Vital Spaces and Living Spaces in Contemporary Archival Practice

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Abstract   This paper explores the different meanings of 'space' that emerged in the context of the humanities' 'archival turn'. The changing nature of the archival spaces due to the advent of the digital age is analysed. This study also focused on how the different 'spaces' of the archives relate to 'time' and the power of control over information, and reflects on which spaces are 'vital' for an archive in the contemporary world. Eventually, the role of 'outside/living' spaces in critically questioning the archive as a knowledge production system will be traced through the case of the repatriation of sound recordings in ethnomusicology.

Keywords   Sound and audiovisual archives. Ethnomusicology. Archival turn. Digital archives. Archival spaces. Musical repatriation.

Summary   1 The Archival Turn. – 2 Space in the Classical Conception of the Archive. – 3 Space in the Contemporary Conception of the Archive. – 4 'Vital Spaces' in Contemporary Archival Practice. – 5 Spaces Inside and Spaces Outside the Archive. – 6 'Living Spaces' in Contemporary Archival Practice: Thoughts Around the Repatriation of Sound and Audio-Visual Musical Recordings Preserved in Western Archives. – 7 Conclusions.

1   The Archival Turn

In recent decades, an 'archival turn' has taken place in the field of humanities. The archive has been subjected to a critical analysis that has led it to transcend its traditional boundaries and be thought of as a philosophical and cultural category. As Stoler noted:

> The 'archive' has been elevated to new theoretical status, with enough cachet to warrant distinct billing, worthy of scrutiny on its own. (2002, 92)

In this process of abstraction and expansion of the concept of 'archive', the famous speculations of Foucault[1] (1969) and Derrida (1995) certainly played a very important role and have become recurring references in scholarly studies.

The main factor that caused this shift in perspective about archives is certainly related to what is perhaps the most radical change of our time, consequent to the development of computer technology, that is the change in the nature of information (what information is, how information is produced and the way it is accessed). A multitude of new issues and opportunities have emerged, and new (theoretical and practical) challenges continue to arise day after day.

This revolution has inevitably had a profound effect on those whose established role is to protect and preserve information, namely the archives. In turn, however, the change in storage processes has had a direct influence on shaping information. As Derrida stated:

> The mutation in technology changes not simply the archiving process, but what is archivable – that is, the content of what has to be archived is changed by the technology. (2002, 44-6)

Another undeniable consequence of technological development, and an interesting point for reflection, has been the disproportionate increase in the amount of data produced and stored in our daily life. This has led the domain of archives to expand from the institutional realm to encompass the private sphere much more than in the past.

According to Eliassen (2010, 30), another event that contributed to this explosion of interest in archives after the 1980s has been the opening of the archives of former totalitarian regimes, which prompted questions about the dynamics of power and control of information, and led to archives being seen as increasingly less 'neutral' places.

The archive, therefore, has been transformed from a static and taken for granted concept, into a hot ground through which contemporaneity can be read and defined. Over the past two decades, theoretical reflections on the nature of the archive have also explored the implications of the concept of 'space' within the archive and how

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1 Foucault speaks of the archive in different meanings in several writings between the 1960s and the 1990s. An analysis of the use of the term 'archive' and the concepts associated with it in different writings and different periods by the French philosopher can be found in Knut Ove Eliassen's essay (2010).

it contributes to the definition of the archive itself. These considerations involved both the historical and 'traditional' conception of the archive and the new shapes it has taken in the digital age.

The archive also turns out to be a particularly fertile ground from which to investigate how space relates to time. Time as action, as a continuous and inexorable force that sooner or later affects the form and matter of all (living and non-living) things, and time as perception, collective or individual memory, historical narrative, past, present, and future.

2 Space in the Classical Conception of the Archive

The word 'archive' originally referred to a physical space, a building, even before it was used to refer to an organised set of documents. The term is derived from the ancient Greek ἀρχεῖον *archeîon*, via the Latin *archium / archivum / archivium*, meaning 'palace of the archon', a place where it is thought that the acts issued by the magistrate were kept. Within Western culture, a conception that we might call 'classical' of the archive, based on two main inseparable constituent elements, has developed and settled. Indeed, the term 'archive', until the final decades of the last century, was used mainly to identify both a collection of information (mainly textual and fixed on paper or parchment) and the building in which this body of documents was stored.

