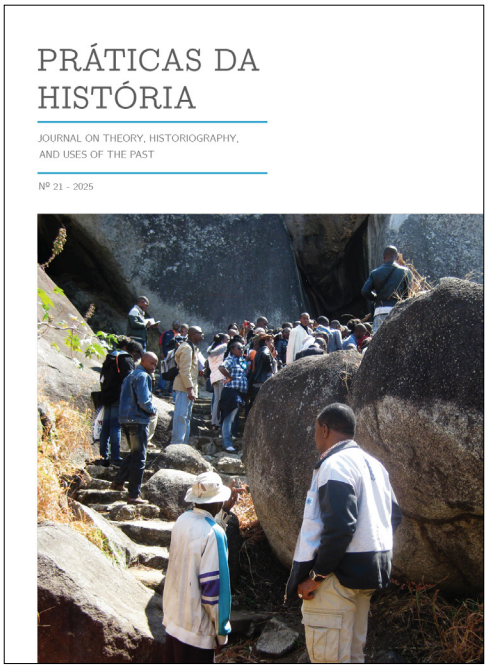


Fifteen Years after 'The Genealogical Gaze'. Constructing Family Archives

Eric Ketelaar

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"The Genealogical Gaze: Family Identities and Family Archives in the Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries" was the title of a paper published in 2009. In that paper I argued that in Renaissance Florence, early modern England, and the Netherlands in the Golden Age, from the fourteenth century on, the "genealogical gaze" transfigured family archives into a cultural patrimony to be preserved, expanded, and transferred to future generations. In the same year that my article was published, it was welcomed by scholars of family archives at the Nova University of Lisbon as "part of a broader investigation into the birth of the patrimonial conception of archives, the most recent continuation of which was research into the occurrence of this conception precisely in family archives." Fifteen years later, I was asked to revisit the brief history of the concept of the "genealogical gaze." Following this review, I suggest some topics and methodologies that may enrich our understanding of family archives, past and present.
Keywords: genealogical gaze; family archives; social history of the archives.

Quinze anos após "The Genealogical Gaze". Construindo os arquivos familiares

"The Genealogical Gaze: Family Identities and Family Archives in the Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries" foi o título de um artigo publicado em 2009. Nesse artigo, argumentei que, na Florença renascentista, na Inglaterra moderna e na Holanda da Idade de Ouro, a partir do século XIV, o "olhar genealógico" transformou os arquivos familiares num património cultural a ser preservado, expandido e transferido para as gerações futuras. No mesmo ano em que o meu artigo foi publicado, foi acolhido por estudiosos de arquivos de família, na Universidade Nova de Lisboa, como "parte de uma investigação mais ampla sobre o nascimento da concepção patrimonial dos arquivos, cuja continuação mais recente foi a investigação sobre a ocorrência dessa concepção precisamente nos arquivos de família". Quinze anos mais tarde, foi-me pedido que revisitasse a breve história do conceito de "olhar genealógico". Após essa revisão, sugiro alguns tópicos e metodologias que podem enriquecer a nossa compreensão dos arquivos de família, passados e presentes.
Palavras-chave: olhar genealógico; arquivos de família; história social dos arquivos.

Fifteen Years after "The Genealogical Gaze". Constructing Family Archives

por Eric Ketelaar*

The Genealogical Gaze and beyond

"The Genealogical Gaze: Family Identities and Family Archives in the Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries" was the title of a paper I presented at the third ICHORA (International Conference on the History of Records and Archives) held in Boston in 2007. It was published in 2009 in *Libraries & the Cultural Record*.[1] The theme of the conference was "Personal Papers in History" but I focused on the family as a space in which identities and archives are constructed. Using Susan Crane's concept of the "historical gaze" which, through interacting with its object, creates a monument,[2] I argued that in Renaissance Florence, early modern England, and the Netherlands in the Golden Age, from the fourteenth century on, the "genealogical gaze" transfigured family archives into a cultural patrimony to be preserved, expanded, and transferred to future generations. Of course, the creation of any archival document entails an awareness of a *longue durée* stretching from what Australian colleagues call "a nanosecond" of archive making, well

* Eric Ketelaar (eketelaar@xs4all.nl). https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2966-1593. Department of Media Studies - University of Amsterdam, Turfdraagsterpad 9, 1012 XT Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

1 Eric Ketelaar, "The Genealogical Gaze: Family Identities and Family Archives in the Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries," *Libraries & the Cultural Record* 44, no. 1 (2009): 9-28.

