THE AUDIOVISUAL RESEARCH COLLECTION FOR PERFORMING ARTS (ARCPA) AT UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA: NEGOTIATING ETHICAL ISSUES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

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The paper introduces the history of the Audiovisual Research Collection for Performing Arts (ARCPA) and its relevance to the Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and to the recognition of intangible knowledge represented in creative arts. Some challenges of ARCPA's actual situation as well as concrete outcomes from the viewpoint of the recordist, the researcher, and the archivist will be discussed. Further, the team wants to promote the idea of implementing basic knowledge on archiving procedures and principles into undergraduate and graduate studies across Southeast Asia in order to increase awareness towards media sensibility and responsibility regarding audiovisual documents used in research and serving the collective memory of the communities concerned.

Each viewpoint contributes another perspective on the same task and may stimulate a differentiated approach to specific needs in the process of collecting, preserving, maintaining, and giving access. The paper will help to clarify the roles and profiles of different users and participants in the archival process.

1. History and Actual Situation of ARCPA

In 2011, a group of researchers at the Faculty of Human Ecology of Universiti Putra Malaysia started 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. 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 since the main idea is to re-use and to effectively exploit existing audiovisual documents for research and educational purposes.

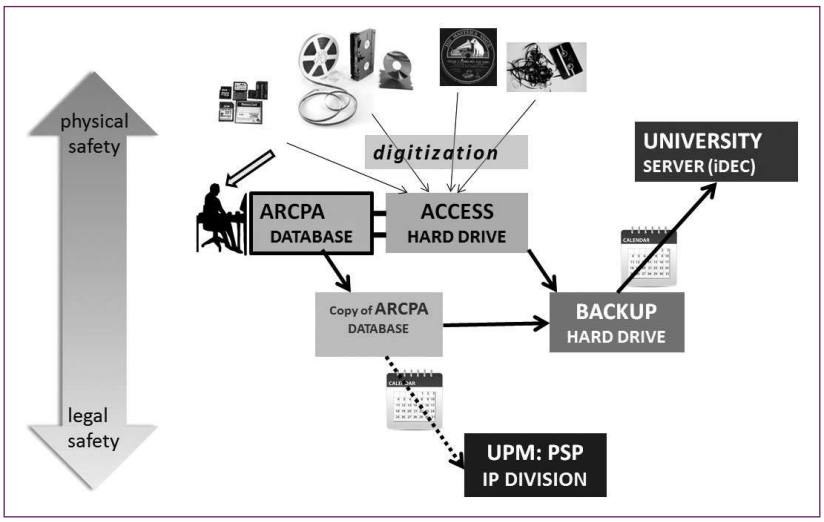

Figure 1: Archiving workflow from the collector/recordist conducting entries in the database while controlled copies are made (with/without digitization) that are stored parallel on two hard drives that are regularly backed up within the university server. The database is copied regularly to the university's Intellectual Property Division to prevent manipulation.

So far, the project may be called successful by the music department and the entire faculty that is home to humanities and social sciences, who increasingly involve audiovisual tools in their research projects. But this was not automatically the case.

Being engaged in audiovisual archiving over decades, it was quite strange to be forced to explain the usefulness and the importance of audiovisual archiving to colleagues who are supposed to be of a similar educational level. However, also being trained in anthropology and cultural studies, we should not be surprised that the actual conditions of tertiary education in Malaysia are complicating a holistic understanding of knowledge sources.

The history of various cultures in place, their mutual relationships that are characterized by parallel rather than interchanging communication (Jähnichen & Meddegoda, 2013) and the post-colonial approach to tertiary education challenge an effective implementation of basic audiovisual archive principles.

