

SYNOPTIQUE

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Teaching Media Archives

Edited by
Hugo Ljungbäck and Christian Balistreri

SYNOPTIQUE

An Online Journal of Film and Moving Image Studies

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Teaching Media Archives

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INTRODUCTION

Preservation, Perseverance, and Pedagogy: Teaching Media Archives

Hugo Ljungbäck and Christian Balistreri

Introduction

We took side streets all the way. The trunk was loaded up with a pair of 16mm projectors, a couple of rewinds, a Moviscop viewer, a few splicers, and an assortment of other editing equipment, along with about 100 rusty cans of 16mm film. They rattled, clanged, clattered, and clacked as we took the long way back to campus. It was fall 2018 and, together with film studies professor Tami Williams, the two of us had spent the past year laying the foundation for a student-run media archive at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee (UWM). Christian had just graduated with his bachelor's degree in English and film studies, Hugo was still a junior in the film production department, and on this day, we were bringing the archive's third collection of films—around 60 orphan films from a retired English teacher and film enthusiast—back to Curtin Hall, our makeshift headquarters. Christian had already been inspecting and repairing films from the archive's "founding" collection—a teaching collection consisting of about 75 16mm prints of classic films from cinema's dawn through the 1960s—when the film studies program was gifted four boxes of instructional films from another local university, and Williams asked Hugo to join their preservation project. We all saw the significant pedagogical value of these film collections, so when a third was offered, we did not hesitate to take it. Over the next several years, we became deeply devoted to turning these films into a useful educational resource.

This special issue grows out of our eight-year collaboration around film preservation and media-archival pedagogy, which began with our makeshift film archive, developed into several conference sessions and grant-funded research projects, and has now materialized in the present volume, which surpasses the scope of

anything we could have conceived of eight years ago, and we hope can serve as a useful teaching resource for archivists, scholars, and teachers far beyond our beloved undergraduate institution. This issue also responds to a recent surge in interest in media-archival education, as evidenced by a 2018 special issue of this journal on the institutionalization of media-archival training and graduate education, a 2019 focused section of *The Moving Image* on archives and pedagogy, and a 2017 issue of the *Cinema Journal Teaching Dossier* on teaching with primary sources. Building on these inspiring publications, and the innovative pedagogical initiatives they describe, the present issue seeks to add to this growing literature on media-archival pedagogy by offering new perspectives on graduate and undergraduate education, the practical and logistical challenges of training and instruction, and the development of curricular and extracurricular programs, initiatives, and activities. What actually happens in the classroom, or in the archive? How does one “teach media archives”?

Featuring eighteen articles and essays by archivists, librarians, scholars, and teachers, the contributions to this special issue include discussions of existing and imagined graduate programs; detailed descriptions of internships and standalone graduate and undergraduate courses focused on film preservation, restoration, cataloguing, and programming; proposals for new digital pedagogical tools and new locations for media-archival pedagogy and collaboration; guides for anticolonial description, inclusive archival practice, and accessible course design for neurodivergent and disabled archivists; and reflections on media literacy, student-led initiatives, and the state of media-archival education nationally and internationally. Taken together, these articles and essays provide an expansive view of media-archival education today, encompassing both advanced, professional training for careers in media archives as well as more general introductions to archival concepts and practices within film and media studies, art history, and information science curricula.

This introduction begins with a short survey of the rise of media-archival education over the past 50 years, before discussing our own do-it-yourself efforts to teach media archives at UWM by training undergraduate students in film inspection, incorporating film prints in film studies courses, organizing screenings and lectures focused on film and media preservation, and developing courses about media-archival practice and theory. The introduction concludes with an overview of the eighteen contributions to this special issue, which model practical, experiential, and collaborative approaches to training the next generation of archives professionals, bridging the gap between film and media education and the archival profession, and bringing both students into the archive and the archive into the classroom.

Media-Archival Pedagogy

Training in film, media, or audiovisual preservation, conservation, or archiving is still a relatively new phenomenon. Until the end of the twentieth century, most audiovisual archivists did not receive formal training in audiovisual preservation before entering the archives, but learned their trade on the job—as Ray Edmondson put it, there “was no other way” (1995, 252). While some archivists may have trained in related “collecting professions”—some of the skills and concepts relevant to film

preservation could be learned from library and information science, museology, and other heritage professions—audiovisual materials presented unique technical, material, and epistemic challenges and required specialized knowledge that could only be acquired through experience or passed down from senior staff to new hires.

In the introduction to their *Synoptique* special issue, Philipp Dominik Keidl and Christian Gosvig Olesen (2018) trace the institutionalization of the audiovisual preservation field to the early 1970s and the emergence of professional organizations and the codification of best practices and standards, including through the launch of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) *Information Bulletin* in 1972 and the first FIAF Film Preservation Summer School in 1973. Gregory Lukow traces the field's further professionalization to the 1990s and the development of more advanced philosophies and codes of ethics, greater awareness about the importance of audiovisual heritage, and the founding of the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA), the first association to welcome individual archivist members rather than only institutions and organizations, which significantly broadened the scope of the field by bringing together a wider range of professionals to recognize and strategize around their common needs. Yet, as Lukow notes, early efforts at developing audiovisual archives “training” (as opposed to “education”) were generally targeted at “staff” rather than “students,” were envisioned to take place at archives rather than in universities, and were primarily modelled on the transmission of specialized technical skills rather than an academic curriculum that incorporated interdisciplinary perspectives (2000, 137).