2 Susan Crane, *Collecting and Historical Consciousness in Early Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 28-30.

into the future.[3] Every archive creator acts with a future use of the document in mind, even throwing away a piece of paper is an archival decision. I will come back later to that counter-archivalization. But this archival awareness is different from the notion that records created in the course of current business *may be transferred as a heritage to future generations who will value these records as cultural assets.* Some records are transfigured into archival and cultural patrimony. Felipa Lopez called it the archival metamorphosis.[4]

In the same year my paper appeared in print (2009), Maria de Lurdes Rosa welcomed it as "part of a wider investigation into the birth of the patrimonial conception of archives, the most recent continuation of which was the investigation into the occurrence of that conception precisely in family archives."[5] Maria de Lurdes Rosa adopted the concept of the genealogical gaze in her introduction to the book *Arquivos de Família, Séculos XIII-XX: Que Presente, Que Futuro?*, published in 2012.[6] Maria de Lurdes Rosa translated genealogical gaze by "perspectiva genealógica". The same translation was used in 2016 by Judit Gutierrez de Armas in her review of the state of the art with respect to family archives.[7] More recently, Judit used the expression "mirada genealogica".[8] I think that using the term "perspective" risks obscuring

3 Nanosecond archiving captures "direct relationships between actions, recorded inscriptions and business processes": Frank Upward *et al.*, *Recordkeeping Informatics for a Networked Age* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2018), 94.

4 Filipa Lopes, "Researching the Archive, Studying Family History: A Doctoral Research Project on the *Viscondes de Vila Nova de Cerveira e Marqueses de Ponte de Lima* Archive," in *Recovered Voices, Newfound Questions. Family Archives and Historical Research*, ed. Maria de Lurdes Rosa *et al.* (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2019), 218.

5 Maria de Lurdes Rosa, "Problemáticas históricas e arquivísticas actuais para o estudo dos arquivos de família portugueses (épocas medieval e moderna)," *Revista de História da Sociedade e da Cultura* 9 (2009): 22: "parte de um inquérito mais vasto sobre o nascimento da concepção patrimonial dos arquivos, e que teve como mais recente continuação a investigação da ocorrência daquela concepção precisamente nos arquivos de família."

6 Maria de Lurdes Rosa, "Arquivos de família: para um roteiro de temas e problemas," in *Arquivos de Família, Séculos XIII-XX: Que Presente, Que Futuro?*, ed. Maria de Lurdes Rosa (Lisbon: Instituto de Estudos Medievais, 2012).

7 Judit Gutiérrez de Armas, "Estado de la cuestión de los estudios sobre archivos de familia," in *XXII Coloquio de Historia Canario-Americana (2016)* (XXII-088, 2017).

8 Judit Gutiérrez de Armas and Francisco Precioso-Izquierdo, "Representação da família nobre no Atlântico hispânico. O livro da família Ponte nas Ilhas Canárias (1615-1640)," *HiSTOReLo. Revista de Historia Regional y Local* 13, no. 28 (2021): 68-95.

the agency of the beholder, the agency so essential in the construction of the archive, as I will discuss later.

The concept of the genealogical gaze was slowly adopted. Some of the publications before 2020 include a reference to my "genealogical gaze", without however discussing or mentioning the concept in the main text. Since the 2020s more engagement with the concept was shown in a number of articles and theses, by scholars in history and archivistics from Portugal, Netherlands, Spain, Turkey, Germany, United Kingdom, and Australia. Two important books published in 2023 refer to the term or the concept of the "genealogical gaze": Markus Friedrich's *The Maker of Pedigrees* on the meanings of genealogy in early modern Europe, and Alexandra Walsham's *Generations. Age, Ancestry, and Memory in the English Reformations*.[9]

I feel honoured by Markus Friedrich's reference to my article, but it seems that we are using the term for different concepts and practices. Friedrich's genealogical gaze and Walsham's genealogical itch or fever[10] is the fascination with genealogy as a cultural, social, religious and political practice. That preoccupation led early modern Europeans to genealogical research and to making and using pedigrees and other documentary genres. These documents (supporting what Daniel Woolf terms "the genealogical imagination"[11]) were normally stored in the family archives. There they were intertwined (to use an expression by Alexandra Walsham[12]) with the records created and received by family members in the course of business and kept as evidence for future reference. Only subsequently were these legal and administrative archives

9 Markus Friedrich, *The Maker of Pedigrees: Jakob Wilhelm Imhoff and the Meanings of Genealogy in Early Modern Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2023); Alexandra Walsham, *Generations. Age, Ancestry, and Memory in the English Reformations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023). See also Markus Friedrich, "Genealogy as Archive-Driven Research Enterprise in Early Modern Europe," *Osiris* 32, no. 1 (2017): 64-84, and Markus Friedrich, "Genealogy and the History of Knowledge," in *Genealogical Knowledge in the Making: Tools, Practices, and Evidence in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Jost Eickmeyer *et al.* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2019).

