

## AUDIOVISUAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND THE FEAR OF LOSING CONTROL

Gisa Jähnichen, *Universiti Putra Malaysia*

### 1. Introduction

In the past, knowledge of any kind was monopolized by a few high ranking persons of a community. Since technology has enabled people of all social layers in nearly all regions of the world, the problem of monopolization is becoming increasingly repressed. However, in dealing with knowledge and its status, cultural diversity is still reflected in societal behaviour and re-produces historical conditions regarding audiovisual archiving even now. This paper documents the process of implementing a small-scale university AV archive and the many contradictory issues in dealing with it as a working tool, as a knowledge property, as a place of higher or lower levels of safety, and as the troublesome memory of academic fallacies.

From a critical perspective, the way keywords and basic bias work is described, including its effect on the implementation process. In conclusion, an open strategy is proposed to identify culturally determined perspectives in contrast to individual understandings in this matter. The material used was collected through a two-year university project at Universiti Putra Malaysia and subsequent discussions.

Not even 100 years ago, the only person of the village who had a 'vision' was the shaman. He could see what others could not. The shaman was said to be the seer and the hearer of the outer world. His power depended on this belief nurtured through common people's interpretation. Anything the shaman uttered was taken seriously. In other places, religious leaders, respected monks, those who could read and write were an alternative source of knowledge beyond the daily life experience. However, the monopoly on knowledge was well confined to persons who derived their power from it.

### 2. One Case

I just had an insightful talk with one student who submitted an interesting paper to a book series we publish annually. His main subject is a video production of two minutes and two seconds length, a musical parody on a university incident that was put on YouTube and richly commented on by Malaysian netizens. In order to provide the reader with full details, he asked the video producer for permission to include this video into the audiovisual supplements coming with each number of the book series. The producer not only allowed him to use his video, but he also sent him a high-resolution version in order to secure the best possible quality for publication. The student then asked me how to do in-text references of this video and I recommended him to archive the video first in order to use the unique archive code as reference in addition to the name such as "([name of video producer], ARCPA 3821)". In the videography he has to provide the full reference and give sufficient acknowledgments as usually required for the database of the archive.

The student hesitated. His argument was that he did not let the author know about being archived, so the author may object to it. He found it unethical to proceed without informing the donor and asking for consent regarding this 'new' or 'different' situation and he somehow felt that he could not ask him for that. Further he found it unethical of me to ask him directly, since that would imply doing something behind the author's back.

We had the following conversation:

- Do you think that the author believes we can control all people who will buy the book?
- *No, but that is fine. He knows that the book will be sold.*
- What is the difference between being 'out of control' on the book market and being archived with unaltered rights and acknowledgements in an archive that can control access onsite?

- *It is that the author does not know it. I should ask for his permission again.*
- Do you know that anyone who buys the book with the AV supplement can archive the files stored on the DVD for safety reason on another carrier? I will have to do it after publication as well in order to ensure the safety and accessibility of the files in case of re-prints or re-editions. That is my duty as an editor.
- *But that is unethical!*
- I feel that it is unethical to keep a file sent to you for the purpose of publication and subsequently 'uncontrollable' distribution on your private computer thus making any further developments depending on you.
- *But I was the one who asked him to send it and he sent it to me. He trusts in me.*
- So, if you feel responsible for the well being of the file, you should archive it. And if you think that this is unethical, you may restrict access for onsite view only. But then you should ask the author whether he agrees with this restriction.
- *Hm. [I have to think about that.]*

This twist of argumentation is typical for the small university AV archive project, called Audiovisual Research Collections for Performing Arts (ARCPA).