While several short-term courses and workshops, like the FIAF Summer School, were offered throughout the last quarter of the twentieth century, these educational initiatives were infrequent and unsystematic, and a more formal system for the training of the next generation of film and media preservationists remained a central concern for the field. In 1990, attempts to formalize audiovisual preservation training saw the inauguration of the first MA in film archiving at the University of East Anglia, which combined courses in the university's existing film studies curriculum with practical training at the university's East Anglian Film Archive (Lukow 2000; Elsaesser 2018). Similar programs, building on the strengths of well-established film studies departments and their proximity to local archives, followed at the University of California, Los Angeles, New York University, and the University of Amsterdam in the early 2000s, the latter of which also included a significant focus on curatorial practices (Lukow 2000; Elsaesser 2018; de Valck 2015). The L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation at the George Eastman Museum—“the only full-time course offered within a film archive or museum,” which combines classroom lectures with weekly rotations throughout the museum's different departments—has also run continuously since 1996, and in 2005 began to offer a similar MA program in partnership with the University of Rochester (Yeager 2018, 36). These foundational MA programs collectively produced the first generation of academically trained film and media archivists, in turn setting new expectations around professionalization and the necessity of educational credentials to enter the field.

The 2010s saw another rise in the development and establishment of more

graduate programs as well as the first undergraduate degrees in film and media preservation—many of them in Germany (Campanini et al. 2018; Ruedel and Koerber 2018; Hanley 2018). While some were modelled on close connections to film studies curricula, a few instead developed strong relationships with local film heritage and culture institutions or forged new alliances with library and information science, museology, and conservation and materials science programs. Marijke de Valck worries about this recent shift away from the field's historical association with film studies, especially at a time when the humanities is under increased pressure to move toward vocational training: "How can archivists and scholars really engage with the preservation of moving images if they are not academically formed in the appreciation and conceptualisation of the objects, their dispositifs and transformations?" (2015, 8). At the same time, the growing scope of our field requires increased interdisciplinarity, as more complex media objects and environments confront audiovisual archivists with new needs, novel challenges, and emergent areas of expertise (Masson and Fossati 2018).

The rise of digital humanities and the increased digitization of archival materials through a wide range of sites and projects, including the Internet Archive and the Media History Digital Library, has also seen the emergence of a new kind of media-archival pedagogy, as it is now possible for film studies instructors to incorporate primary sources and archival research methods in their undergraduate courses, often introducing students to archives for the first time. This increased interest in having students interact directly with archival media or primary documents related to media history has sent students on scavenger hunts through digitized archives and allowed students to develop their own original media-historical research (Montgomery 2014; Horwitz and Comiskey 2014; Carman 2017; Groening 2017; Keidl 2021; Tepperman 2022; Clarke 2022; Hoyt and Morris 2022).¹ While the mass digitization of archival records has made it possible for students to undertake original research without ever setting foot into a physical archive or speaking to an archivist, Vincent Longo (2019) notes that increased availability of materials does not necessarily equal increased accessibility: students and other users must still be taught where to find archives and collections, how to read a finding aid, and how to make use of their materials. As such, these courses and assignments have sometimes become opportunities to discuss the work that archives do and introduce students to archival tasks and processes through innovative assignments (Johnson 2017; Ehrick 2017). While usually not their primary purpose, these activities can help students learn about, and maybe even pique their interests in pursuing, the archival profession.

As Caroline Frick (2018) notes, the professionalization of the field, especially through the requirement of expensive advanced degrees, has limited who is able to pursue a career in media archives and who is able to call themselves a media archivist, inhibiting diversity within the field. While efforts like the recent AMIA Pathways Fellowship, intended to provide funded internships, mentorship, and professional development seminars to students from underrepresented groups, are very welcome initiatives to make the profession more diverse and inclusive, we see the development of introductory media preservation courses at both the graduate and undergraduate

level—which can be incorporated into existing degree programs in film production, media studies, information science, art history, and adjacent fields—as a promising and necessary way to introduce a broader range of students to the work of media archives. It was with these things in mind that we saw the opportunity to activate a dormant collection of 16mm films at our own university to teach students about the work of film archives and the practice of media preservation.

Teaching Media Archives at UWM

Our efforts began with a collection of about 75 film prints (just over 150 reels) that had been held in an art history department storage room for fifteen years. The Patricia Mellencamp 16mm Film Print Collection was named after the distinguished professor emerita of art history who had collected the films as a faculty member in the Department of Art History, where she taught film history, theory, and criticism for three decades until her retirement in 2002. She was instrumental in founding UWM's interdepartmental film studies program in the early 1970s—one of the first in the nation—and in developing the study of film and television in the humanities throughout her career. The collection had been amassed as part of her teaching, and primarily represented a canonical history of classical cinema: Alfred Hitchcock, Buster Keaton, Orson Welles, Sergei Eisenstein, and D.W. Griffith were among the auteurs best represented; Germaine Dulac and Maya Deren were the only women. The films were used throughout her courses until her retirement, upon which her successors swapped the bulky projectors and heavy reels for VHS cassettes, laserdiscs, and DVDs.