10 Walsham, *Generations*, 172, 497.

11 Daniel Woolf, *The Social Circulation of the Past: English Historical Culture 1500–1730* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 99-137.

12 Walsham, *Generations*, 498.

transfigured by the "genealogical gaze" into a cultural patrimony to be preserved, expanded, and transferred to future generations. Perhaps "patrimonial gaze" would be a better expression. Or "patrimony consciousness", as Alexandra Walsham suggests.

The two conceptions of genealogical gaze (Friedrich's and my transforming archives into patrimony) are linked. Many families, after having acquired genealogical knowledge recorded and preserved in pedigrees, encyclopedias and other documentary forms, would also keep in their muniment room administrative and evidential archival genres. Some of these would eventually be transfigured by the genealogical gaze. One genealogical gaze stimulated the other. Hybrid forms were used too: for example, by continuing their father's account books, sons would convey "patrimonial continuity", as Imogen Peck recently wrote.[13]

As I said, Maria de Lurdes Rosa introduced Portuguese scholars and practitioners to the concept of the genealogical gaze in *Arquivos de família* in 2012. That happened in the context of the renewed interest in and engagement with family archives.[14] *Arquivos de família*, a book of more than seven hundred pages, predominantly covered family archives in Portugal, Spain, and Italy. The more than fifty case studies framed family archives in patrimonialization, archiving and history.

After 2012, family archives stayed on the research agenda of universities and archival institutions, leading to (inter)national research projects, seminars, dissertations and numerous articles. Much of that research on family archives was carried out under the umbrella of *Arquivística Histórica*,

13 Imogen Peck, "'Of No Sort of Use'? Manuscripts, Memory, and the Family Archive in Eighteenth Century England." *Cultural and Social History* 20, no. 2 (2023): 193.

14 For an overview, see Rosa, "Arquivos de família: para um roteiro"; Maria de Lurdes Rosa, "Arquivos de família – o que são, para que servem, como preservá-los e estudá-los. Tendências actuais da investigação histórica e dos estudos em patrimonialização," in *Actas do 3.º Congresso Internacional Casa Nobre: Um Património para o Futuro* (Arcos de Valdevez: Município de Arcos de Valdevez, 2013); Gutiérrez de Armas, "Estado de la cuestión"; Rita Sampaio da Nóvoa and Maria de Lurdes Rosa, "O estudo dos arquivos de família de antigo regime em Portugal. Percursos e temas de investigação," *Revista Brasileira de História* 38, no. 78 (2018): 75-95; Abel Rodrigues, "Os arquivos pessoais e familiares em Portugal: uma reflexão crítica dos últimos vinte anos," in *Actas do I Encontro da Fundación Olga Gallego: arquivos privados de persoas e familias. Unha ollada á Fundación Penzol (Vigo, 27 de outubro de 2017)* (A Coruña: Fundación Olga Gallego, 2018).

introduced by Maria de Lurdes Rosa in 2011/2012 at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa, and recognized as a subdiscipline of archivistics in interdisciplinary conjunction with history and information science.[15]

In 2019, a new milestone was reached with the book *Recovered Voices, Newfound Questions. Family Archives and Historical Research.*[16] The book was to be launched on 6 April 2020 at a seminar connected to the VINCULUM project. However, the seminar was cancelled because of the pandemic. I am glad that I archived the speech and the slides I had prepared, and which form the basis of my presentation today.

In 2019, Maria de Lurdes Rosa contributed a chapter to Eickmeyer, Friedrich, and Bauer, *Genealogical Knowledge in the Making: Tools, Practices, and Evidence in Early Modern Europe.*[17] In 2021 and 2022, Maria published a short introduction to a collection of papers *Les archives familiales dans l'Occident médiéval et moderne: trésor, arsenal, mémorial*, followed by a paper *Ouvertures et fermetures des archives de famille, XIVe-XXIe siècles.*[18]

Although not specifically focusing on the history of family archives, a useful overview and bibliography of research on family archives was published in 2017 – a fruit of the UK research project "The Family Archive: Exploring Family Identities, Memories and Stories through Curated Personal Possessions."[19] The multinational project Archifam (2013-2015), yielded in 2021 the volume *Les archives familiales dans*

15 Maria de Lurdes Rosa, "Reconstruindo a produção, documentalização e conservação da informação organizacional pré-moderna. Perspetivas teóricas e proposta de percurso de investigação," *Boletim do Arquivo da Universidade de Coimbra* 30 (2017): 547-586; Maria de Lurdes Rosa and Rita Sampaio da Nóvoa, "Arquivística Histórica e arquivos de família, entre História e Ciência arquivística," *Revista Portuguesa de História* 49 (2018): 85-98.

