

Call for papers

International and interdisciplinary conference ***THE ARCHIVE: FROM PRIMARY SOURCES TO DIGITAL***

The international conference "*From primary sources to the digital archive*", to be held on **December 5 and 6, 2024** at the Jean Monnet University in Saint-Étienne (France), will address a central question of modernity studies, namely the issue of accessibility to sources and archives in the digital era. This colloquium is the fruit of collaboration between the IHRIM (<https://ihrim.ens-lyon.fr>) and ECLA (<https://ecla.univ-st-etienne.fr/fr/index.html>) laboratories, and the federative research structure GANESHs (<https://ganeshs.hypotheses.org/>) of this university. The event is open to researchers, curators, librarians, archivists and young researchers.

The power of the archive

In a 2014 article, Dietmar Schenk¹ emphasized the power of the archive, a phenomenon that has been emerging in relatively recent times as a topic of scientific and public interest that goes beyond archival studies, and whose interdisciplinary debate has redefined the very concept of archive. The truth is that our relationship with the archive² is uneasy, even tormented, as is the human condition in weaving ambivalent links with memory. In all its manifestations, whether material or immaterial, the presence of the archive often suggests passion, elsewhere embarrassment and sometimes rejection. To a greater or lesser extent, and without necessarily referring to the archive as such, those who defend arbitrariness, conquering doctrines or esoteric knowledge, and those who advocate radical and totalizing modernity have had to deal with its existence. In some cases, they have argued for its destruction, in others for its concealment, either to prohibit or to misappropriate it. All these signs of crystallization around the power of the archive raise questions about its access, its control, its constitution as a source, its distribution, conservation, relevance and presence in catalogs. Access to the archive raises the problem of the power exercised over and by the document itself, by those who own it, treasure it and determine the conditions of its dissemination. The penetration of computer science into archival science and research data processing, the advent of the World Wide Web and the movement towards open science have reshuffled the cards: the knowledge economy, archives and digital data have been reshaped.

From primary sources to digital

The development of the web and technology for storage media and data carriers has imposed itself as an unprecedented incentive by allowing the democratization of access to knowledge, and the unlimited circulation of data in the process of transition from the esoteric to the exoteric knowledge. While researchers and their publications were restricted to a community of insiders, the archival turn - questioning the meaning given to collection, preservation and accessibility - and the almost simultaneous rise of digital humanities represented a step forward in the emergence of new methods of analysis and dissemination of archival data³. A world-library and a horizon have emerged in which massive collection and processing have become possible, in which singularities can escape the standardization of cataloging practices as well as the oblivion to which they are condemned in the hells or purgatories of documentary collections. In this extraterritoriality, the archival document is freed from its materiality and from the space of its source and, by becoming a set of autonomous data, likely to form new collections, i.e. to be de-catalogued and re-

¹ SCHENK, Dietmar, "Pouvoir de l'archive et vérité historique", *Écrire l'histoire* [En ligne], 13-14 | 2014, mis en ligne le 10 octobre 2017, consulté le 10 décembre 2020. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/elh/463>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/elh.463>

² DERRIDA, Jacques, *Mal d'archive*, Paris, Galilée, 1995 et cité par D. SHENCK dans le même article.

³ HIRIBARREN, Vincent, "Tournant archivistique et tournant numérique en Afrique: Entretien avec Vincent Hiribarren" Sources. *Materials & Fieldwork in African Studies*, 2020, no. 1: 273-282. <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/SOURCES/halshs-02865472>.

collected. In cases where archiving would mean condemning the document to limbo, it would become suitable for exhumation and rebirth.

Digital technology has changed the way history is written, filling the “archive gap”⁴, bringing to light forgotten or rediscovered documents and artifacts, giving back the word hitherto denied and sometimes at odds with the official history inherited from the discourse of the victors. This phenomenon of dissemination, born of the encounter between archival science and digital technology, also carries the risk of atomization. Like physical documents, digital archives are vulnerable and data are volatile and perishable, dependent on storage media and technical obsolescence. Added to this are other entropy factors such as confusion, falsification, the arbitrariness of the archive itself, erroneous and distorted interpretations, where equating opinions and truths derived from scientific consensus veils access to meaning, generating a background noise that silences the archive⁵. Nevertheless, the archival document as a source of knowledge nurtures a privileged relationship with truth by virtue of its testimonial character⁶. To claim veracity, must a digital archive always be linked to a material source as a reference of authenticity? What methodologies should be adopted for intangible sources (gesture, dance, oral traditions, etc.) if not to reconstitute them in material form, in the absence of or in addition to tangible, representable, visualisable and modelable form? When the primary source is digital, how can archives be built from the continuous flows of the Web and social networks? What kind of metadata is necessary to allow accessibility? There, surely, new digital tools will also play an essential role. The role of researchers and curators is even more crucial in authenticating, preserving integrity, ensuring transmission dynamics, recomposing corpora, and updating access, context and meaning.

Our conference will focus on the following 3 themes:

- **Digital construction of the archive:** from source to data, bringing the archive to life from a material or immaterial source, enriching the archive to feed a history of memory, accessibility in question (documents, texts, meanings, sedimentary and syncretic approach, multiplication of places of enunciation) in the age of digital humanities, dynamics of digital preservation and perpetuation (text, image, sound, video, gesture, orality), potential for digital exploitation (machine learning, LLM, OCR/HTR, automatic indexing, graphs...),

- **Memory media in question:** ethical issues, technological issues, digital archiving and enhancement, transmission dynamics? What media should be used to perpetuate data? What solutions for digital amnesia? Software/readers/formats in question, AI and archives, what about serendipity in archive work? Archives and open science,

- **Archives and power:** archives and the challenges of civilization; archiving or de-archiving as a political act; archiving in the service of power (colonial empires); the politics of transmission; archives in the digital age; shedding light on the interstices of history; writing counter-histories and new narratives? Should knowledge be decolonized?

- **Practical information and schedule**

- Date of the conference: December 5 and 6, 2024

- Location: Saint-Etienne (France), Université Jean Monnet

- Launch of the call for proposals: May 14, 2024

- Deadline for submission of proposals: June 30, 2024. An abstract of 3000 characters maximum, spaces included, should be submitted (Times New Roman¹², single spacing).

Four to six keywords and the main sources on which the paper will be based should be included.

⁴ SCHENK, Dietmar, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

⁵ “Les faits et les événements sont choses infiniment plus fragiles que les axiomes, les découvertes et les théories – même les plus follement spéculatifs – produits par l’esprit humain” in ARENDT, Hannah, “Vérité et politique”, dans id., *La Crise de la culture. Huit exercices de pensée politique* [1954], trad. de l’anglais par C. Dupont et A. Huraud, Gallimard, 1972. Nous citons ici d’après l’édition de poche (Gallimard (Folio Essais), 2007), p. 294

⁶ BLOCH, Marc, *Apologie pour l’histoire ou Métier d’historien*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2007 [1949], p. 75.



- Priority will be given to papers that focus on specific projects (planned, in progress or already completed) that reflect the importance of the rescue, transmission and dissemination of tangible or intangible archives.
- Notification of acceptance or rejection of proposals: July 15, 2024.
- Conference papers should not exceed 25 minutes and may be written in French, English, Spanish, Portuguese or Italian.
- Proposals, as well as requests for information, should be sent to the following addresses:
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Organisation

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