

## Changing roles & changing sceneries

From filmarchive to televisionarchive to media-archive

by Annemieke de Jong

At this very moment a lot of archives connected to FIAT/IFTA find themselves right in the middle of huge digital plans and projects. Audiovisual archives seem to be playing a key role in the developments. They are being approached as experts in the field of datamanagement and archiving of multimedia. They are seen as the ultimate 'end-user'. And as by far the biggest and richest provider of digital content.

On the other hand a lot of digital activities seem to be developing outside of us, without us: archive-systems are being built and evaluated by industrial companies, broadcast engineers develop and revise assetmanagementsystems, metadata standards are being set by the industry and by technology groups. And also: archivingprocesses seem to extend themselves to areas outside of the traditional environment.

To get a general overview of the changes we might look at what's happening from four different angles, situating the archives right in the middle of Content, Context, Computing and Communication. At the start of this digital era: what can we see is different? What will- generally spoken- remain the same in comparison to the analogue age? And can we already add something as to which direction we should follow, what new roles we should concentrate upon?

It is clear, that in any future digital environment a lot of the experience we as archives built up over the last decennia can be of great use. In the world of digital production and distribution, where all the material will have to be accurately archived from the start, our old skills are most welcome indeed. To put it even more firmly: *digital production will always be a form of archiving as well*. That is: if people want to be able to trace their own stuff, and to work in the first place. Changing roles implies here that everyone working in digital area has to become a bit of an archivist themselves.

### *Content*

Everyone using this word nowadays. The broadcast and audiovisual industries are 'contentdriven' they say, and: 'technology needs content'. And whenever the word is mentioned people start pointing at us, start looking for ways to use our collections, that they now call 'media-archives'. Our content is wanted more and more, within and outside of our companies, for pilots, projects, for the industry to experiment, for commercial products, for research and development etc.

Another new issue about content: in the digital environment there seem to exist no real obstacles for people to start and exploit a media-archive themselves. And anyone can produce a webcasted radio- and videoprogramme for that matter. Content does not 'belong' only to us anymore. A related aspect is that the physical location does not seem to matter, because digital content might be anywhere. These developments will effect us deeply in one way or the other.

Rather than merely focuss on providing material, we should concentrate on developing the various aspects of managing and delivering content, trying to turn our experience into new assets:

We might adopt the role of *content experts*

- .- Control and maintain the quality and guarding the integrity of the information,
- Our job could be to validate the programmematerial: by adding topical metadata, because computers cannot judge the suitability of av-material for various sorts of use and re-use
- We could help the searchingprocess by structuring the content with the help of controlled vocabularies and a thesaurus: Classification

The fact that our collections are now called content has not solved any of our preservation problems. Digitization is by far not the ultimate answer. Archive-standards for the keeping and maintaining of digital audiovisual media yet have to be set. In a digital world we will still have to deal with a lot of material that will need to be transferred and identified. This problem will probably even grow bigger. We will have to make even more choices as to what to select and catalogue. And then there is the migration of our old analogue material, our so called legacy archives, including our non-machine readable cardcatalogues.

### *Context*

Context in this context refers to the background information about the formal, legal and descriptive aspects, that we as audiovisual archives check and catalogue so we know that our our users can safely use and re-use the material for different purposes. We always have and will go on providing context to audio and videomaterial by means of our catalogue descriptions, now called descriptive metadata. Context to us and to our users includes information about rights and licenses, an area that has always been of importance, but that will be vital in the digital world. Once audiovisual material starts flowing around by its own, information on copyright and the source of the material will be extremely important. How to guard the authenticity of the data when the context lacks? Trustworthy information on where the material comes from, which version is delivered, who owns the copyright will, especially in the digital age, be needed more than ever. We cannot underestimate our future role in this.

## *Computing*

Within a digital environment automated systems play a huge role. Networks link the archive directly to the production process and the archiving process will start right at the beginning of the chain, not at the end. All company-procedures and activities will eventually be dealt with from the same media systems. These new working processes will lead to a much closer relation between technology, content and documentation, areas that were traditionally strictly divided.

Up till now 'computing' and 'automation' has managed to improve our way of cataloguing and our searching capacities substantially. In the near future we can await the introduction of advanced systems that will automatically index material and help us with the pre-cataloguing. It is not expected that the descriptive metadata, the way we catalogue on a semantic level, will undergo too many changes, especially where it covers the interpretation of audio and video material. This goes to show that some of our documental work will have a long lasting value.

In general our long and extensive experience in managing information, managing multimedia – even though it was all analogue- might be a substantial help in controlling and managing the digital data that will invade the

production areas. But working in a tapeless, networked environment will also demand many new skills, a differently educated staff and other working processes that make way for more users and more services.

Right behind the problems that can be solved with the help of our traditional techniques we see many other new problems arise that have to do with the specific nature of digital multimedia that is being distributed via large networks. To name a few : the huge need of methods to identify digital data, the unique identifiers we have to develop. The problem of standardization, the interoperability between information systems and media, the dilemmas that surround automated indexing etc. To solve the problems we need completely new knowledge, a whole new set of documentation rules and principles as well as a digital translation of our old skills.

## *Communication*

At the moment our users still come to the archive to get their material, like they have always done. But the circle of customers is broadening and new groups of users are soon to be reached and serviced in different ways. Because we will not encounter our users face-to-face anymore, because the direct communication will vanish in the near future, we will have to find new ways of finding out who our users are and what they need.

Due to the digital developments, the material we keep will be used and re-used in many new

and still unknown ways. Users can take out of the archive *whatever* they want and *whenever* they want it. Agents and push- and pullapplications like TV/Anywhere-Anytime will facilitate rich and varied ways of using archive material. At any time, to any specific demand, from personalized services to standardized delivery.

Another change we have become aware of concerns our language. A lot of new digital words illustrate the way old, familiar rules are being transferred and acquire a new function in the world of digital distribution. Everyone in the audiovisual business seems to be talking about structure, keywords, cataloguing, identification and classification nowadays. 'Our' words have become other peoples words as well. But the words are used in different ways, depending on the various professional backgrounds. This is logical. The analogue and digital production encloses a lot of processes and the words that describe them, even more. It is clear however, that we cannot transfer our old terms (conservation, preservation, cataloguing, accessibility, distribution, re-use) to the new world just like that. In a digital world these terms might hold a new and different meaning. More uniformity, more standardization in the digital language we use will help us on our way into a joined future .

### *Finally*

Whatever will happen to the archives, in whatever form the digital transformation will take place: it is quite clear that we will not get our new position for free. The change of scenery, the changing roles imply that others will be active on the field of media-archiving as well. Earlier I mentioned the productionarea's within the broadcastcompany, the industry, the commercial firms. Our old skills help but they are not enough. And the fact that we own and exploit a big pile of digital content will not necessarily guarantee our future position either.

One last observation: the change of scenery, the rapid movement towards a digital future might also lead to a change in the archive landscape itself: there is the danger of a gap between the various groups of archives. We can already see that commercial audiovisual archives or archives belonging to commercial

broadcasters are a lot quicker in adopting new media-technologies. Public broadcast archives might follow soon, as it may seem equally profitable for them to exploit new markets and to increase efficiency by automation. But what about some of the National Archives? If not connected to a commercial or public production-environment these archives will most certainly be not as fast in embracing and implementing new technologies. Their collections might remain on the shelf for quite some time, maybe for ever, undigitized, and in the end unaccessible to a public that is used to access multimedia straight from their own desktop.

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