16 Maria de Lurdes Rosa *et al.*, eds., *Recovered Voices, Newfound Questions.*

17 Maria de Lurdes Rosa, "The Production of Genealogical Knowledge for the Arrangement of Archives of Noble Families (Portugal, Fifteenth to Early Nineteenth Centuries)," in Eickmeyer *et al.*, *Genealogical Knowledge.*

18 Maria de Lurdes Rosa, "Preâmbulo da primeira parte," in *Les Archives familiales dans l'Occident médiéval et moderne: trésor, arsenal, mémorial*, ed. Véronique Lamazou-Duplan (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2021); Maria de Lurdes Rosa, "Ouvertures et fermetures des archives de famille. Portugal et la Péninsule Ibérique, XIV-XXIe siècle," in *Les conflits d'archives: France, Espagne, Méditerranée*, ed. Stéphane Péquignot and Yann Potin (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2022).

19 Anna Woodham *et al.*, "We Are What We Keep: The Family Archive, Identity and Public/Private Heritage." *Heritage & Society* 10, no. 3 (2017): 203-220.

l'Occident médiéval et moderne. Trésor, arsenal, mémorial, edited by Véronique Lamazou-Duplan.[20] The book contains 39 papers, a part of these based on doctorate research and theses. Universities in Portugal, Spain and France worked together with archival institutions and with owners of family archives to produce this magnificent result.

In concluding *The Genealogical Gaze*, I suggested that we use our understanding of the past in discussing current and future concerns of the archival endeavour. To what extent, I asked, are records constructive in creating and maintaining memories, communities, and identities of individuals, families, corporate bodies, social groups, nations? These are political questions but also questions that determine the agenda for research in archivistics: historical, comparative, future-oriented research. A lot of that agenda has been implemented in the past fifteen years. Essential and influential was the involvement of the community of scholars in archivistics in Portugal, reaching out to colleagues in other countries. Still, the research agenda is as yet not fully depleted, as the papers in this dossier make clear. As a start, I may suggest some topics and methodologies which might enrich our understanding of family archives.

Frameworks of memory

In my article, I quoted the French anthropologist and ethnologist Françoise Zonabend. Every person, she writes, "is fixed in a genealogical network in space and time, where past and present, kindred and community are intermingled. Each individual is set first and foremost in a time determined through the family."[21] This is what the "father of sociology" Maurice Halbwachs argued.[22] The first social framework of any individual's memories is constituted by his or her family. Personal memory (remembrance of what one has experienced) is not sealed

20 Véronique Lamazou-Duplan, ed., *Les Archives familiales dans l'Occident médiéval et moderne.*

21 Françoise Zonabend, *The Enduring Memory: Time and History in a French Village* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 142.

22 Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. Francis J. Ditter, Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper & Row, 1980); Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

off from other people's remembrances, from what Halbwachs called social or historical memory. The family too, has a memory: as with any other collective group the family has "its memories which it alone commemorates, and its secrets that are revealed only to its members."[23] However, family memory is embedded in (and permeated by) larger frameworks of kinship, local and regional memories, religion, nation, etc. Halbwachs therefore discussed the collective memory of the family first, before he went on to describe religious collective memory and that of social classes.

It looks like a simple step from a reification of family memory to reifying family archives. Who creates a family archives? At some point in time, the *pater familias* or another family member has cast a genealogical gaze on one or two or many documents in the archive chest or the muniment room or the library. Gazing at some documents, leaving others untouched. This leads to the primordial creation of a family archives, but only to the extent that other family members endorse the creative act. A patrimony "needs not only a testator and a will, but also an heir who accepts the conditions."[24] By sharing the genealogical gaze, family members become co-creators of the family archives, contributing to the "accumulated layers of meaning" of the archives.[25]

This creative process has very recently been unraveled by the Australian archivistics scholar Michael Piggott, who worked on his family's papers which he and his siblings had inherited.[26] We need more ethnographic and anthropological studies like Piggott's and Woodham's to understand more fully the constructing of contemporary family archives. In those endeavours, it is important to listen to the owner of the archives, following the example of several projects in Portugal and Spain.[27] And at this conference owners of archives are well represented

23 Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 59.

24 Ketelaar, "Genealogical Gaze", referring to Jean-Marie Léniaud's "paradigm of patrimony".

25 Rosa *et al.*, *Recovered Voices*, 181; Rita Sampaio da Nóvoa, "Family Archives, the Archival Practices of Noble Families, and the Social Logic of Archival Preservation (Portugal, Fifteenth to Nineteenth Centuries)," in Rosa *et al.*, *Recovered Voices*.

