

# The Object of Memory Institutions in a Digital World

Prof. John Mackenzie Owen  
University of Amsterdam

ICA/ SPP International Council on Archives, Section of Archives and Archivists of Parliaments and Political  
Parties Conference, 1 – 3 November 2007, Corfu, GREECE  
Department of Archival and Library Sciences, Ionian University

## Object

- Purpose
- Thing

# Memory Institutions

- Archives
- Libraries
- Documentation Centres
- Museums
- The Internet (?)

## What is a document?

- Briët's *Antilope*
- From *analog* to *digital*
- From *document* to *information object*

# Convergence

- Google: webpages, books, images, video's, blogs, patents, news ...



# Convergence

- Institutions:
  - convergence of functions
  - common development path
  - common object type: the digital object
  - converging user experience on the Internet
- The World Wide Web:
  - virtual*
  - archive/library/museum/documentation
  - centre

# Digitization: a common development path

- Internal digitization
  - the silent revolution
- External (on the WWW)
  - network presence of archives, libraries, museums, etc.

## Memory Institutions on the Web

- Web-presence of memory institutions

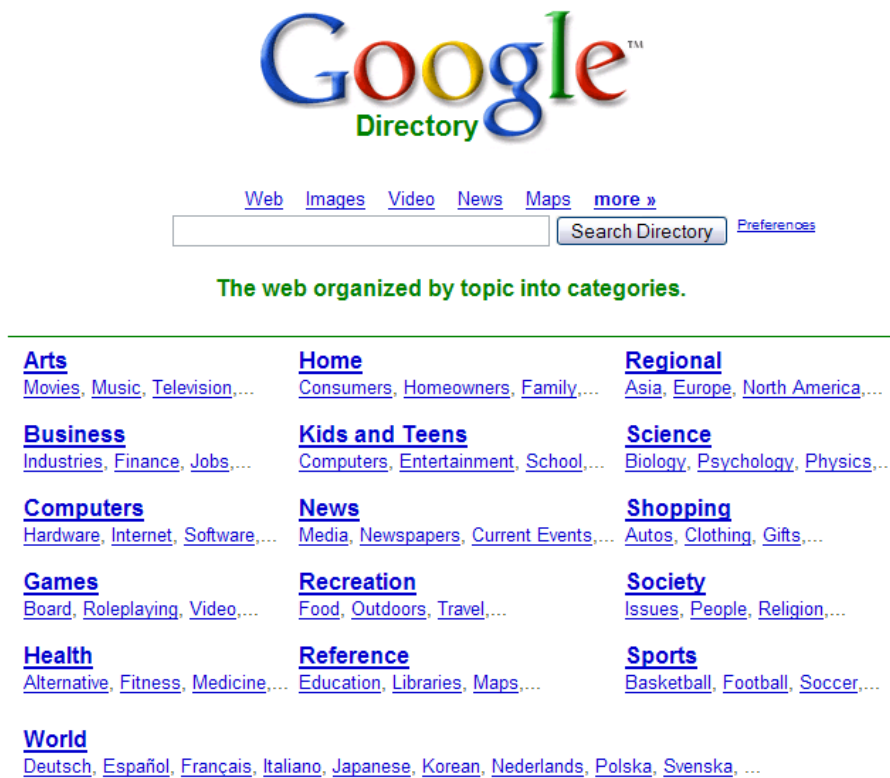
Rijksmuseum

National Archives of Norway


- Virtual archives, libraries, museums, etc.
  - Virtual Vietnam Archive
  - Education Virtual Library
  - Web Gallery of Art

- The Internet: [Click here!](#)

# Google as a Virtual Library

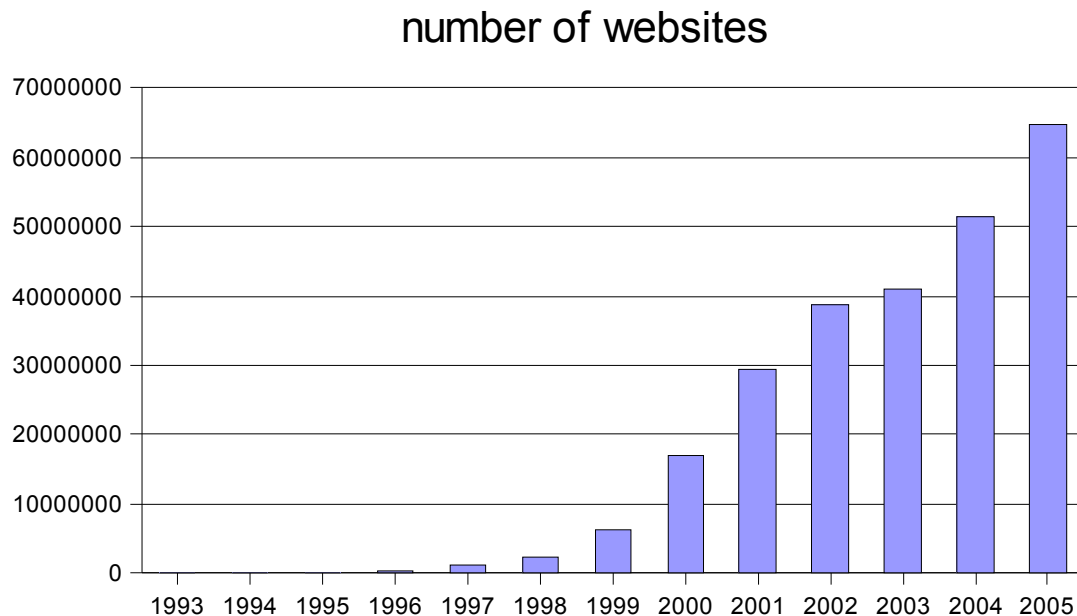


## The New Web

- Web2.0: the social internet
  - An architecture of participation and democracy that encourages users to add value to the application as they use it. This stands in sharp contrast to hierarchical access control in applications, in which systems categorize users into roles with varying levels of functionality.
  - The key is: *user participation*.
- The Amazon Model 
  - The key is: *richer metadata + user participation*

# The Abundancy of Information

- 29.7 billion pages on the World Wide Web as of February 2007.



## The Role of Memory Institutions

- What should memory institutions do in a world of abundant information?
  - Select on the basis of quality.
  - Preserve and protect valuable resources that have no economic significance and/or that otherwise would disappear.
  - Enhance the visibility (i.e. findability) of neglected resources.
  - Provide indexing based on meaning rather than on aboutness.
  - Base selection and preservation policies on information use rather than on information production.

# Information and Culture

- Information is no longer merely a representation of culture
- In a digital world, information is also a *component* of culture itself
- The challenge for memory institutions is to preserve the *information fabric of society*

## Preserving Digital Culture

- In a global, networked world, information is a global commodity. A focus on 'national' information makes little sense.
- Contemporary culture is not defined by information produced, but by information consumed.
- Preserving the information fabric of society requires capturing information *use*.
- This requires a *major transformation* of our memory institutions.

# Conclusions

- The object (= thing) of memory institutions is increasingly the digital object.
- The object (= purpose) of memory institutions is not just to preserve access to digital 'things', but to preserve them *in context* as the 'information fabric of society'.