The collection came under the stewardship of newly hired art history professor Elena Gorfinkel in 2009, who cared for the collection until her departure at the end of 2016, at which time film studies professor Tami Williams became the collection's de facto steward. Christian had met with Gorfinkel throughout the fall 2016 semester, and under Williams' mentorship, he started inventorying the collection and evaluating the condition of the films, funded by a Support for Undergraduate Research Fellows (SURF) Grant, sponsored by the university's Office of Undergraduate Research, which paid students to assist faculty mentors on their projects. He taught himself the basic standards of film handling, inspection, cleaning, repair, and projection by consulting *The Film Preservation Guide* (National Film Preservation Foundation 2004), purchasing the necessary supplies out of pocket from a local record store that kept film leader and splicing tape in stock for film students. He also maintained detailed reports on the condition of each reel and extensive notes about his interventions.

In fall 2017, Hugo received SURF funding to work with Williams on researching the history of the film studies program at UWM. During the first week of classes, however, another local university asked Williams if the film studies program would be interested in some old 16mm films they were going to discard. A couple of days later, four large boxes filled with a mix of more classic film prints as well as educational films were delivered, and Hugo quickly shifted his attention from his initial research project toward cataloguing the new collection and evaluating its con-

dition. Having already worked with 16mm film as a production student, he adapted those production skills to the preservation workflow Christian had already developed, which included inspecting and cleaning the films, repairing or making note of any splices or other damage, adding and labelling head and tail leader, and—eventually—rehousing the films from rusty cans or damaged cardboard boxes into new archival plastic cans.

At the time, the collections were housed in two different locations—the Mellencamp materials were still in art history storage, and the new collection was taking up most of Williams' office. Our first priority was to pool our resources and combine these collections, while being mindful of their distinct provenance. The three of us approached Richard Grusin, the director of the Center for 21st Century Studies, an interdisciplinarity humanities centre originally founded as the Center for 20th Century Studies in 1968. He was enthusiastic about Mellencamp's collection and her connection to the centre's history (it was a central intellectual home for Mellencamp, who organized and participated in several of the centre's conferences), and he offered us an unused office on the centre's floor. We graciously accepted his offer and spent winter break lugging large, heavy metal cabinets through the snow so that both film collections could be brought to their new home before the spring 2018 semester began. Now that we had a dedicated office in which to inspect, catalogue, store, and care for these films, we started to think about the collections and our new space as an archive.

At the beginning of the spring 2018 semester, with Williams serving as faculty advisor, we founded a student organization, the Moving Image Society, through which we recruited several more student members to help inspect films, to host and organize film screenings, to invite visiting speakers, and to raise funds for the archive. Founding a society, we thought, would not only increase the archive's visibility on campus and make us eligible for university funding—it would also ensure continuity and that others would keep up our efforts long after we had graduated. The society's charter declared its express purpose as maintaining the archive and providing students with hands-on training, practical experience, and professional development opportunities in film studies-related careers like film preservation and programming, while energizing and building community within the film studies student body.

After our newly formed organization was denied a student government grant to purchase new archival film canisters, supplies, and equipment, we decided not to wait around for the next application cycle and instead explored other fundraising options. That summer, together with a few other students and alumni, we curated a benefit film festival consisting of three hour-long programs of recent found footage films, films about archives, or films made on celluloid or analogue video, as well as a program of two slapstick films from the archive with live musical accompaniment by Renato Umali, a faculty member in the film production department. Through donations and filmmaker submission fees, the inaugural Save the Archives Film Festival, hosted in Mellencamp's honour at the UWM Union Cinema that September, raised over \$1,500, which went toward new film canisters, a new set of rewinds, and various supplies and materials for inspection and repair, including splicing tape,

photographic emulsion cleaner, non-abrasive wipes, gloves, masks, and loupes. The festival also helped garner some attention for the archive and our activities, including through a profile in *UWM Report* (Hackett 2018; see Figure 1). The festival was followed a month later by Mellencamp's own return to campus for the Center for 21st Century Studies' 50th anniversary conference and a celebratory dedication of the archive, which occasioned another screening of a Buster Keaton film. Screening prints at events across campus was a relatively easy thing to do, but the ways in which it made students aware of and curious about film as a material object assured us that incorporating materials from the archive into film studies courses would be a success.



Figure 1: Posing with a daylight spool of unidentified film for a *UWM Report* profile. Photo by Troy Fox, courtesy of the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee.

In fall 2018, following Gorfinkel's departure, Williams was asked to teach the early film history course, covering 1895–1945, which she had previously taught between 2003 and 2008. Inspired by the Domitor conference on Provenance and Early Cinema held at the George Eastman Museum that summer, which Williams co-organized as Domitor president, and seeking to use the collection in her course, we decided to screen several 16mm prints from the archive in lieu of a DVD or Blu-ray. Since most of the students were not familiar with the difference between film and video, we began by unspooling a short compilation reel of Lumière films across the large lecture hall, letting students touch it, feel it, look through the transparent film base, and examine the individual frames, before placing the reel on the projector at the end of class and letting the still images come to life on the screen—a technique Williams had been inspired to use following a visit to UWM by experi-

mental filmmaker Peter Kubelka in 2005. Allowing students to interact directly with the material, even in this brief encounter in a large lecture hall, helped them better understand the mechanics of early film technology, and piqued at least a few students' interest in film preservation. Later in the semester, local pianist and composer Anthony Deutsch performed a live musical accompaniment to a print of a German expressionist film, his improvised score emphasizing the performative live aspects of early cinema and recreating the conditions of early moviegoing. These experiments were well received by students and proved that the film collections could be useful to help broaden students' understanding of film history.