Within this traditional conception of the archive, space – understood as physical, architectural space – turns out to be a necessary element for the existence of the archive itself. Concerning this, the Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbebe states:

> The archive has neither status nor power without an architectural dimension, which encompasses the physical space of the site of the building, its motifs and columns, the arrangement of the rooms, the organisation of the "files" the labyrinth of corridors, and that degree of discipline, half-light and austerity that gives the place something of the nature of a temple and a cemetery […]. (2002, 19)

Also, according to Derrida, 'space' is one of the two pivotal elements in defining an archive along with 'control' by an authority (originally the archon in the Greek world):

> To be guarded […], in the jurisdiction of this stating the law, they [the documents] needed at once a guardian and a localization. Even in their guardianship or their hermeneutic tradition, the archives could neither do without substrate nor without residence. It is thus, in this domiciliation, in this house arrest, that archives take place. (Derrida 1995, 10)

These reflections by Derrida and Mbebe, in addition to emphasising the foundational importance of space in defining the archive, highlight the role of space in regulating power dynamics within the archive. The archive space must therefore be circumscribed and have well-defined boundaries through which the authority can exert its control over access to information.

> Archive is not a living memory. It's a location – that's why the political power of the archons is so essential in the definition of the archive. (Derrida 2002, 42)

The relationship between archives and power is one of the topics that has been most investigated and subjected to critical analysis in recent years. The archive has long been seen as a neutral place, a guarantor of the rigour and truthfulness of information. These attributes have also been extended to the figure of the archivist. Within Western culture, archives have also long been considered, and to an extent are still considered, as oracles – infallible authorities whose word is not questioned. In the context of knowledge production, especially in relation to history, archival documents are brought in as evidence to support a claim, as a guarantee of its veracity.

Historians are used to questioning the authenticity and correct interpretation of a document, but, until recently, this reflection has rarely gone so far as to question why a specific document was preserved in that archive and passed on to us. Why was this document preserved rather than another one? What documents have been produced throughout history? Which of these have been lost and which have been preserved? How and why did this selection process occur?

Within the archival turn, it was realised that establishing the pool of data/documents contained in the archive (and thus establishing the set of possibilities) is a complex process that involves the exercise of power (establishing what is included and what is excluded, what should be preserved and what should not and, secondly, what information can be accessed and what cannot). That undoubtedly has enormous consequences for the readings of reality and the past that can be delineated from archival records (Schwartz, Cook 2002; Mbebe 2002). Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook wrote about this:

> Archives – as records – wield power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups, and societies. […] Taken together, the on-going denial by archivists of their power over memory, the failure to explore the many factors that profoundly affect records before they come to the archives, and the continued assumptions by many users of archives that the records

presented to them are not problematic, represent a prescription for sterility on both sides of the reference room desk.

When power is denied, overlooked, or unchallenged, it is misleading at best and dangerous at worst. Power recognized becomes power that can be questioned, made accountable, and opened to transparent dialogue and enriched understanding. (Schwartz, Cook 2002, 2)

Some authors have pointed out that space, in the framework of the classical notion of the archives, stands not only as an instrument of an authority's control over access to information but also as a means of control (or at least containment) over the inexorable action of time. The primary purpose of archives in addition to mediating access to information is, in fact, to protect records from the effects of time, extracting them from the present to project them into the future.

This occurs through a 'spatialisation' of time. Moments of time are 'frozen', through fixation on a medium that is stored in a given space. This objectification of time is what allows humans to exercise control (however partial) over it. In this way fragments of time become portions of space, as Eivind Røssaak and Wolfgang Ernst pointed out:

Fundamentally, the archival practices that evolved alongside modern state formations transform time into a set of spatial orders. (Røssaak 2010, 12)

Since antiquity and the Renaissance, mnemotechnical storage has linked memory [time] to space. (Ernst 2004, 49)

However, the digital revolution has severely challenged this classical notion of the archive. A conception of the archive inextricably linked to a physical, architectural space such as the one Mbebe (2002, 19) speaks of has disappeared. A definition of an archive that is not uniquely tied to the presence of a building is not only possible but is now the norm in the contemporary world. Although the archive's connection to physical space has not completely disappeared (as will be detailed below), it is undeniable that the paradigm has become considerably more complex and that the 'spatial' variables within the archive have multiplied in number and type.

Therefore, the traditional relationship between space and time in archives has profoundly changed as well.

3 Space in the Contemporary Conception of the Archive

No medium, analogue or digital, is immune to the ravages of time. No carrier is capable of preserving the integrity of the information it contains forever. The only way for information to survive over time is to transfer it from one medium to another. While, however, the transfer from one analogue carrier to another (and from an analogue carrier to a digital one) inevitably involves the degradation of information, only digital-to-digital transfers are, on a theoretical level, lossless. This is one of the most powerful and innovative features of digital technology that opens up a range of once unimaginable theoretical perspectives: digital information, if properly transferred, is potentially immortal and non-perishable.