26 Michael Piggott, "Family Archives, Fateful Options," *Archivaria* 96 (2023): 6-35.

27 Rosa, "Arquivos de família: para um roteiro"; Filipa Lopes, "L'accès aux archives familiales au Portugal: archives de familles nobles de la fin du Moyen Âge et de l'Ancien Régime," in *Les*

too. All the same, many researchers are concerned with medieval and premodern family archives only and not with their continuation or construction in modern times. Archival history (*Arquivística Histórica*) is not restricted to classical, medieval and early modern studies. Yesterday's archiving is history too. Furthermore, the current focus on archiving by nobility and elites should be extended by paying attention to other actors in society—past and present.[28] Research on family archives could profit from research on community archives.[29] As the editors of *Recovered Voices, Newfound Questions* argued, it is "useful to think of family archives as community archives, reinforcing with this concept the role they have played, and in some cases still play, in forming and consolidating a community identity."[30] But also vice versa: the experiences and discourse of community archives (and of the community archives movement) may serve as inspiration for all people working with family archives.[31]

Research in archival history can be enriched by sociology, anthropology and other social sciences, even by art. As yet there are very few archival scholars and practitioners who acknowledge the important contribution that art and artists could make to archivistics.[32]

The family as such is an archives creator too. Writing about commonplace books, Adam Smythe has argued "that a family might be

sources inédites en Histoire. Travaux issus des journées d'étude de jeunes chercheurs organisées à l'École nationale des chartes, les 25 et 26 mai 2018, par le centre Jean-Mabillon et l'association Chroniques chartists, ed. Léo Davy (Paris: École nationale des chartes, 2021); Maria de Lurdes Rosa and Randolph C. Head, eds., *Rethinking the Archive in Pre-Modern Europe: Family Archives and Their Inventories from the 15th to the 19th Century* (Lisbon: Instituto de Estudos Medievais, 2015).

28 F. Borja Aguinagalde, "Gli archivi di famiglia nei Paesi Baschi (1990-2018): un ambito di gestione specifico e integrale," *Atlanti* 28, no. 1 (2018): 139-149.

29 The literature on community archives is abundant. See Rebecka Sheffield, "Community Archives," in *Currents of Archival Thinking*, ed. Heather MacNeil and Terry Eastwood, 2nd ed. (Santa Barbara, Denver and Oxford: Libraries Unlimited, 2017).

30 Rosa *et al.*, *Recovered Voices*, 17.

31 Anne Gilliland and Andrew Flinn, "Community Archives: What Are We Really Talking About?," keynote at IRN Prato Community Informatics Conference, 2013, https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Community-Archives-%3A-what-are-we-really-talking-Gilliland-Flinn/fc9057422d047559943b6da10572addb467e88e1.

32 Eric Ketelaar, "Archive Art," revised paper presented at the international symposium Archiving Exhibiting – Going Off-script in Art Archives, Museu Picasso Barcelona and Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona, March 16-17, 2023.

said to author" these texts. Since many were inscribed by people of successive generations, the books (not only commonplace books, but also recipe books,[33] the family bible, pedigrees, etc.) can be regarded as written *by* the family. We do not see anything wrong with the expression: the archives of the city X, or agency Y, knowing that the archive is practically formed by individuals working for that city or agency. This is also true for family archives and therefore the new ICA standard Records-in-contexts recognizes the family as an agent.[34]

The *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* by Muller, Feith, and Fruin (1898) considered "so called family archives" to be "a conglomerate of papers and documents", very often "gathered together in the strangest manner", they "do not form a whole" and lack the organic bond of an archive. "The rules for ordinary archives, therefore, cannot be applied to family archives."[35] This verdict lasted for nineteen years only. In 1917, at the annual meeting of State Archivists, under the presidency of National Archivist Fruin, it was acknowledged that a family archive is an organic whole, encompassing private documents, official and semi-official documents and manorial records. This was in fact a codification of archival practice and policies which, even before 1917, had been accepted. Unfortunately, the reversal of the 1898 verdict was not mentioned in the second edition of the Manual of 1920. It is a pity that in most foreign literature the Manual's rejection of archival quality of family archives was perpetuated.[36]

33 Elaine Leong, *Recipes and Everyday Knowledge. Medicine, Science, and the Household in Early Modern England* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 129.

34 International Council on Archives, *Records in Contexts – Conceptual Model (RiC-CM)*, version 1.0 (ICA, 2023), https://www.ica.org/resource/records-in-contexts-conceptual-model/.

