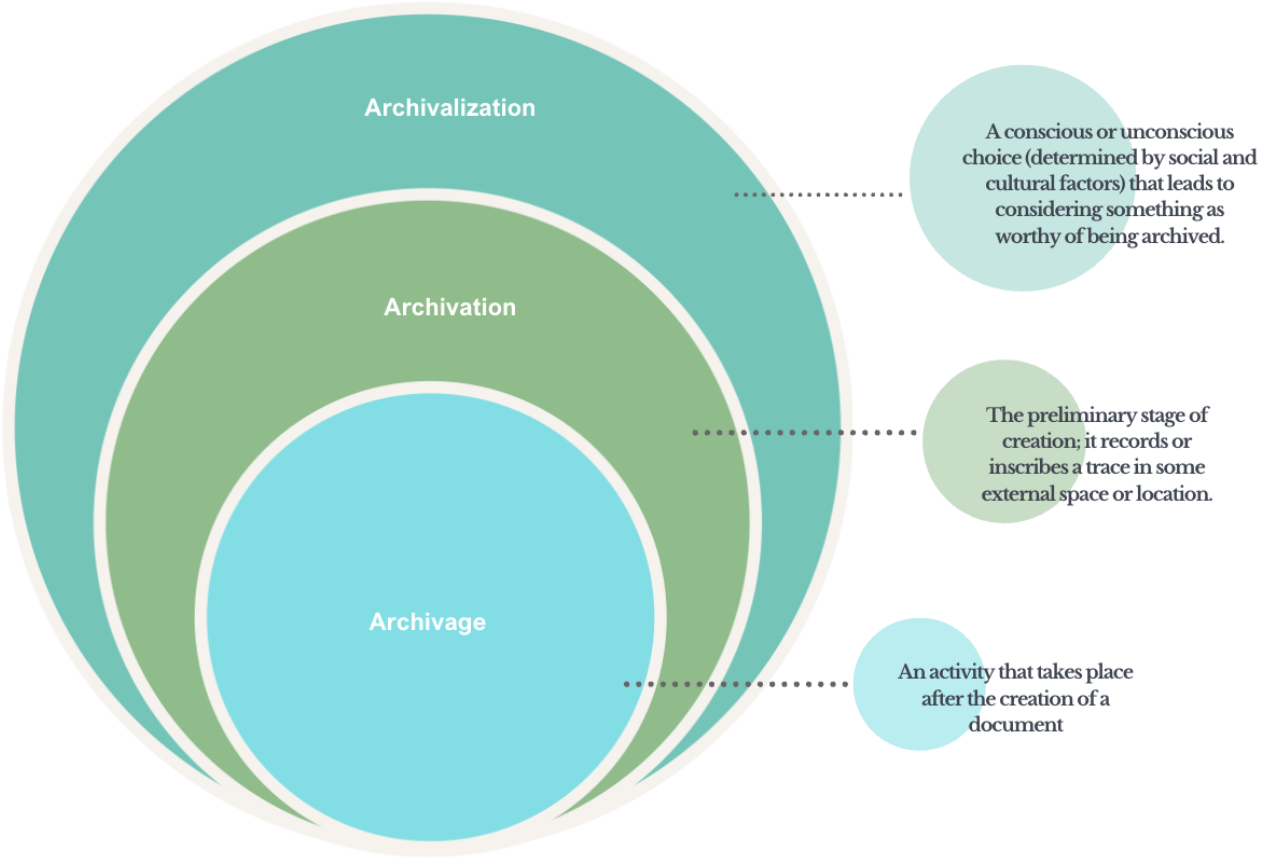
Linked to the concept of archiving, as illustrated in Figure 3, the author also mentions the term “archivation”, introduced by Jacques Derrida and used by Paul Ricœur, which refers to the act of inscribing or fixing information in an external space (Ketelaar, 2006). Finally, it relates to the "archivage"4.

Figure 3 - Archivalization, Archivation, and Archivage



Source: Prepared by the authors based on Ketelaar (1999; 2006).

According to the author, it is at this point that traditional archival theory usually begins. The author emphasizes:

4 It is every action carried out after the production of a document, with the purpose of registering, organizing, protecting, or ensuring its access. According to the Dictionary of Archival Terminology (2013, p. 26, our translation), it is the “sequence of intellectual and physical operations aimed at the orderly storage of documents.” On the other hand, the Model of Requirements for Computerized Archival Document Management Systems e-Arq Brasil (2022, p. 38, our translation) differentiates the archiving of digital documents from non-digital ones, stating: “The archiving operation of digital documents differs from the archiving of non-digital documents because in the latter, archiving is at the same time a logical operation in physics, such as archiving a report in the Reports folder.” In other words, archiving involves both technical and structural aspects, and may vary depending on the documentary form.

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> When humans build (create, develop, and use) archives, they are consciously or unconsciously influenced by cultural and social factors. Those working in different organizations create and use their documents differently. Even when they work in the same organization, accountants, lawyers, and engineers produce their archives differently — not only because of legal requirements, but mainly because they have different professional — that is, social and cultural — standards. Thus, archival studies not only address archival documents as they were created, but also cover the organizational culture of the archive creators, considering the social, religious, cultural, political, and economic contexts (Ketelaar, 2006, p. 68).