However, this almost 'divine' power of the digital, in a sort of counterpoise, is limited by a combination of factors. Digital media are usually more vulnerable to loss of information through wear and tear than analogue media. Their lifetime is generally short – three to ten years (much less than analogue media[2]) – because of a combination of system obsolescence and storage media format, and due to high data density (a large amount of information in a small space).

With the digital turn, therefore, there has been a gain in stability in terms of maintaining the integrity of information at the price, however, of greater instability and insecurity in terms of media preservation over time, which therefore requires greater attention and more frequent direct actions (cf. Ernst 2014).

This has forced archives to give up their traditionally 'static' nature by becoming increasingly, as Røssaak said, "in motion":

> The archive was the space outside time, where everything was kept in a dormant state. […] The archive doesn't want to move […] and yet, today, it is on the move more than ever, both conceptually and physically. This is critical, it is even a crisis; one may even claim that it is one of the most interesting crises in our time. I believe it is exactly the oxymoronic quality of the situation, the impossible conjuncture of motion and arrest, which has given the archival discourse such an ubiquitous impact today. (2010, 16)

This continuous migration of data, according to media theorist Wolfgang Ernst, has radically changed the traditional connection between space and time within the archive, reversing their relationship. Archives are no longer places where time is 'spatialised' but where space (or spaces) experiences a condition of constant precariousness in temporal terms; their existence is thus increasingly 'temporalised':

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2 An analogue paper document can survive for centuries.

> The static residential archive as permanent storage is being replaced by dynamic temporal storage [...]. (Ernst 2004, 49-50)

> With the archive itself being transformed from an agency for spatialization of time into an in-between ordering (arresting) of dynamic processes [...], spatial architectures of the archive transform into sequentializing, time-critical, synchronous communication. (50)

> Space becomes temporalized, with the archival paradigm being replaced by permanent transfer, recycling memory. (50)

Another attribute of contemporary digital archival space, in addition to temporalisation, is that of fragmentation. The total space of an archive is given by the sum of a multitude of spaces (smaller memories) that may also reside in different physical locations. The spaces are perceived as unique as a result of an abstraction that links them to the name of an institution. But there is not necessarily a physical correlation between the spaces in which an institution is located and the physical locations in which storage media are held.

The bond between digital storage space and physical space though profoundly changed has not totally broken down. Digital storage media allow large amounts of information to be enclosed in very small physical space (a much more favourable ratio than analogue storage media) but still occupy a portion of it. Until now, the technology paradigm has been to store more and more data in less and less space. It should be considered, however, that this process is countered by an ever-increasing demand for storage space, both in institutional and private contexts all over the world. This is a new and interesting relationship all to be investigated. The balances between these two forces and their repercussions on physical space are not stable and are constantly in question. At present, however, the impacts of digital storage space on physical space do exist and are perhaps more evident than a few years ago. Just think of the size that the world's largest data centres offering cloud computing services reach, which exceeds one million square meters.

I find it curious that even in the age of 'dematerialisation', the power dynamics among the world's largest companies are still somehow linked to the ownership of physical space, of the same land that has always ruled power relations among humans.

4 'Vital Spaces' in Contemporary Archival Practice

Most of the institutional archives in the cultural field, almost for more than two decades, have been in an ambivalent stage where old and

new spaces coexist. All archives born before the full establishment of the digital information era are required to manage the preservation of the analogue media on which they store their data. They must therefore cope with the specific physical space requirements and preservation strategies for the carriers they hold. Since the digitisation of analogue media has been universally recognised as the only way to pass on information without loss, archives have had to embark on this onerous new challenge and deal also with digital storage spaces and their ever-changing nature. For most historical archives this 'dual status' will probably persist. For current sound, audio-visual and photographic archives, on the other hand, the connection to the media's physical dimension has faded very quickly, and for many of them, the all-digital 'future' is already an established 'present'.

Having an adequate amount of digital storage space in relation to the materials held has thus become 'vital' for any contemporary archive.