Once the next student government grant application cycle opened, we were better prepared, and ready to think bigger. In addition to requesting more supplies (which we were granted this time) we also planned our inaugural Symposium on the Moving Image. The resulting spring 2019 Women Film Pioneers Symposium—hosted in conjunction with a series of film programs curated by Williams at the Oriental Theater, a local arthouse—brought silent film experts Jane Gaines, Shelley Stamp, Jennifer Bean, and Maggie Hennefeld to campus to discuss early women filmmakers, film preservation, and archival research. A few undergraduate students helped introduce the speakers at the symposium, while another assisted Williams with the logistics of her film and music program, gaining practical experience in event organizing, public speaking, and silent film programming. Over the next few semesters, we continued to host more visiting lecturers, including Dan Streible and Kim Tomadjoglou for a fall 2019 event focused on preserving orphan and amateur films, in an effort to drum up excitement about the orphan film collection we had acquired a year earlier. In partnership with the UWM Union Cinema, we also hosted several visiting artists, including Sandra Gibson and Luis Recoder, whose “projection performance installation” refracted the image of an archival film print across the theatre (and whose artwork beautifully illustrates the front and back covers of this issue).

By summer 2019, we had acquired several more collections—including 12,000 35mm teaching slides used by Mellencamp and others to illustrate their course lectures, which had also been stored with the Department of Art History—and more than five undergraduate research fellows and volunteers were working on cataloguing, inspecting, and rehousing the films, following the protocols developed by Christian. As a result, we were quickly outgrowing the office space we had been allotted just a year and a half earlier. Hugo had previously worked as a production assistant with the campus television studio, which had closed down at the end of 2016, and had since been working on a parallel project preserving and digitizing some of the remaining videotapes. In summer 2019, it occurred to him that the old studio control room could be repurposed as an archival space, and the separate collections of film and video could be joined together for greater synergy, so he drafted a proposal outlining how this merger could benefit both the individual departments as well as the larger university community (Ljungbäck 2025, 216). The old control room would become our new workspace, with rewinds, light tables, projectors, screens, and supplies, as well as video decks of various formats, from MiniDV and VHS to Betacam, U-matic, and 1” Type C. The old tape room would be converted

into the new “vault,” where all the collections could be stored together, while the two adjacent offices would be turned into an administrative office and storage for paper collections. The proposal meant that the archive could keep acquiring new collections and several students and faculty could be engaged in collaborative research and preservation projects, workshops, or training at the same time, while the smaller, more centrally located office could be used as an administrative meeting space.

The Vice Chancellor was receptive and excited about the prospect of turning these vacant facilities into a teaching space, and in February 2020, after several months of rescheduled meetings, revisions to the proposal, and approval from various university committees, the agreement was finally signed. We had just begun moving equipment over and making adjustments to the space to accommodate its new use as the home of the Patricia Mellencamp Film and Television Archive when COVID-19 shut campus down and ground our efforts to a halt (Ljungbäck 2025, 216). The second Symposium on the Moving Image, to be hosted that spring, was postponed, and eventually hosted virtually the coming fall. Two pending collection acquisitions were put on indefinite hold, including a large collection of soap opera magazines previously stored with the journalism and media studies department, until they could proceed the following summer. At that point, however, we were both alumni of the program—Christian since 2018 and Hugo since 2020—and contributing only on a volunteer-basis. The pandemic had largely destroyed the continuity we had hoped the Moving Image Society would ensure, and although student interest was revived in summer 2021, it has remained sporadic ever since.

One of our most ambitious efforts had been creating courses focused on archives and media preservation, a goal which finally came to fruition in 2022. That fall, in an effort to restore momentum, Williams taught a “Film and Media Archives Practicum,” which included several guest presentations by archivists and scholars, site visits to the UWM Archives, and lectures on handling, inspecting, and projecting small gauge film. As part of Williams’ seminar, Christian taught students about small gauge film identification and co-taught a lecture with Shiraz Bhathena, digital archivist at the UWM Archives, on 16mm film handling, splicing, and projection, in preparation for the first Milwaukee Home Movie Day, co-organized by Bhathena, Williams, and colleagues in the film studies program and film production department. Involving students in the hands-on work of home movie day and film inspection provided the students with insights that typical lectures could not (Tepperman 2021; Lameris and Flueckiger 2019). Williams’ archive practicum was followed in spring 2023 by a theoretical seminar—“Film Historiographies and Archives,” taught by Jocelyn Szczepaniak-Gillece—combining training in historiographic methods with archival theory. While this course sequence has not been taught again since, our hope is that it will be brought back and become a staple of the film studies program, so that future students can be introduced to the work of archives and media preservation, and maybe find their way back to the Mellencamp Archive.

We both stepped down from active roles in the project at the end of 2022, after the third Symposium on the Moving Image—the aptly titled Teaching Media Archives Symposium, co-organized with Allison Farrell—but we continue to serve

in an advisory capacity. Since then, things have largely slowed down. While Williams applied for two SURF grants for fall 2024, the requirements for grants had changed, and the unsuccessful applications meant that interns had to assist her on a voluntary basis. The majority of the films are still stored in the Center for 21st Century Studies office in Curtin Hall, unused, in the same type of cabinets we had hoped to rescue the Mellencamp collection from eight years ago. But the fact that things have slowed down does not mean that the work we did failed. For a couple of years, there was a flurry of archival activity, which brought a wide range of archivists, scholars, and artists to campus to interact with students. Several of these students had their first experiences with preservation and programming initiatives through the archive, some of whom are now working in archives or film culture organizations professionally. Christian graduated from the L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation and is now working as an Archives Technician at the Library of Congress; Hugo is a doctoral student at the University of Chicago, where he worked with the South Side Home Movie Project; two other students involved with the archive went on to pursue their MLIS degrees and are now working in the field; and other students have worked or are working with local and regional film and media organizations.