35 Samuel Muller *et al.*, *Manual de Arranjo e Descrição de Arquivos*, trans. Manoel Adolfo Wanderley (Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Nacional, 1973), http://arquivistica.fci.unb.br/titulo-da-obra/manual-de-arranjo-e-descricao-de-arquivos-2/, annotation of paragraph 13: "No entanto, não abrange o exposto os chamados «arquivos de família». Constituem estes, por via de regra, um aglomerado de papéis e escritos, que os vários membros de determinada família, ou os habitantes de uma casa ou castelo, na qualidade de pessoas privadas ou a títulos diversos, algumas vezes mesmo como colecionadores de curiosidades reuniram e conservaram. Os documentos de um arquivo de família não formam «um todo»; foram, não raro, agrupados segundo os mais estranhos critérios e falta-lhes a conexão orgânica de um arquivo no sentido em que o define o presente Manual. As regras para o arquivo em sua acepção própria não se aplicam, pois, aos arquivos de família."

36 Just one example: Lopes, "L'accès aux archives", 192.

Genres

The archiving by a family and any other community extends beyond its boundaries, involving addressees, senders, and all other parties who are participating in an intertextual genre system. Genres have been introduced into archivistics from the field of rhetorical genre studies. The journal *Archival Science* devoted a special issue to it in 2012. Genres are patterns of communication written and non-written—according to the norms of a certain community. A genre is a social category, linked to the expectations and norms of a social group. Genres offer social codes of conduct, which on the one hand stimulate a certain interaction, but which can also limit it. In my article *The Genealogical Gaze*, I showed how the "genealogical gaze" was expressed in various document genres: Florentine *ricordanze*, pedigrees, family histories, memoirs, cartularies, letters, *prioristi* and other office genealogies showing which family members were entitled to offices, etc. They were all important for transmitting values and family identity to descendants.

In the 1990s, the concept of a genre system was introduced by Charles Bazerman, who wrote that a genre system is a "complex web of interrelated genres, where each participant makes a recognizable act or move in some recognizable genre, which then may be followed by a certain range of appropriate generic responses by others".[37] "It is therefore a particularly useful concept for archival studies as it allows researchers and practitioners to consider a record's broader context, both within and beyond the organizational and physical setting where it was created."[38]

Genres provide social codes of behaviour and they can initiate actions: people know how to respond to a particular genre. An application for a patent triggers a specific social action involving different participants and genres, a petition for a writ of summons triggers a sequence of genres created and used by lawyers, judges, and parties directly or indirectly involved in the litigation.

37 Charles Bazerman, "Systems of genres and the enactment of social intentions," in *Genre and the New Rhetoric*, ed. Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994), 97.

38 Pamela McKenzie and Elisabeth Davies, "Genre systems and 'keeping track' in everyday life," *Archival Science* 12 (2012): 441.

Consider, for example, the archival consequences of the death of a family member. The relatives at the death bed, the doctor or coroner, the funeral director—everyone knows what is expected of him or her. The doctor checks whether there is a donor codicil (genre 1) and he makes the death certificate (genre 2). It is delivered to the town hall when the death is formally notified (genre 3). No funeral or cremation may take place without a death notification. Extracts from the death certificate drawn up (genre 4) are provided to the relatives (genre 5). They need that extract for consulting the central register of wills (genre 6), for cancelling the rent (genre 7), for paying out a life insurance policy (genre 8), etc. A notary must draw up a certificate of inheritance (genre 9), allowing the heirs to access the bank account. In the meantime, the immediate family has prepared and disseminated the death notice (*faire part de décès*) (genre 10). The first letters of condolence come in (genre 11) ... and so the paper trail continues. In a short time the death led to eleven consecutive and interconnected documentary genres, according to a partly unwritten scenario in which each participant performs an action in a certain genre, which evokes certain reactions in others. Some of these documents end up in the family archives as muniments and/or monuments, depending on the genealogical gaze. Still, the documents stay "alive", "comprised in their continuing and future enactment and use; in layers of performance."[39] Archival documents are not static, "they are constantly refreshed so that their ephemerality endures", to quote Wendy Hui Kyong Chun.[40] I have discussed the ephemerality in my paper "Celebrating Change in Archives", at the seminar "Rethinking the Archive(s)/ Repensar o(s) Arquivo(s)', organized by l'Instituto de Estudos Medievais and the VINCULUM project, 9 November 2023.

Thus, the archive keeps its openness and transformative force that characterize a genre system.[41] Conceptualizing family archives as genre

39 Paul Clarke *et al.*, eds., *Artists in the Archive. Creative and Curatorial Engagements with Documents of Art and Performance* (Abingdon and Oxford: Routledge, 2018).

40 Wendy Hui Kyong, "The Enduring Ephemeral, or The Future Is a Memory," in *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, ed. Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 184.

41 According to Fiorella Foscarini (in conversation with the author, April 2024), genre systems typically refer to ongoing activities where multiple, different genres interact with one another. She agreed, however, that a family archives that is "in progress" may qualify as a genre system.

systems brings "the social" embedded in archiving to the foreground, emphasizes what Bazerman calls the "multivocality" of the text and highlights the enabling (and constraining) power of archives and archiving.