Attention must be drawn to the fact that the advent of digital has led to a profound shift in the archival paradigm, by moving the focus from 'storage' to 'access' as Angelika Menne-Haritz (2001) pointed out. Thanks to the mobility of digital files and the possibilities of sharing them through the Internet, a new era for archives has undeniably (at least on a theoretical level) begun. Over the years, the Internet has profoundly changed our habits to the extent that it has become the first place in our daily lives where we search for information (of all sorts). This has certainly had an impact on people's expectations regarding archives, as Carolyn Landau and Janet Topp Fargion point out:

> Digital technologies and the Internet have played a role – not only do people know they can access recordings, they now clearly expect to access them. (2012, 128)

Therefore, it becomes essential for an archive to also possess adequate space on the Web to provide access to its collections if it intends to play a role in the contemporary world and meet its expectations.[3]

It can be said that the digital space of contemporary archives has a dual nature related to two different functions: 'conservative' offline storage space and online 'access' space. In my view, both are to be considered 'vital' spaces for a contemporary archive, the former providing the basis for the very existence of a digital archive and the latter being necessary for an institutional archive to play an active function in society today.

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[3] In compliance with legal and ethical issues related to the dissemination of archival collections.

In Italy, most archives in the cultural field have now embarked on their digital transition and are equipped with more or less functional and up-to-date infrastructures for offline digital storage and have launched digitisation projects.[4] Instead, the digital age expectations that were held for web access, at least for sound and audio-visual archives, have been largely unfulfilled.[5] The reasons for this are complex and depend on an intertwining of copyright and privacy management issues, lack of expertise, and funding. Until recently, in order to put their collections online, archives have had to manage and maintain their own web server with the appropriate features to meet their storage space and bandwidth needs. The cost of system maintenance and staffing to manage it has been too high for the budgets of many cultural institutions. This is especially so for sound and audio-visual archives that have to deal with much 'heavier' material than archives that preserve textual documents or images (cf. Schüller 2008, 7-8).

However, with recent developments in cloud computing, this has changed somewhat. The balance between archive needs and service costs has become more sustainable. A subscription of a few hundred euros per month[6] could now meet the storage and data transfer demand of many sound and audio-visual archives without them carrying the expense of an on-premises web server; however, for many institutions, these expenses are still difficult to incur. In addition, the cost of cloud storage services appears to be increasing, and its future sustainability for cultural institutions is difficult to predict (Banerjee 2022).

The status of the 'vital' spaces of digital archives is rather unstable and constantly changing. I think that even though the situation is complicated, institutions and archivists should not give up and not stop looking for effective solutions in order to allow the vaunted 'opening of the archives' to take place on a large scale. Just preserving in our age is not enough. I believe that archives should play a more

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[4]   However, many efforts to digitise risky archival collections have yet to be made.

[5]   These statements are based on experiences gathered as part of my current Ph.D research through interviews with directors and archivists of about twenty European sound and audio-visual archives in the music field.

[6]   This assertion is based on an estimate of the possible costs of the S3 One Zone-Infrequent Access service (the most in line, in my opinion, with the needs of a sound and audio-visual archive in the cultural field) by Amazon Web Services (the industry leader). The price per month for this service is $ 0.0105 per GB in Europe (Milan) region (`https://aws.amazon.com/it/s3/pricing/`, accessed on 23 September 2022). Data transfer courses should be added to this figure, but, after simulating several scenarios through the AWS price calculator (`https://calculator.aws/#/`), I can say that these expenses are quite insignificant for the number of data transfers assumed for an archive in the cultural field and can therefore be excluded from the calculation. For 10 TB online storage (a realistic amount for the needs of a small sound and audio-visual archive) the monthly price is about $ 100; for 25 TB storage (a realistic amount for the needs of a medium sound and audio-visual archive) the price is about $ 250 per month.

active role in disseminating their records and become an active part of the cultural debate. Otherwise, for many archives, passing directly from analogue inaccessibility to digital oblivion poses a real danger.

5 Spaces Inside and Spaces Outside the Archive

As has been stated, the space of the archive is no longer monolithic but plural and mobile. Although its declinations have changed, the definition of 'space' remains essential for an archive. Despite the great changes that have taken place, the archive's need to define (more or less permeable) boundaries to establish an inside and an outside has not disappeared. The need to define an 'inner space' (or spaces) in relation to 'outer spaces' is still present.