To be specific, we struggle with the following conditions regarding the general understanding of audiovisual archiving: A strict difference is made between 1) a publication endorsed by a higher authority such as an approved publishing house and 2) providing access to audiovisual documents. The first seems to be praiseworthy, the second suspicious. When asking about offering AV archival service to a wider clientele within the university, the question often bounced back to us: "Who gave you permission to store other people's things in your archive?" Obviously, the self-determined care about what happens to one's own documents and the recordings of performers and musicians seems to be an alien concept to a number of academics who might be accustomed to blindly follow general procedures of reporting outcomes. The observed unwilling response to audiovisual archiving of research documents indicates, on the other hand, that individual responsibility for outcomes is not in the scope of research. By publishing papers through a publishing house it is believed that a part of responsibility for contents and layout is delegated to the approving body, which could, in return, scare editors and publishers. On the other hand, the insight that grant funded projects and their results are not owned by the project leaders is partially new since knowingly it was only applied on purchased equipment. For many colleagues and subsequently for their students, a sense of responsibility towards research tools, audiovisual resources, documents, and finally towards an increasing knowledge

in a research field is rarely the norm. Thus, audiovisual archiving in academic environments is like starting a vegetarian restaurant on a buffalo ranch.

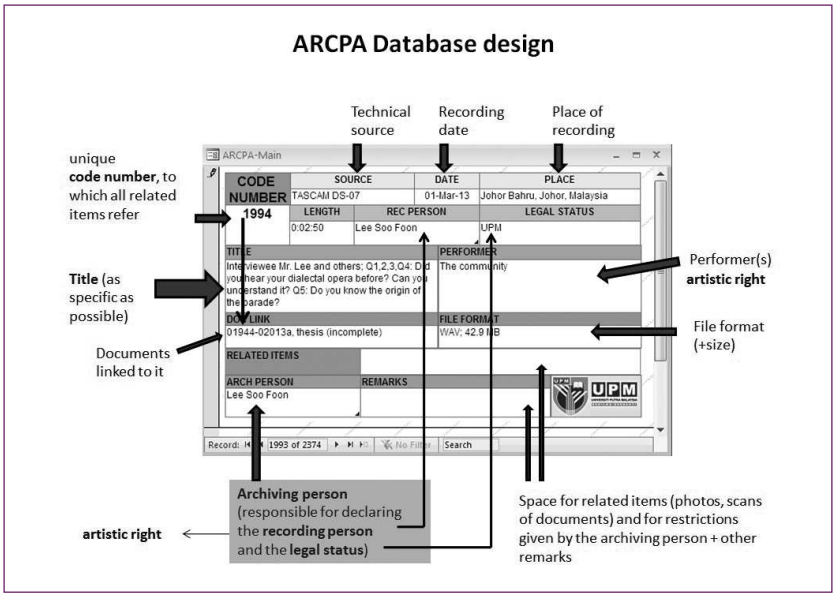

Figure 2: Data sheet for collectors, who conduct entries under the guidance of an archivist. Further manipulation of entries is excluded through immediate back-up copies stored on a separate data carrier that is controlled by the IP division of UPM.

Another problem is the ignorance of those who deliver a critical piece of knowledge at both ends of any research process. During collecting data, musicians or other performers as well as the audio and visual conditions of their practice, are often insufficiently documented given the common habit not to ask odd or other personal questions (Jähnichen, 2014). While working on a publication, the participants are rarely informed or asked for final comments. This common habit makes collecting, maintenance, preservation, and providing access extremely vulnerable regarding both physical and legal safety.

Our main task remains, therefore, taking up the challenge not only to archive audiovisual documents without compromising technical and legal standards but to educate ethically in paying respect to all participants in the process of gaining knowledge and finally to the outcome itself. The key goal of any archiving activity (Edmondson, 2004) is providing access that allows for re-use, learning, and teaching.

2. Quality Recordings for Research Archives

At the root of all audiovisual collecting efforts are the recordings. Here is an example of how a manual for recordings can be designed, especially for social scientists, which are the main users of the archive.