Archivalization

Archiving happens in a social context. This contextuality implies that archiving changes in society, but vice versa also supports changes in society. I call this the duality of the archive (*a dualidade do arquivar*): we construct the archive and are constructed by the archive.[42] Joseph Morsel calls this the sociogenetic outcome of archiving. Or, to borrow from Anthony Giddens' duality of structure: structural (or structuring) properties of archiving (communicative action) are produced and reproduced in what people do, they are the medium *and* the outcome of activities of actors. As Filipa Lopes argued: "In fact, the profile, nature and social behavior of families conditioned the type of documentation that was produced and preserved. Consequently, their archives provide clues as to how families self-regulated and saw themselves."[43]

Archiving is a social practice, entailing a social logic. That logic is conditioned by what the Dutch historian Judith Pollmann calls the scripts available within a family, social group, or community. These scripts are included in Markus Friedrich's "archival ideologies". I have proposed the concept of archivalization:[44] the conscious or unconscious choice (determined by social and cultural factors) to consider something worth archiving: *arquivalização, a escolha consciente ou inconsciente (determinada por fatores sociais e culturais) para considerar se algo merece ser arquivado.*

Archivalization permeates the family too. We must be aware of the fact that a family archive, like every archive, is a construction. What did the family want to keep and what did they destroy? Think

42 Eric Ketelaar, "A dualidade do arquivar," in *Informação e Memória: Perspectivas em Movimento*, ed. Ricardo Medeiros Pimenta, Leyde Klebia Rodrigues da Silva and Thayron Rodrigues Rangel (Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Brasileiro de Informação em Ciência e Tecnologia, 2021).

43 Lopes, "Researching the Archive", 209.

44 Eric Ketelaar, "Archivalisation and Archiving," *Archives and Manuscripts. The Journal of the Australian Society of Archivists* 27, no. 1 (1999): 54-61.

of sensitive correspondence, diaries, financial documents concerning a bankruptcy.[45] "Understanding 'family archive' is dependent on understanding family politics," as Verne Harris wrote.[46] The family archive reflects the image that the family wants to give of itself. Timo de Nijs, who has been researching the family life of the well-to-do citizen of Rotterdam since the end of the nineteenth century, concludes that the content and form of a family archive, even its existence alone, was part of "the discourse that families kept about themselves". That is very normal. People in their dealings with objects—furniture, art, photos, books, musical instruments, scrapbooks and also archives—define who they are, or were or want to become. But that identification belongs to the "tacit narratives" of the family archive. When describing a family archive and when characterizing its components, account should be taken of the constructedness of the archive that results from the self-image not only that of the archive creators, but also that of the descendants who save the archive or donate or deposit it at an archive institution. These self-images are formed in a social context that varies according to time and place.

Absences

Studying archiving in the past, focusing on the people involved in archiving made me realize that, in fact, destruction is the default, and preservation is accidental. Olivier Poncet quotes Leibniz (1714): "Pourquoi il y a plutôt quelque chose que rien"?[47] "Why is there something rather than nothing." And Leibniz continues: "Car le rien est plus simple et plus facile que quelque chose." "After all, nothing is simpler and easier than something." And Poncet embarks on a quest for absences, for archives that have not been formed, for what Michelle Caswell calls the imaginary archive. To paraphrase Carolyn Steedman's *Dust*: an absence is not nothing, but is

45 Deborah Cohen, *Family Secrets: Living with Shame from the Victorians to the Present Day* (London: Penguin, 2013).

46 Verne Harris, "Archons, Aliens and Angels: Power and Politics in the Archive," in *The Future of Archives and Recordkeeping*, ed. Jennie Hill (London: Facet, 2011), 116.

47 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Principes de la nature et de la grâce fondés en raison*, ed. Paul Janet (Paris: Félix Alcan, Éditeur, 1900), art. 7, https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Principes_de_la_nature_et_de_la_gr%C3%A2ce_fond%C3%A9s_en_raison.

rather the space left by what was never there or what has gone.[48] In principle, everything is lost simply because everything passes away over time. This also applies to emails, digital photos and WhatsApp messages that are stored on a device without any selection. They are irrevocably lost, at the latest when the device breaks down, is discarded or recycled. Only by that time do users take care of everything that has been kept and do they try to save anything from it. In terms of Michael Thompson's "rubbish theory": everything is rubbish or at best transient, the exception is whenever someone assigns value whereby the stuff becomes durable. Survival of archives is only a chance, which is a warning to archive users: beware of survivorship bias.[49] Destruction is the norm against which our archival consciousness goes.[50] As Derrida wrote: there is no archive fever without the threat of the anarchivic destruction.[51]

Archival history yields many examples of this primacy of destruction and other modes of what Markus Friedrich calls "counter-archival behaviour".[52] Not every record is meant to exist much longer than the transaction it attests. Anarchivic is not only destroying what has been created, but also not recording at all. I introduced the concept of "counter-archivalization": the conscious or unconscious choice not to record, not to put things on paper.[53]

Contexts

I argue for making the social context (or rather contexts) transparent—the contexts in which the archival documents are created, used, misused,

48 Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 11.