From this observation, it is evident that the archives are deeply rooted in specific sociocultural threads. Professional norms, institutional values, and worldviews shape the creation and use of documents. This reveals that archival practice operates within systems that define what is considered legitimate or illegitimate from a documentary perspective. In this context, debates emerge concerning the exercise of power in archives — power that manifests in the selection, ordering, deletion, and silencing of records. Therefore, archives become spaces of dispute and negotiation of memory, identity, and authority, as pointed out by Cook and Schwartz (2002) and Jimerson (2007; 2009).

For Cook and Schwartz (2002), the power lies in the recognition, by archivists, of their agency over the archives. The authors propose a shift from a technical perspective to a critical, reflective, and ethical posture, anchored in social responsibility. They argue that "such archival performances represent power over memory and identity, over the fundamental ways in which society seeks documentary clues about where it came from and where it may be going" (Cook; Schwartz, 2002, p. 181). In this sense, the archivist is no longer seen as a neutral agent and is now understood as a performative subject, whose performance actively influences the constitution, mediation, and interpretation of documents.

Inspired by the notion of performativity, the authors suggest that archival work is not only a technical practice but a situated action, permeated by institutional norms, expectations, and repetitions that become naturalized over time. What appears to be neutral is a series of value-laden interpretive decisions. This perspective is also explored by Kaplan (2002, our translation), who proposes an analogy between the archivist and the anthropologist, emphasizing the interpretive and situated dimension of archival practice, marked by the awareness of the choices made and their implications.

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> Anthropology provides a particularly fruitful basis for comparison because the two fields share specific critical characteristics. At their most basic level, both are concerned with representations – of people, cultures, events, and, ultimately, history and memory. Both exercise power in creating and using records, observations, and information. Anthropologists (as well as archivists) traditionally see themselves as disinterested selectors, collectors, and organizers of facts coming from a transparent reality. But both serve as intermediaries between a subject and its later interpreters, a function/role that is, in and of itself, interpretive. This translates into power over the record and how it is interpreted; and points to where power is negotiated and exercised. This power over the evidence of representation and access to it gives us some measure of power over history, memory, and the past. Although archivists and anthropologists may consider that their professions have no such power, the fact is that both are so deeply embedded in political institutions and social structures that any residual claims to innocence and objectivity are entirely unfounded.

To understand the power and intermediation cited by Kaplan (2022) when exercising the functions of the archivist is to bring decisions capable of affecting contexts; it is to reflect on the archivalization alluded to by Ketelaar (1999;2006). In other words, it means understanding the relationships and forms of memory, including the archival memory cited by Jimerson (2009), which also signals this power. Returning to Cook and Schwartz (2002), it implies noting the performance and the stages where power is negotiated and social memory is built. The authors also highlight that the image of the archivist as an impartial guardian, typical of the Jenkinsonian tradition, no longer responds to the present challenges. Involved in the mediation of memory, archivists exercise power. Therefore, theory and practice must converge: the first without the second becomes sterile; the second without the first, conservative. Integration between the two is essential to review practices and respond to current ethical and social demands.

But where does understanding this power and exercising criticality move us? What does situating the contexts that surround us make us apprehend? What is beyond it, behind it? For Jimerson (2008; 2009), the dynamics between archives and power must be recognized and assumed. Focusing exclusively on evidence, as still occurs in classical assumptions of the area, perpetuates the illusion of neutrality, considered by the author a dangerous illusion for omitting archival responsibility. The author argues that neutrality hides political decisions that support the status quo. Thus, focusing only on technical aspects, such as management systems, evidence, and legality, can obscure the ethical dimension and social mission of Archival Science.

In short, archivists can no longer limit themselves to the technical function of custody. They are constantly challenged to recognize the tensions between neutrality and power, evidence and memory, silence and representation. By acting as mediators of memory and

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agents of meaning, they become active in the dispute over what should be remembered or forgotten. In this process, Archival Science is called to abandon the abstract ideal and assume its historically situated, culturally shaped, and ethically implied condition. In this movement, sometimes conflictive, dialogue with other areas and theoretical approaches proves indispensable, not to dissolve the archival identity, but to expand it, tension it, and place it in constant reconstruction in the face of the demands of a plural and changing society.

FINAL REMARKS

The paths discussed in this article stimulate a realization: archives are sociotechnical constructions subject to power forces, memory disputes, and cultural transformations. From state conceptions to community and participatory archives, each turn has shifted boundaries, demanding from the archivist critical awareness of the scope of their intervention.

This awareness implies rethinking neutrality, which appears as a "myth". Selecting, describing, preserving, and making documents available are performative acts that shape social narratives, legitimize identities, and can silence voices. Recognizing them as such moves the archivist into a position of mediator responsible for openly negotiating criteria of inclusion, exclusion, and hierarchy and making the underlying processes transparent.

The contemporary scenario amplifies this challenge even more. Massive digital archives, artificial intelligence, and social justice demands push for the integration of interdisciplinary knowledge, the strengthening of open access policies, the adoption of technical standards that ensure authenticity, and, above all, the effective participation of the groups represented in decision-making processes. In this context, critical and post-custodial studies are observed to address plurality, simultaneity of times, and multiplicity of subjects.

Thus, assuming the situated historicity of archival work does not mean diluting the disciplinary identity, but renewing it continuously. It implies articulating tradition and innovation, methodological rigor, and ethical engagement. Archives will only fulfill their social function if Archival Science maintains a permanent critical dialogue with society, re-examining practices in the light of human rights, equity, and bottom-up technologies.

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