First, a recording team has to be composed. Each team member should be able to conduct all necessary working tasks. However, in an actual case, each member has to focus on the best possible quality of his or her special area that might be different from case to case. To achieve good coordination, any work has to be based on joint agreement and well defined communication modes. Essentially, a number of decisions have to be made by the recording team on the equipment in its best possible effectiveness, though a low budget environment sets some limits. One important concern is, for example, the choice of microphone types according to the type of sound source (see figure 3). The decisions have to be made mostly on the spot and are de-

manding in terms of flexibility within the team. The methods for decision-making and the final production process have to be articulated in the documentation[37] that includes related items such as reports and subsequent research papers (Musib, 2012a, Musib 2012b).

The recording procedure does not end with choosing the right equipment and the positioning of microphones. In course of experiences with this part of the collection, recordings of narratives, of unaccompanied songs, of music ensembles accompanying singing, and of instrumental music within an environmental setting that fits most to its cultural repertoire have to be differentiated (Bradley, 2008). For example, considering low budget recordings but high demands, music ensembles accompanying singing may be recorded best through

- a stereo pair with 3:1 ratio position
- signal level monitoring for balance of ensemble and singers
- sampling rate of at least 16 bit 48kHz or, if the disk space is ample, a user may select 24bit 96kHz.

While using a portable digital recorder, recordists should be aware of ALC (Automatic Loudness Control), a built-in audio signal compressor that attenuates loud signal from over modulating of a signal or distortion at the input signal; and AGC (Automatic Gain Control), a built-in device that serves as a "hands on the knob" function, keeping the correct as well as ideal signal level seen from the perspective of standard audio engineering.

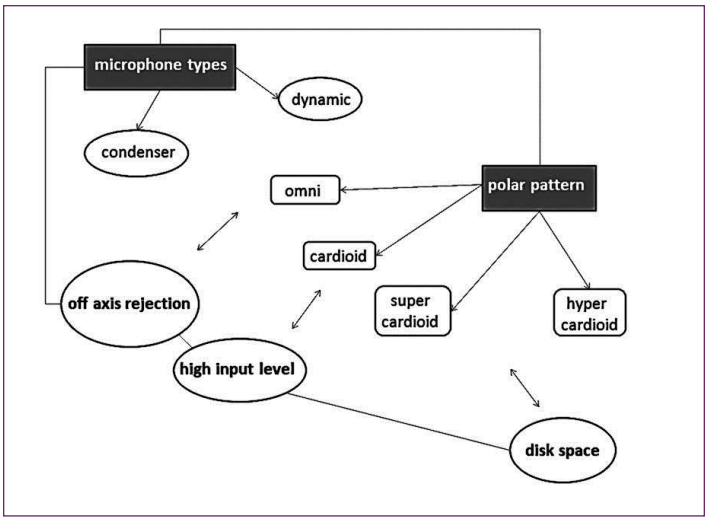

Figure 3: Decisions to be made on the spot in order to achieve high effectiveness in a field recording process.

Another example is recording in a holistic approach that offers alternatives of perception modes as it gives a choice of how the event might have been experienced. As described in an earlier study (Jähnichen & Musib, 2013), the microphone consideration focuses in most cases on the core source and the source might contain multiple radiators such as drums, strings instruments, other sound radiators such as accessories worn by the dancer, and sound activities and occurrences in the surrounding. A 'contextual sound' microphone setting requires

37 Bradley (2009) pointed out regarding effective preservation that this process involves consideration of historical values, their content, as well as archiving a format that can be repossessed in an apparatus which does not alter its originality. In this context, the entire workflow should be considered part of the audiovisual documents. However, in low budget environments, special systems that encode relevant information into the primary preservation object are still not affordable.

sound mapping that draws the attention of the listener into understanding from which angle he or she listens to. To achieve this it is necessary to obtain the overall signal level by using the sound meter. If a stereo microphone is needed, a signal monitoring technique has to be applied to find the most suitable spot for placing the microphones. Again, the sampling rate should be at minimum of 16bit with 48 kHz or, if the disk space is ample, one may use 24bit with 96 kHz (Bradley, 2009).

