

Repetition, Archive and the Construction of Identity: Institutional Research as Information Management.

Repetición, Archivo y la Construcción de la Identidad: Investigación Institucional como Gestión de la Información.

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Abstract

The constitution of the concrete institution of the archivistic science is going through several interrelated challenges, including that of establishing the statute of documentation analysis in the construction of the archive's institutional identity.

Documents have a formal structure which is related to their function. Using its visual language and content we can discern meanings which assist us in improving our information management practices.

Through a case study of some documents part of the TUCA Theater historical archive, we sketch an analysis of a process of "institutional meaning construction"; that of the institution of which it is part, São Paulo's *Pontifícia Universidade Católica* (PUC-SP).

This case study was performed specifically to try to understand the identity formation process of the Theater during its history and to create the content of the institutional text of the CDM TUCA website.

Keywords: archive, information, meaning.

1) Introduction.

We see our institutions through the same meanings we enunciate in the term “identity”, be it the identity through which we see ourselves as archivists in “our archive”, or through the method which we use to evaluate the life and death cycle of documents, classifying them as permanent, intermediary or current.

In any case, we can be sure of the repetition of certain terms in some specific acts, notes, preambles, etc. which emerges from how the institution communicates with itself and others.

As we face difficulties in their classification, we should pay attention to the role documents have as acts and notes to the community. Documents which have a specific unambiguous function are easily classifiable, as they are conceived with a clear goal and execute a clear-cut task. On the other hand, except a few cases in which they simply notify an “act of command”, acts by the Chancellor have a different meaning: they are there to create an institutional identity by producing signs appropriated by the organization.

This paper’s intention is to understand TUCA, the Theater of São Paulo’s *Pontifícia Universidade Católica*, as a part of the institution in which it is embedded, PUC-SP, from the point of view of the CDM TUCA, one of the theater’s administrative bodies.

Evaluating administrative documentation from the year 1981 to the year 1986, we can infer some preliminary conclusions, but I wonder, is it possible to acquire all of an institution’s knowledge, as we all are responsible for a gaze biased by the perspectives of our own times?

2) Intentions.

Why underscore these issues and not others? Because the archivist, as he or she works with documents, faces the need of understanding what he or she is doing, and why.

How many times have we heard about the importance of basic archivistic principles? Of origin and original order, and of the three ages, but are we capable of simply reproducing these principles like an instant formula which unproblematically connects theory and practice?

It is because of this that many times we have heard about the “(re)construction of the process of institutional development” or about the “organizational organigram” as tools through which we could keep up with our own organizations and their needs.

Even the information which is generated, information which the institution needs, is specific. This is the first challenge I had to face. During its 42 years of history, the TUCA theater has seen its functions and internal typologies change in several occasions.

At the same time, there is the need of meeting the requirements of several research initiatives promoted by the theater’s administrative bodies (our primary objective) and by external researchers attracted by TUCA’s historical, political and cultural importance (our secondary objective).

It is important to stress that TUCA has not always been an organization fully autonomous from the university. During several periods of its history it was directly linked to PUC-SP, especially due to the use of its space for academic events. Even so its artistic events and its history as a space of political and cultural resistance helped in building a powerful independent identity; an institutional image based on humanist/revolutionary ideas which, at the same time, originated from within the university itself.

Institutions need to have a name, to classify and, in a self-referential process, to cause that which they are, creating an identity.

“Institutions confer identities by assigning properties to categories, by polarizing, excluding and grading and by distinguishing the visible and the obvious from the less visible and the murky. Institutions name and classify. They shape the very categories of plausible and possible thought. But institutions themselves are not natural, they are caused”.

3) Analyzed documents.

Chancellor's act nº. 101/85. PUC SP. Content: Functionary's exoneration. São Paulo. August 30th, 1985.

Correspondence. PUC SP. Content: On TUCA Rebuilding. São Paulo. May 30th, 1986.

Note to the community. PUC SP. Content: On the Rebuilding Commission TUCA. São Paulo. October 17th, 1984.

Note to the community. PUC SP. Content: On the TUCA fire. São Paulo. January 4th, 1985.

Note to the community. PUC SP. Content: On a student's death. São Paulo. April 16th, 1986.