Several years removed from the project, we have been able to reflect on many of the factors that played a part in its (short-term) success. We were lucky to be able to receive a wide variety of forms of support: the Moving Image Society was able to fund the purchase of archival supplies and equipment and pay for travel and honoraria for visiting speakers with minor, but regular, student government grants; through our affiliation with the Center for 21st Century Studies-sponsored Media Studies Research Collaboratory, led by Williams between 2019 and 2023, we were able to receive research funding that could be used for visiting speakers, consultants, and supplies; the Office of Undergraduate Research generously funded over a dozen student research fellowships to work with the archive; the Save the Archives Film Festival fundraiser, which we hosted twice, in fall 2018 and 2019, brought in a limited amount of money for supplies; and we received several in-kind donations of equipment and materials, as well as a generous donation from Mellencamp herself in support of our activities.

Williams' consistent enthusiasm and support as our faculty mentor also allowed us to get students involved in a variety of capacities: as members of the Moving Image Society, assisting with fundraising activities and programming initiatives; as volunteers, devoting a few hours each week to inspect film prints and gain hands-on experience; as paid undergraduate research fellows sponsored by the Office of Undergraduate Research's SURF program, working ten hours per week on film inspection and other research tasks; and as unpaid interns, receiving film studies course credit while gaining professional experience in film studies-related professional work. While this level of flexibility allowed students to pursue the specific tasks and projects they were most interested in, it also made for a somewhat unstable structure, as students had various levels of commitments and did not always feel compelled to remain with the project longer than a semester—or even a few weeks. Sustainability of both student participants and funding remains the greatest challenge. Without

dedicated captains to steer the ship, and institutional support to develop new initiatives, the project risks coming to a standstill. We still want to see the archive continue to grow, prosper, and attract new students to discover the exciting work of film preservation. But having nursed the project for over five years, even long after we both left Milwaukee, we felt it important to step away and let new students discover these collections, and activate them in whatever way they see fit.

Our greatest asset may have been the scrappy can-do attitude we learned to adopt at our public research university, where scarce funding forced us to make use of any and all resources we could find, and where we were empowered, especially by Williams, to create our own opportunities and to make things happen ourselves. When furniture, equipment, or films needed to be moved across campus—even in the January cold—we grabbed a cart. When we could not get our hands on a rewind table, we built our own. And when a donor reached out, offering us their materials, we drove to their home and packed them up ourselves. As a result of our efforts, the archive now holds close to 250 film prints, several hundred master videotapes from the television studio, a couple of dozen Laserdiscs, 12,000 teaching slides, and over 2,000 books and periodicals across its collections. The primary goal of the archive was not necessarily to preserve all of these objects—though we certainly hoped to do that, too—but to introduce students to the work of archives, archivists, and the practice of media preservation, to get them interested in unique materials that may not (yet) exist in digital form, and to make them realize that they, too, can play an active role in the preservation of media history—and on that count, the project succeeded many times over.

Overview of the Contributions

We offer this modest discussion of our own efforts at UWM in the hope that it can provide models to develop similar initiatives at other institutions, in the same way we envision the following contributions will. The eighteen articles in this special issue are organized into three sections. The first, “Students in the Archives,” focuses on practical and theoretical training in audiovisual preservation work for students pursuing careers as archivists. The second, “Archives in the Classroom,” offers several case studies about incorporating archival materials and primary source research into undergraduate courses. The third, “Beyond the Archive and Classroom,” proposes new and overlooked sites of media-archival pedagogy and practice. Readers will find that these separations are somewhat arbitrary, as each section often overlaps thematically with the others. In putting together this issue, we have also sought to include a wide range of article types, combining a mix of peer-reviewed articles and thought pieces, as well as an artist statement and a roundtable, to allow for different kinds of knowledge to emerge, and different voices to participate.

Ben Harry kicks off the first section with “Teaching Media Archives and Performing Film Reconstructions with Undergraduate Students,” in which he provides a detailed description of an undergraduate internship he has led at Brigham Young University since 2021. After providing a thorough overview of the informal discussions he engages in with students interested in archives and the preservation

process—an overview which itself could serve as a roadmap for an introductory media archives syllabus—Harry describes how he was able to make use of film elements produced by the BYU Motion Picture Studio, which are now part of BYU Special Collections, to start a semester-long internship focused on film restoration and reconstruction. Through this internship, students learn to identify, inspect, and describe film materials, edit, reconstruct, and colour grade digitized film elements, and present the restored film to an audience, encompassing all steps of the film restoration process.

Internships remain the focus of “Praxis is Paramount: NYU MIAP’s Approach to Educating Media Archivists Today for Collection Stewardship Tomorrow,” in which Kimberly Tarr discusses the central role internships play to New York University’s Moving Image Archiving and Preservation program. In addition to describing the hands-on components of several courses taught as part of the curriculum and giving an overview of the logistics and administrative aspects of MIAP’s internship program, Tarr emphasizes the importance of creating opportunities for students to critically reflect on their practices and experiences—an element crucial to fostering what Paulo Freire calls “praxis.” Concurrently with students’ internships, they participate in a seminar that Tarr leads, which is designed to address issues that emerge during their internships and provide a structured space for self-reflection and dialogue around the preservation practices they are engaged in, so that these practices may be changed, adapted, or improved.