Despite all technical efforts that must be based on cultural information on the event to be recorded, it is important to treat the sound as knowledge (Wightman and Jenison, 1995) which is not limited to only an instrument and musicians. The sound environment should also fall in the picture of an archivist and should be documented in equal quality to the content description (Wightman & Jenison, 1995). Taking field notes on recording matters is of the same importance to the archiving process as photographing the recording situation, spatial layout, and special parts of the equipment.

3. User Cultures

Seen from the other end of the archiving process, though some users and enthusiastic collectors are already working hard on it, a wider user community has to be introduced into the various functions of the archive and to be educated in terms of amplifying the effect of the archiving process. To promote the archive, the main advantages from the viewpoint of the 1) performers, 2) recordists, and 3) the researchers have to be clearly explained and made visible.

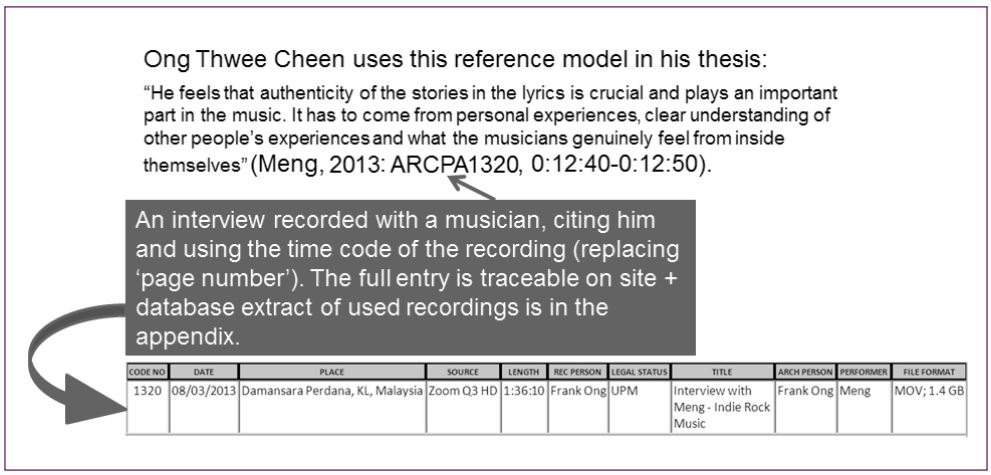

Figure 4: How audiovisual documents serve as reference material. Through linked documents, more information can be traced about the performer.

One good and convincing strategy to attract researchers is acknowledging them the possibility to integrate audiovisual documents as reference material in their publications. Also, researchers in many tertiary educational institutions can claim recordings and their documentation as counts for their productivity index. Graduate students are pioneering in this function and have shown in a number of theses and editions that the reference system is of advantage for both researchers and performers, who are recognized in an academically satisfactory way for the first time. Previous publications on anthropological or ethnomusicological issues suffered often from insufficient data provided such as "a musician A in village X" or "an informant B in Y street of Z town at the beginning of the 20th century." Even if more precise data were given, they were presented in a "zoological" manner (Jähnichen, 2014) mentioning age, gender, race, and body characteristics (such as "small, pink skinned, nearly bald, with white moustache") before getting to the professional skills and the performance offered in a way that respects the personality of the performers in giving an account of the event and the contents of the performance with

reference to the performers' or their descendants' contact details. In this way, when database entries are requested, self-servicing collectors as well as users are forced to rethink their interactions with the participants of the recordings (Seeger, 1996).

Another important tool in promoting the functions of audiovisual archiving for research in social sciences is the assurance of not exploiting the material commercially without providing security control mechanisms. The commonly displayed fear for loss of control of audiovisual documents seems ridiculous in the context of print publications, of which nobody is ever able to know all readers. Nevertheless, there is still a perception that the partners with whom one is going to share knowledge must be approved by an authority.