The importance of an 'outside', an external dimension, for the very existence of an archive is emphasised by Derrida (1995). An outside to which the archive addresses itself and from which, at the same time, it protects the documents located in its interior:

> There is no archive without a place of consignation, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside. (Derrida 1995, 14)

According to Wolfgang Ernst (2004) and Arjun Appadurai (2003), external space (and the people who live in it) is crucial to the archive because it is only through it that the data contained in the archive can take on meaning and become part of a narrative:

> Archival space is based on hardware, not a metaphorical body of memories. [...] Upon its stored data, narratives (history, ideology and other kinds of discursive software) are being applied only from outside. (Ernst 2004, 47)

> All design, all agency and all intentionalities come from the uses we make of the archive, not from the archive itself. (Appadurai 2003, 15-16)

Ernst and Mbebe in their writings also rightly point out the nature of the archive as a collection of discontinuous elements, whose main characteristic is that of fragmentation, not linearity. The archive is commonly seen as the seat of intrinsic, objective, linear memory, whereas in reality archival records do not speak for themselves but represent fragments of 'events' floating in the vastness of the seas of history:

> Let us not confuse public discourse (which turns data into narratives) with the silence of discrete archival files. There is no neces-

sary coherent connection between archival data and documents, but rather gaps in between: holes and silence. (Ernst 2004, 48)

> Through archived documents, we are presented with pieces of time to be assembled [...] in an attempt to formulate a story that acquires its coherence through the ability to craft links between the beginning and the end. A montage of fragments thus creates an illusion of totality and continuity. (Mbebe 2002, 21)

The coherent readings and pathways that connect archival documents by bridging the gaps between them (like the lines that join the stars to form constellations among an infinite number of possible combinations in a star chart) come from outside the archive, that is, they are not intrinsic to the documents and data themselves but are constructed and thus are always connoted, never neutral.

In light of these reflections, the role and the power of those who have control over the archival records appears to be even more important in determining all the readings that can be made from a pool of possibilities selected by them. The fact that the system underlying an archive is not neutral must always be taken into account. The birth and development of an archive must be placed in a historical and social framework on a par with the documents it preserves.

6 'Living Spaces' in Contemporary Archival Practice: Thoughts Around the Repatriation of Sound and Audio-Visual Musical Recordings

There has been a recognition that the space outside the archive is not unique but plural. External spaces are not all the same and different interpretations, different readings, and different uses of the same archival documents can result from them.

As an 'extreme' case study, the investigation of colonial archives provides an important contribution to better understanding the power dynamics within archives and the key role of 'external', 'living' spaces in determining different readings of an archive (seen as a set of records but also as a system of knowledge production). As an ethnomusicologist, here I will focus on sound and audio-visual music archives.

The world's first sound archives emerged as part of early comparative musicology studies at the height of the colonial period.[7] In many cases, even after the end of the colonial era, in ethnomusicological

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[7] The Wien Phonogrammarchiv was founded in 1899 and the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv in 1900.

research[8] there inevitably was a power imbalance (in terms of economic and technological power) between the scholars and the people who were being studied. The result was that most of the musical recordings collected around the world were deposited by researchers in archives located mainly in Europe and the United States. These documents have entered archives for different purposes and have been included within narratives that have long been confined to the Western domain only. This awareness has led many scholars to reflect on the perspectives related to the repatriation of musical recordings held in Western sound archives.

In a recent paper, Anthony Seeger, one of the scholars who has worked most on these issues, defines repatriation as follows:

> I use 'repatriation' to refer to the return of music to circulation in communities where it has been unavailable as a result of external power differences – often the result of colonialism – but also including differential access to wealth and technology, educational training, and other factors. (Seeger 2018, 145)

In the field of ethnomusicology, the first considerations about repatriation emerged in conjunction with the archival turn in the late 1980s and especially in the 1990s as a result of a critical analysis of power dynamics in colonial archives[9] and due to new resources in the field of digital audio that made it possible to make copies of a recording without devaluation and to circulate them much more easily (cf. Seeger 1986).

From the outset, repatriation is not used simply as a synonym for 'passive access' (such as making records accessible online or sending back copies), but as an activity that wants to play an active role in reflecting on the process of recording, archiving, and the impact that past recordings can have on a community's present (cf. Chaudhuri 2021, 96).

Repatriation thus emerges as a noble intention of Western scholars to come to terms with their past and the past of their discipline, but it has been realised that this process has complex consequences and opens up many problematic ethical and practical issues:[10] how can we define the community of origin of a recording, especially in cases where that recording relates to a musical practice that has now disappeared? By what criteria are individuals who will receive the recordings back selected? Are there criteria for selecting which re-

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8 As a discipline focused on the study of oral tradition music and non-Western musical traditions.

9 "Who 'owns' traces of the Lore?" wonders Robert C. Lancefield (1998, 47) in one of the earliest and most influential contributions on the topic of musical repatriation.