Based on his research on the accessibility of media-archival education for disabled and neurodivergent students, and on his own experience as a film archivist with epilepsy, Michael Marlatt discusses strategies that archivists and instructors can employ in their teaching to account for students’ unique needs and situations. “Supporting the 36%: A Teaching Guide on Student Mental Health in Media Archival Education” provides several concrete suggestions that instructors can follow, including having proactive discussions with student accessibility services, being upfront about the different challenges archivists face as part of their everyday tasks, introducing students to existing professional networks and support structures, and familiarizing themselves with resources and research on mental health. By following these recommendations, Marlatt proposes, we can not only make media-archival education more accessible, but the larger field and profession more equitable and inclusive.

Concluding these discussions of internships, Tyisha Murphy draws on their own experience as an intern to reflect on archival labour and embodied knowledge. In “Reparative Description in ‘Project Naming’: Toward an Anti-Colonial Practice,” they discuss Library and Archives Canada’s “Project Naming,” which sought to identify photographs of Inuit community members taken by ethnographers and explorers throughout the twentieth century, as a successful example of “reparative description” work. By working directly with community members to identify their ancestors in the photographs, LAC archivists ceded their authority as custodians of the archive to learn from the communities depicted and develop new systems to account for this updated information. Yet, as Murphy notes, this kind of work can be difficult to

sustain as archives rely on short-term contract workers, who may be unable to devote the time, energy, and care necessary to ensure that descriptions and finding aids accurately and respectfully reflect a collection's contents.

Staying within the realm of archival description, the next article in this section explores two experiential learning courses on video preservation, cataloguing, and digital curation. Grounded in queer archival theory and practice, “‘In A Way I’m Coming Out to All of You Tonight’: Activist Media, Digital Curation Pedagogy, and the Future of Queer Archives” describes a graduate practicum and an undergraduate seminar that incorporated digitized videos from the LGBTQ+ Columbia History Project documenting South Carolinian queer history and activism. Travis L. Wagner discusses how these materials not only became a practical case study for library and information science students learning about preservation, digitization, cataloguing, and database management, but also introduced students to the unique challenges and ethics of preserving and making LGBTQ+ media accessible, including the complexities of gender- and identity-inclusive description practices, the conflicting needs of queer representation and privacy, and the benefits of involving community representatives in the archival process.

To conclude the first section, Paolo Cherchi Usai proposes a radical new film preservation curriculum. In “Obscure Cinema,” he presents the outline of a seven-year program that intends to give equal weight to film studies, filmmaking, film technology, and film preservation. His expansive, ambitious, and holistic curriculum, which requires an almost complete abstinence from audiovisual media for the first five years, is structured around a gradual (re)exposure to and (re)familiarization with moving images and sounds stripped to their most basic elements. Students receive training in all aspects of film, from cinematography, editing, and the craft of filmmaking to film inspection, identification, projection, and curation—even the manufacture of eco-friendly film stock and the disassembly and reassembly of a film projector. This radical, utopian proposal responds to the social, political, and environmental crises of the twenty-first century, and is an inspiring call to reckon with and rethink the status quo of media-archival education today.

The first article in the second section, Brian Meacham’s “Teaching ‘The Film Archive’ at Yale University,” describes a graduate course Meacham has taught since 2016 that introduces doctoral students in film and media studies to film preservation practices. The first half of the course surveys different film technologies, processes, and formats—gauges, stocks, colour, and sound—as well as preservation and restoration concepts, curatorial practices, and the history of film archives. Students are also trained to think about films as material objects and to pay attention to the physical condition of films as they are being projected. In the second half of the course, students are asked to acquire a film print for the Yale Film Archive, which they are taught to inspect, repair, catalogue, scan, and present to an audience at the end of the semester.

In her article, Marina Hassapopoulou discusses several courses and projects she has taught and developed at New York University centred on obsolete, interactive, complex, and ephemeral media that make use of collaborative and DIY research

and preservation strategies. “Ephemeral Media: Countering Transience through Alternative and Participatory (Meta-)Archiving” recounts how the participatory and amateur archival processes that students employ as part of her courses to research and preserve the histories of neglected media formats and objects, while perhaps not living up to the standards of institutional archives, have allowed her to build several alternative online archives devoted to these unique media. Across her discussion, Hassapopoulou also stresses the important contributions that the students make to both pedagogy and scholarship, as these non-traditional, multi-authored research platforms become a way for students to present their intellectual labour in a public-facing venue.

In “Film Programming as Archival Research at the University of Leicester,” David Christopher discusses a first-year undergraduate course where students work to develop and realize their own film programs or media exhibitions. Through a detailed breakdown of the syllabus, he describes how students are trained to develop transferable skills in research, administration, design, and communication as they work in groups to develop a program idea, explore potential film or media objects to include in their program, build a website to promote their event, and finally present the program to an audience. Throughout his article, Christopher reflects on how he has tried to encourage students to pursue more rigorous and original archival research as part of their project development, and how the limitations of the various iterations of the course have curtailed these efforts, encouraging him to continually modify the syllabus.