Note to the community. PUC SP. Content: "A glow remains". Budget committee. São Paulo. 1986.

Note to the community. PUC SP. Content: On the dismissal of professors on politico-ideological grounds. São Paulo. May 7th, 1986.

Preamble by Dom Paulo Evaristo Arns on the occasion of PUC-SP's 35^o anniversary. São Paulo. August 22th, 1981.

4) Method. Documents analysis and current institutional discourse analysis.

- A) Repetition of specific words in different contexts.
- B) Repetition of similar events in different situations, yet with the same reaction.
- C) Repetition of different ways of thinking which create the same ideas.
- D) Repetition of the same history for the sake of thinking in an institutionalized manner.
- E) Repetition in the belief in values which reproduce themselves in history.

F) Repetition of combativeness in the name of certain values.

4) The Documents.

The documents will be used to describe how an act by the Chancellor is performed and how it is received by the university and its community.

According to Schellenberg, it is important to underscore the direction of the steps to be taken for there not to be doubts in task performance, but the author also emphasizes the importance of paying attention to documents not just as means but also as an ends in themselves, as they communicate, in many cases, with great difficulty their function within the institution.

“Documents are necessary to transmit, from the top-down, the ideas and process to be followed, and from the bottom-up, the actions performed and, furthermore, to register all the phases of the governing acts in relation to the parts involved in its operations.”

A document carries the formal structure of the institution’s identity; the coat of arms, the institution’s name, and, above all, the “decision”.

For instance, a Director of the SEC (Serviço de Extensão Cultural), responsible for the administration of TUCA, was exonerated from malfeasance charges, according to the first document.

This document refers us to a particular fact: it was designed by a hierarchy in the name of transmitting a message, and with the function of giving an order.

Above all, the role of the archivist is to understand the actions which take place within the network of knowledge constituted by different document types, and to understand their function and to classify them appropriately.

The second document is a piece of mail from the Chancellor’s office on the rebuilding of TUCA, after two fires which occurred in 1984 and almost completely destroyed the theater.

The speech register used at that time showed gratitude, a gratitude which should be “sent” to all who were involved in the construction of the theater’s identity and who donated diverse services and materials.

“The configurative position does not lack assertive objectives, but these are tempered by the modesty history and its variety demand. At stake is a particular kind of narrativity: less than the metanarrativity of pressupositional narratives about such grand concepts as progress and enlightenment or such commanding but general processes as the creation of mass society and class struggle, but more than the employment of the many stories history offers up. Rather a configurative macroanalysis aims at an analytical narrativity that employs spatial and temporal concepts ‘to reconstruct and plot over time and space the ontological narratives and relationships of historical actors, the public and cultural narratives that inform their lives, and the crucial intersection of these narratives with other social forces’.”

As the author above mentions, history is made from the demands of language and discourse, and social actors are called upon to act in times of discord or uncertainty in the name, once again, of constructing an identity.

It is interesting to highlight that this piece of mail was also sent to a producer, Mr. Poladnam, who for many years was responsible for setting the theater’s cultural and artistic agenda; particularly all issues related to Cultural Management.

This type of fundraising is still (non-excessively) used to this day, and it is also a way of thinking about the theater’s function as a cultural pole which supports itself with plays and events.

The third document, in alphabetic bibliographical order, gives a message on the Theater Rebuilding Commission which was created with the goal of planning the rebuilding of TUCA.

This document, from a group called “PUC em Movimento”, and signed by the Chancellor, Luis Eduardo Wanderley, addresses and tries to clarify accusations made by a major newspaper, Folha de São Paulo.

PUC-SP has always vehemently fought against all newspapers which have published information believed to be biased, distorting the university’s image. There were always, at least, communiqués to the university community trying to make more accurate information known.

These actions were part of a combative stance which, in name of defending certain values, had to underscore specific forms of discourse. They were used to build “ideals”

and to create a “we” which could be believed and recognized outside the university walls.

The fourth document presents forensic proof of criminal intent behind the second fire, which nearly destroyed the theater; an event of political significance during Brazil's military dictatorship.