### 3. Knowledge Management as Theory

ARCPA was started in 2011 when a group of researchers at the Faculty of Human Ecology of Universiti Putra Malaysia took up an explorative research project on the feasibility and the impact on research and creative art works of a small scale audiovisual archive within the faculty's music department.<sup>108</sup> Two years later, the archive was installed as a "one site entry and access archive" equipped with all playback units necessary for digitization and dependable networking supported through the university as the storage provider. Since the project started, 14 archiving persons, mostly the collectors themselves, registered 69 different recording persons with 28 different declarations of legal status. To date, 2,576 entries have been made and more than 3,000 items from other archives or storage departments have been deposited for unrestricted onsite access. The archive is used by many students and some staff as well as by outsiders to the university. ARCPA is operated by temporary users such as graduate students, visiting researchers, and staff in order to increase the physical safety of their recordings and teaching materials and to document the legal status of works jointly produced with musicians, performers, and colleagues in the field. Database entries are created and maintained by the main collectors themselves under the guidance of a voluntary archivist on duty. Copyright and legal status or resulting claims are not altered through the archiving process. Most of the audiovisual documents belong to university grant funded projects and are therefore controlled legally by the university. However, the main agents, the recorded musicians and performers, are the primary copyright holders. The main collectors, mostly the project leaders, but also the primary copyright holders, may restrict access to documents for certain purposes or persons. However, the archive strives for long-term accessibility<sup>109</sup> since the main idea is to re-use and to effectively exploit existing audiovisual documents for research and educational purposes.

### 4. Fear in Reality

Fighting with highly sensitive issues caused through culturally different approaches to archiving and access, the archive cannot yet be seen as a safe place for knowledge management.<sup>110</sup> Coming back to the example given above: What does the story of the student's query imply?

- Archiving is more dangerous and uncontrollable than publishing. (You may ask somebody to be published but not to be archived.)
- Archivists can do worse things with archived items than publishers.

<sup>108</sup> Musib, Jähnichen & Meddegoda, 2014.

<sup>109</sup> Seeger, 1996; Willinsky, 2009.

<sup>110</sup> Jähnichen & Musib, 2012; Jähnichen, 2014.

- Accessibility of an archive is unlimited through file duplications while publishers may just stop publishing the item, then it will not be distributed anymore.
- Archives deal with rights differently than publishers.
- The purpose of archiving remains unclear and unforeseeable.
- An archive is like an evidence room of the court; things cannot easily be put in or removed. Therefore, they are not flexible and can become a hindrance in development.
- While agreeing on publication, the publisher will bear a part of responsibility, but in an archive things are not transparent regarding responsibilities. No one knows what could happen in the future.

If we put this list of statements into a table and include two columns — the suspected danger for being part of a book publication and the same for being included in an AV archive — and rate them on a scale from 1–5, then we come to this result:

Risk	Being part of a book publication	Inclusion in an AV Archive	Unpublished and stored on home PC hard drive	
			As expected	In reality
Uncontrollable	5	1	1	5
Not to be trusted	3	3	1	3
Access can't be stopped	5	1	1	1
Insecure legal rights	3	1	1	5
Unclear and unforeseeable purpose	1	1	1	3
Not flexible, hindrance in development	5	1	1	3
Not transparent regarding responsibilities	1	1	1	5
Risk (the higher the number the higher the risk)	23	9	7	25

The fear of losing control seems to be widely irrational. However, AV archives have to struggle with this irrationality that is culturally patterned and cannot be reduced to simple misunderstandings.

Another example can illustrate even better which nature of fear we have to deal with and what could possibly cause it.

## 5. Other Cases

On 15 June 2013, a group of researchers attended a recording session in a Malay wedding and an evening rehearsal. The musicians called themselves Nobat Nafiri Melaka. One of the researchers intended to write a thesis about these musicians, the others were asked to help with the recordings. While the wedding went on, the music performed was taken from a broad traditional entertainment repertoire re-arranged by the Nobat Nafiri musicians. The evening rehearsal was mainly to instruct younger musicians in traditional court music pieces that have to be learned entirely by heart. The place for the rehearsal was outside the state Melaka for some special reason. Since Melaka has no court and no Sultan or any other state representative besides the elected governor, court music cannot be played in Melaka. The musicians, who all