Returning to description and cataloguing, in “Guerrilla Television Out of the Box: Exploring the Raindance Foundation Video Archive at ZKM | Karlsruhe with Students of Art History,” Barbara Filser and Felix Mittelberger discuss a series of three seminars taught in the art history program at Karlsruhe Institute of Technology in collaboration with ZKM | Karlsruhe, making use of archival video from the Raindance Foundation Video Archive. These courses tasked students with cataloguing and describing digitized videos from the archive, entering metadata into ZKM’s database, and researching and identifying the individuals, organizations, locations, and events depicted. In addition to serving as an introduction to the history of early video—a history typically overlooked in art history programs—the course also allowed students to develop an understanding of the archival labour that is necessary to verify historical data and make materials available for art-historical research.

In “Les archives télévisuelles, génératrices d’histoire(s) de l’art,” Marie-Odile Demay makes a case for the historical value of early television programs and broadcasts focused on the arts. She suggests that early interviews with artists and recordings documenting their practices and exhibitions which were aired on TV could serve as useful primary sources for art-historical research. However, as she shows, many of these materials have not been preserved in a systematic way, and they remain overlooked by art historians. Providing a history of earlier efforts to produce, promote, and preserve films and television programs about art, she discusses the contemporary challenges to preserving these television broadcasts and her own difficulties researching, finding, and accessing them. Throughout her essay, Demay conveys the urgency

of curating, contextualizing, and making these materials available to researchers, students, and the public alike.

Concluding this section, in “Creating an Educational Common: Activating Vulnerable Media Archives in the Classroom,” Chloë Brushwood Rose and Axelle Demus describe several educational guides they developed for both high school and undergraduate students as part of the Canadian research project *Archive/Counter-Archive*. Built around digitized archival media that have in different ways been “marginalized”—a notion they complicate in their article—the authors describe the development of two of these guides, the first centred on a cable access program about HIV/AIDS, and the second on Margaret Perry’s promotional government films. In both case studies, Brushwood Rose and Demus reflect on how these historical materials can be activated in the classroom to teach about specific Canadian histories, about the subjective nature and limits of the archival record, and about political resistance, civic engagement, and community building, in order to create what the authors describe as an “educational common.”

The final section begins with “The Pedagogic Paradox: Addressing Audiovisual Archiving Education in India,” in which Madhavi Reddy, Aparna Subramanian, and Shruti Hussain discuss the state of media-archival training in India. The authors provide an overview of the development of some of the country’s national film and media institutions, and the policies and practices that have prevented them from developing audiovisual archiving training to support their own missions. Summarizing the few educational opportunities available for audiovisual archivists in the country, they describe many of the challenges to establishing professional training, including the film industry’s focus on creating new product rather than caring for its back catalogue, and the lack of recognition and professional status accorded to film archivists in India. Informed by interviews with two regional archivists, as well as their own experiences, the authors provide a roadmap for developing a robust audiovisual archiving “ecosystem” to support both preservation and education in the country.

Patricia Ledesma Villon retains the focus on professionalization and professional identity as she makes a strong case for recognizing the unique knowledge and skills of film workers labouring outside the archive. In “Photochemical Pedagogy: Film Preservation Education beyond the Archive,” she gives due to the artists, lab workers, and other practitioners who keep analogue film alive as a contemporary art form. As Villon argues, an expanded view of what counts as “preservation” could acknowledge that these film workers help preserve analogue film practices and processes by passing down the technical skills necessary to make, process, and project films—skills that archivists often do not possess. The archival community, she suggests, rather than eyeing the artist-run film lab community with suspicion, would only benefit by inviting them to share their knowledge and collaborating with them to find solutions to the issues both communities have in common: obsolescence, technical malfunction, and lack of resources.

Moving from the film lab to film schools, Luiza Gonçalves and Lucas Larriera propose a new method of digital linear editing using the archival tool FFmpeg, which can be used to introduce filmmaking students to archival concepts. In “Ar-

teleku No-GUI: Using Digital Linear Editing to Teach Archival Practices at Film Schools,” they suggest that editing in the command line, without the mediation of a graphical user interface, can help students and editors better understand the technical transformations that happen in the background of editing applications and make more conscious choices about their edits. In addition to describing how they developed this method to create their own short film, Gonçalves and Larriera suggest that this lossless process can also counteract the effects of generation loss and compression for orphaned digital materials. A detailed breakdown of the entire process, including the FFmpeg recipes necessary to execute the edits, is provided in the appendix to their article.

Nicholas Caluda, in “Gauging Interest: Media Preservation Literacy and the Public Library,” examines how public libraries can become sites of media-archival pedagogy. Based on a public program he hosted at the public library branch at which he works, he shows how exposing patrons to a 16mm film print as part of the library’s classic movie night allowed him to introduce them to basic media preservation concepts, including information about ideal storage conditions for film, magnetic media, and optical discs. He assesses the success of his program with a survey, which reveals that participants feel better prepared to preserve their own media collections after attending the program. As Caluda argues, the public library often gets overlooked as part of media-archival efforts, but its accessibility and openness can make it a valuable collaborator for local archives and museums to engage with new audiences.