10 See Lancefield 1998, 47-9; Nannyonga-Tamusuza, Weintraub 2012, 216; Chaudhuri 2021, 96.

cordings should be repatriated and which should not? How might the introduction of cultural knowledge from the past conflict with current cultural and social practices? Who wields moral rights over these documents: individuals or institutions? What should be done when members of a community refuse or have no interest in receiving back the recordings of their ancestors, as has happened in some cases?

As is evident from this set of questions, there can be no simple solution to the problem of repatriation, and as if that were not enough in this field, the risk of falling back, even unintentionally, into colonial-style paternalism is just around the corner. As Schwartz and Cook, and Ajotikar and van Straaten pointed out:

> It is important, as Verne Harris[11] has noted, not to romanticize the marginalized, or feel elated for saving them from historical oblivion: some do not wish to be "rescued" by mainstream archives and some will feel their naming by archivists as being "marginalized" only further marginalizes them. (Schwartz, Cook 2002, 17)

> [The ideological undercurrents of the notion of giving 'voice to the voiceless' and 'recovering lost sounds'] include the underlying neoliberal assumptions of individualism as a universal, and the problematic implication that such select recovering of individual voices and narratives equate reparation of systemic inequalities. [...] In the so-called decolonial project of saving voices of the unheard, analyses often confirm – rather than critique – their biases and stereotypes about the Othered. (Ajotikar, van Straaten 2021, 12-13)

The answer to all these questions is that there is no single valid answer to them. Each context is different, there is no single repatriation model that can be applied to all. One should not think in terms of universal solutions but should always start with a dialogue to highlight the specific dynamics of a given context, to develop *ad hoc* approaches in a collaborative way, directly involving community members. This should not be done by imposing a single top-down model, but by building one together case-by-case, even if this certainly requires more research and interpretive efforts (cf. Lancefield 1998, 57-60; Nannyonga-Tamusuza, Weintraub 2012, 220-5). The method stems from the same foundations of the demo-ethno-anthropological disciplines, that is, in this context, to apply elasticity, as well as the relativism and non-dogmatism that distinguish them.

The repatriation of sound recordings also stands as a privileged method for reflecting critically on how different narratives concerning 'other' musical cultures have been constructed in the West. Observ-

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11   See Harris 2001, 12.

ing in the present, with members of a community, archival records from their past allows the researcher to focus on the criteria and conceptions that were behind the selection by previous researchers of particular sound documents over a wide spectrum of possible choices (Nannyonga-Tamusuza, Weintraub 2012, 221-4). How do the documents collected and deposited in archives relate to the totality of a community's musical expression? Which repertoires have been documented and which have not? Why were certain choices made? What do internal community members think about the choices that have been made by Western researchers? What kind of decisions would they have made if they had wanted to representatively document their ancestors' musical culture? Why would they have made those choices?

The last three questions highlight how repatriation can also be an effective tool to open a channel of communication on the present and past music conception of a studied community. Repatriation could be then seen also as a method of doing better ethnography (cf. Iyanaga 2018).

Archives need 'living spaces' to address to and from which to draw meaning; without this interpretive process, records remain mute. These spaces may need the archives to build their own vision of the past and memory. Their relationship is mutual. The more the visions and readings are plural and come from different spaces the better we can investigate, critically understand and analyse the mechanisms behind the creation of archives, reconstruct their selection process, and the conceptions on which it is grounded.

With their external gaze, someone who comes from a different cultural background can help to question and critically evaluate the dynamics involved in how knowledge is produced through archives, which are usually taken for granted.

7   Conclusions

Analysis of the spaces of archives is an important tool for understanding their (changing) nature and role in society. In the traditional conception of the archive, architectural space is an essential means for controlling access to information and the action of time on documents. Time is 'spatialised' in order to contain its effects as much as possible. In contemporary digital archives, the decay of information is 'frozen' and transmitted without loss, at the cost of continuous and more frequent migration of the spaces in which it is stored. Space is thus increasingly 'temporalised'. Digital storage space and its connection to the Internet constitutes the 'vital' space for contemporary archives but its management is not easily sustainable by institutions and poses continuous challenges. 'Living' spaces outside the archives are crucial to give meaning to 'mute' and 'fragmentary' archival records by

including them in a linear reading of the past. Different readings of history can arise from different 'living' spaces starting from the same archival documents. Having multiple interpretations of the same archival records helps to better highlight the dynamics of data production and preservation, which are never neutral but always connoted.

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