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live and work in other serious professions in Melaka, especially in Kampung Cina, have to go to the neighbouring state Negeri Sembilan in order to play court music. The rehearsal house is attached to a piece of land owned by a relative. The rehearsal takes place only in the darkness. The house consisting of one room, where the instruments are stored and an attached terrace with roof, where the musicians sit and play, is also a meeting point for villagers nearby who come in search of advice and cures. Besides the rehearsal house, there is another one-room house on stilts, where cooking utensils and construction materials are stored. This house is also used for so called bomoh activities, healing rituals that are conducted by the eldest Nobat Nafiri member. The recordings were brought to the university archive and documented. A set of copies was taken by the researcher who is writing his thesis. Since then, nothing happened. No thesis is written yet and no access should be given unless this occurs. However, another member of the recording team mentioned in a public meeting the fact of having heard a Melaka Nobat Nafiri group and was harshly criticized. Since Melaka has no court there cannot exist any Nobat group. Later, the researcher who was writing his thesis took this incident as a reason to decline his enthusiasm by saying that his research data were stolen and openly distributed thus his writing would not be of unique value anymore. The data collected and the knowledge retained seemed to go nowhere.

And another example of frustration is the entire collection of a very famous Malay storyteller, Said Aripin, unfortunately also one of the last of his kind. He was the first to have performed in London's Albert Hall as one of those people of public importance that were invited to Great Britain after proclaiming the independence of Malaya. The storytelling was conducted on university ground during three nights with private technical support and some small funding for recording material and catering. The text of the sung stories was later transcribed in a handwritten manuscript by a student who voluntarily wanted to help the head of the department. Since then, seven years ago, nothing has happened. The manuscript was not even typed into a computer in order to support the documentation. It is also privately secured and inaccessible. Nobody can do research on it unless a financed project is approved. Students are discouraged to listen to the recordings and any further discussion is stopped.

These two cases illustrate the tragic patterns behind the activities. Knowing that only audiovisual archiving can secure an important part of any performance practice<sup>11</sup>, technical equipment and knowhow are very much asked for. Once the 'items' — recordings — are created, the interest in them declines rapidly. The items seem to become suddenly troublesome and a burden for the administration. They are quickly stored away as 'project outcomes' and 'research reports'. While owning items is widely accepted and obviously presented as research achievement, sharing is seen as unethical because sharing is considered as a matter of personal attachment to the items that can only be exchanged between intimate friends. Any other free sharing for the sake of increasing wisdom on a subject is a sort of betrayal.<sup>112</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

Analysing the three cases presented here, we can summarize that knowledge, as something to live and to grow through sharing, is not an appreciated value in the currently practiced academic culture of Peninsular Malaysia. Knowledge is widely seen as an asset in personal promotion and an achievement assigned to its owner; in this case of the audiovisual 'items.' Therefore, audiovisual items cannot be simply included in an archive and if so, not simply be accessed unless the owner — actually the one who was responsible for conducting an approved and financed research programme — agrees graciously upon it.

The real situation of acknowledging rights in documentations and references does not change this situation, because the power of a project leader is mainly based on dependencies of co-researchers, mostly graduate students or colleagues of lower rank. The power balance decides

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111 Mills, 1996, Massey & Stephens, 1998.

112 Jähnichen, 2014; Jähnichen & Meddegoda, 2013.

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finally whether a collection can be used successfully. Culturally, this situation is still far from what audiovisual archiving might be in other areas of the world.

Interestingly, among the musicians recorded, the people who help in arranging sessions and meetings with performers in the communities are much less affected by academic considerations of power relations. They are very often disappointed by not becoming known through archiving activities and by not being included in the discussion of resulting knowledge.

However, even if we state certain sociophobic behaviour, conducting AV archiving in a Malaysian university seems to be a long term undertaking in terms of determination and stubbornness. Every year a challenge, every teaching hour a very small step into an open minded world in which knowledge cannot be monopolized or hidden, in which knowledge invites creative spirits to contribute without hesitation.

The hesitation and the way of hiding is the result of social condemnation, the many years in which knowing things or having seen things could be only powerful in the hands of a few leaders and otherwise quite harmful. The remaining distortion derives from barely movable academic structures and a working design that affects all types of knowledge, not only knowledge that comes with AV documents.

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