Rebuilding the theater became a symbol of the struggle against political repression and for an open university with a strong identity, and affirmed the possibility of a freer science and society; a symbol upon which something could be built.

The institutionalization of a way of thinking takes here center stage, due to the repetition of certain pieces of information and the revolutionary character of the discourse itself.

The fifth document is a note to the community which, I infer, repeats a fact, and an act. In 1986, a female economics student was found dead in circumstances which, by the information presented on the note, would indicate suicide. Closed letters and open scribbles were found next to the girl's body. This was not the only time a person decided to take his or her own life in the university. A history student in the year 2007 jumped from the university newest building's fourth floor; even so, happily, he survived.

The repetition of similar events produces similar responses; in this case, expressions of support in front of difficult circumstances, and of compassion and grief by all members of the university.

The sixth document is my personal favorite; a note to the community entitled “The Glow Remains” (“Permaneça um Brilho”). The text refers to Christmas lights which are placed every year at Monte Alegre Campus' entrance.

The discourse begins with a symbol of joy and hope; yet, as the university is going through a crisis period, the expense is considered superfluous. The absence of the Christmas lights becomes a symbol of the university's crisis. The continuing absence of the light bulbs becomes a metaphor of that which needs to be rethought.

But, according to this document, in the near future, the university will shine again. In a nutshell, the discourse develops in such a way that it tries to repeat several times “an open form of discourse”, but it does so in different ways, relating to diverse facts and symbols.

The seventh document is a note communicating the dismissal of two professors from PUC-RJ, on politico-ideological grounds. Here a keyword is repeated: university autonomy.

This keyword enters discourse every time that a governing body makes a decision which minimizes professors or students autonomy. It becomes paramount to describe PUC-SP as a space favorable to free thinking and pluralism.

Acknowledging these values becomes a “sine qua non” for the university itself. Specific words are repeated in different contexts, for them to always perform the same mission.

The eighth and last document is a preamble with a message from Dom Paulo Evaristo Arns on the celebration of PUC-SP 35^o anniversary.

Evaristo Arns is the university’s Community Councilor, for which he decides to rethink the path to be taken by the PUC community.

The council’s mission, as he describes it, is to shake the university out of its inertia, to raise awareness, and to promote greater action by the whole of the university.

Following this text closely, we can take under consideration the importance of believing certain values to reproduce the “ideal of commitment” which the university and, therefore, TUCA has with society as a whole.

We can establish, therefore, from acts and pieces of correspondence issued by the Chancellor, Deans and the like, a group of functions to be fulfilled by the institution and which may also serve as basis for building the CDM TUCA institutional website.

From all these ideas we can begin to sketch the basic traits of how TUCA, as an institution, has been thought within PUC-SP and its function as a cultural and historic place.

- To serve PUC-SP and other cultural, social, scientific and religious institutions, with its auditoriums, following rules established by the Chancellor (1965).
- To offer its auditoriums at no cost for educational, cultural and artistic activities directly sponsored by the Chancellor's office and other related areas (1965).
- To rent its auditoriums for educational, cultural and artistic activities, according to fees established by the Chancellor and through contracts between PUC-SP and the interested party (1965).
- To obtain all needed permits for its functioning (1965).
- To make contracts for its use (1965).
- To establish rules for those who may use the auditoriums (1965).
- To make a full budget (1965).
- To authorize the recording and use of images and sounds which may involve the theater's name and space together with the Chancellor's office (1967).
- To give opinions, together with the Chaplain and the Chancellor, on the artistic and scientific activities promoted in the theater, as well as to put them forth to be assessed by the federal censor (this stopped happening after 1983) (1968).
- To manage its Human Resources, together with the Personnel Department (1976).
- To manage the theater's box office, gates, cleaning, security, and secretariat (1979).
- To promote courses with the Art Department (Voice, Dance, Theater) (1983).
- To equip, organize and maintain the auditoriums (1987).
- To promote the development of the arts and culture within and outside the university (1987).
- **To organize and preserve its memory (1987).**
- To establish safety rules for the auditoriums (1989).
- To obtain funding for services, advertisement, marketing and sales, T.V. programs, videos and software related to TUCA (1996).
- To exploit commercially all of the TUCA's auditoriums (2001).

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