As observed, resentments towards any collection of information in the world of research derive from bad experiences in natural sciences with authorship infringement following the stealing of research data. This general bias is hard to overcome although in social sciences, looking at the diversity of items that might be found in the database (see figure 5), such incidents rarely occur or may not occur at all. Nevertheless, the theoretical possibility is often taken as an excuse to avoid archiving procedures or to delay the lifting of access restrictions (Schüller, 2008, Seeger, 1997).

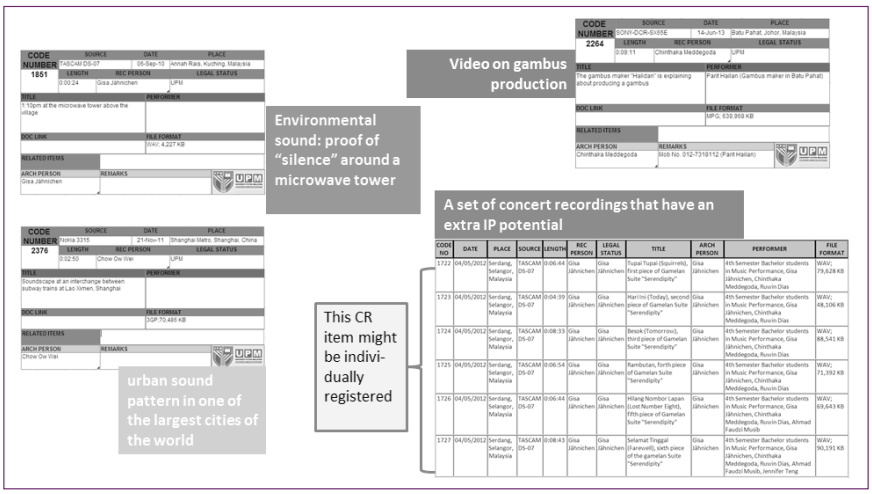

Figure 5: Diversity of audiovisual documents stored and maintained in ARCPA. Most of the documents do not serve further exploitation as IP items of the university. However, copyright and legal status is clearly stated.

Also, a widespread misconception is the assumption of not being able to control one's own rights from the moment in which the data are stored in an archive. This applies also if the original data carriers are not handed over. This fear derives partly from ingrained social experience in being detached from decision making regarding laws and their applications. It is a culturally rather than an individually patterned perception of participation in an interactive process. Still in search for ideas how to turn this perception into pro-active participation and in promoting knowledge access, ARCPA has designed a webpage to provide all necessary information on various archiving tools and subsequent control options. To give an example of the challenge, this website has not yet been approved and endorsed by the department's leading group since there are supposedly still pending questions of integrity to be answered.

Another point in promoting the archive is the design of its outer appearance. Since a digital archive does not look like a conventional audio and video library with nicely labeled items on shelves, students who might be open to its functionality are not much attracted by its unexciting look. However, original carriers that have been digitized, have to be stored in an envi-

ronmentally safer place than the entry and access point of the archive. Therefore, a few items such as duplicates of recordings or replay units, musical instruments, and audio equipment are exhibited in order to attract larger groups of beginners in the academic world.

4. Final Remarks

Many details have to be improved further, such as the ability to include entries in the database that should not be fully accessible to all users. Until now, in order to provide the most transparency possible, ARCPA has worked with only one interface to the database. This might be changed in the future.

One of the most burning tasks is the integration of audiovisual archive principles in as equal of a way as library information has been integrated into undergraduate and graduate studies of tertiary educational institutions. Only long-term training of all potential "stakeholders" may help to face the growing importance of audiovisual documents in the future of research and education. How this training might be designed depends strongly on cultural conditions as the case of ARCPA shows.

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