49 "Why Do We Misjudge Groups by only Looking at Specific Group Members? The Survivorship Bias, Explained", The Decision Lab, accessed December 16, 2025, https://thedecisionlab.com/biases/survivorship-bias.

50 Arnold Esch, "Überlieferungs-Chance und Überlieferungs-Zufall als methodisches Problem des Historikers." *Historische Zeitschrift* 240, no. 3 (1985): 529-570; Nóvoa, "Family archives", 182-183. See also Michael Piggott, *Archives and Societal Provenance. Australian Essays* (Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2012), "the silences of non-creation" (p. 3), and the "infertile opposite" of record creation (p. 188).

51 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 10 and 19.

52 Markus Friedrich, "Epilogue: Archives and Archiving across Cultures—Towards a Matrix of Analysis." In *Manuscripts and Archives: Comparative Views on Record-Keeping*, ed. Alessandro Bausi *et al.* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2018).

53 Eric Ketelaar, *Archiving People. A Social History of Dutch Archives* ('s-Gravenhage: Stichting Archiefpublicaties, 2020), 14a.

selected, ordered, described and reformatted.[54] This makes the scripts that once applied in the genre system visible. A strictly diplomatic or legal description of the components of the family archive is not sufficient. This must be supplemented—sometimes replaced—by a new narrative that can often be literally a story or several stories that are added by family members, archivists and others. The relational description protocols recently proposed in archival literature are very suitable for this new standard for multidimensional description 'Records in contexts' (note the plural!) or RiC, distributed not long ago by the International Council on Archives.[55] The norm recognizes that the contexts in which archival documents arise and are used over time are dynamic and complex. The standard proposes a contextual description method in order to offer different perspectives and different access possibilities. The description of an archive item according to RiC makes the network of related actors, documents, functions and processes and their contextual history transparent.

Ethics of care

In these contexts family archivists work. They are placed in a web of relationships with each "archiver" within or outside the family. Archivers are record subjects, authors, clerks, registrars, antiquarians, genealogists and other users. Each "archiver" participates in the recursive production and mediation of the archive.[56] With each of them the archivist has (or should have) an affective responsibility. This view corresponds with a feminist ethics of care approach, wherein "archivists are seen as caregivers, bound to records creators, subjects, users, and communities through a web of mutual affective responsibility", according to Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor in a groundbreaking essay published in 2016.[57] "The central focus of the ethics of care," writes feminist philosopher

54 Eric Ketelaar, "Archival contexts," *Archeion* 124 (2023): 35-56. https://doi.org/10.4467/26581264ARC.23.003.17863.

55 International Council on Archives, *Records in Contexts*.

56 Eric Ketelaar, "The Agency of Archivers," in *Archives: Power, Truth, and Fiction*, ed. Andrew Prescott and Alison Wiggins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

57 Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor, "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives," *Archivaria* 81 (2016): 23.

Virginia Held, "is on the compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility."[58] This applies of course to the family and family members as cocreators of the family archive. But the archivist and the archival scholar are also caregivers, towards the family, towards researchers and colleagues in research and archival institutions. In a recent book, archivist and librarian Trevor Owens argues that "we need to consider how institutions of memory enable relations of care between the people they employ, the peoples documented in their collections, the communities they serve, and their broader memory function in society."[59]

Conclusion

The perception of the genealogical gaze which I proposed more than fifteen years ago is still a vibrant concept used by researchers in archivistics and other disciplines, dealing with family archives. The genealogical gaze transfigures administrative records and emanates from people situated in a particular context. They are agents in the construction of family archives, and their transfer through time and space.

The genealogical gaze is not only a historical phenomenon. Any individual scrolling through the messages and photos on their phone is constructing an archive by explicitly or implicitly creating, saving, expanding, sending, destroying documents. These actions are often triggered by a genealogical gaze. Over time, that gaze may lead to different outcomes depending on the context.

The archiving by a family or any other community (imagined or real) extends beyond its boundaries, involving various "archivers" who are engaged in an intertextual genre system. This entails for archivists and users adopting a wider gaze, looking at the contexts of the record and adopting an expanded view of provenance. An expanded view too of the role and responsibilities of archivists as caregivers.

58 Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political and Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 10.

59 Trevor Owens, *After Disruption. A Future for Cultural Memory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2024), 137.

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