The final section concludes with Petra Totten’s video essay, *When We Gather Round the Giant Stone Peacock*, which turns our attention to another library: the John P. Robarts Library at the University of Toronto. The Robarts Library becomes the focal point for Totten’s reflections on the hierarchies of value ascribed to academic, archival, and personal kinds of knowledge production—hierarchies the video flattens by treating them as equally important. Engaging with queer and trans theory, Totten reflects on the ways in which trans experiences have been excluded from the archive and historical record, the ways in which trans lives have persisted, and the ways in which trans people gather to engage in their own collective creation. The ten-minute video is available in its entirety on the *Synoptique* website, and readers are encouraged to watch it before reading the accompanying artist statement included in these pages.

Having kicked this issue off by discussing our own efforts to develop a student-led teaching archive at UWM, it seems fitting to conclude with a roundtable about a similar initiative at Purchase College. In “Now or Never: Teaching 16mm Archiving and Preservation at Purchase College,” Oscar Becher, J.M.S. (Andi) Emberley, Camila Garcia Cabrera, Nathan Holmes, and Lindsay Miller discuss Holmes’ efforts to activate a 16mm film collection at his liberal arts college as part of an undergraduate course he redesigned, and later through a student society. Holmes shares his perspective as the instructor and faculty advisor, Becher and Miller discuss their efforts as professional archivists to support both instruction and preservation work, and Emberley and Garcia bring us full circle by describing their experiences

as students taking the course and remaining active with the Purchase Film Archive through the student society. Their wide-ranging conversation ends this issue on a hopeful note about students' interests in archival work and their willingness and initiative to take an active role in preserving our collective media histories.

When we set out to guest edit this issue, we posed several questions we hoped our contributors would respond to: How can we make the work of archives and archivists more visible to students? How do you balance teaching practical, hands-on preservation skills with theoretical and historical training in archival practice? How do you teach media preservation with limited or no access to physical archives? How can working with archival media as primary research documents, as creative source material, and as heritage artifacts build a historical appreciation and analytical understanding of the materiality of media and the politics of preservation? And how can we ensure that archival instruction—and the archival profession—is accessible and inclusive to students from historically underrepresented groups?

The contributors to this special issue have gone above and beyond in responding to these prompts, providing practical lesson plans and describing innovative assignments; reflecting on students' reactions to and engagement with their course materials, projects, and experiences; and discussing the limitations, challenges, and opportunities presented by access to resources, and the collaborations and partnerships they built both intra-institutionally between siloed departments and inter-institutionally with archives and museums. As these contributions show, audiovisual preservation education has grown to encompass a wide variety of media and can take place in a variety of settings. We hope this special issue can serve as a useful handbook, and that it will inspire and empower other archivists and instructors to develop their own media-archival pedagogical initiatives. For our part, we are full of new ideas, and excited to get back to the classroom.

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Notes

¹ See also the resources for educators, including sample assignments, available through the Media History Digital Library: <https://mediahistoryproject.org/about/educators.php>.

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STUDENTS IN THE ARCHIVE

Teaching Media Archives and Performing Film Reconstructions with Undergraduate Students

Ben Harry

Introduction

With the advent of online video streaming sites, media archives in the twenty-first century can be challenging to define and differentiate from other types of media collections—even for those of us who work in them. YouTube is currently the largest repository of audiovisual content in the world, at least in terms of its global reach and viewership. Particularly for younger generations, YouTube has become *the* resource for searching for “vintage” or “retro” moving images and sounds. Its eclipse is so total that many might believe that if something does not exist on YouTube, it does not exist at all. How can archives compete with, revolt against, or leverage their content beside commercial streaming sites that eclipse media collections in the minds of so many? We must also question the enduring value of retaining physical carriers when media content can be efficiently migrated for managed digital preservation and instantaneous digital delivery.

While these questions are too encompassing for me to attempt to answer in this report about our efforts at Brigham Young University (BYU) to engage the next generation of students with our audiovisual holdings, they are constantly present throughout our pedagogical projects and the archival and preservation actions we take in our archive. Our efforts to *teach* media archives have focused primarily on spreading awareness of media archives and their function with the hope that the curious will want to learn more about the archives and media preservation, and join us in dialogue about these questions. We have been able to inspire students by organizing celluloid projection presentations, hosting tours of the media archive, and sponsoring a film internship program. Through this internship, students gain hands-on experience reconstructing a film project from photochemical elements to give forgotten films another chance to connect with audiences. Through these efforts, we strive to

educate those within our sphere of potential influence and increase the understanding of media archives and media preservation practices.

In this essay, I outline and explain how I have tried to engage a new generation of students with the concepts and realities of audiovisual media items, artifacts, and time-based content housed in our special collections and archives. Considering the rapid technological development of media over the past few decades, one challenging aspect is to communicate to young students the impact physical materials have historically had on the preservation and accessibility of media content. In my discussions with students, I am careful not to overstay my welcome by reminiscing about how things worked “back in my day” without grounding it in practical impact. Students need to have some knowledge of the inherent physical and material aspects of media objects to appreciate their role in history. This physicality is essential to understanding how the archive performs the preservation of media carriers and offers access to the content they contain. In the pages that follow, I will describe three efforts we implement to “teach media archives”: course-related and public screenings on celluloid motion picture film; a series of informal tours and presentations; and an internship program, through which students have an opportunity to work on the reconstruction of a film.

Course Presentations and Archive Tours

My attempts at teaching media archives naturally spring from my role as a manuscript curator in the BYU Library Special Collections, collecting personal papers and institutional records that document the history of cinema, radio, and television as a subject. I am one of eight rare book and manuscript curators, each serving in their own subject specialties. I also serve as the audiovisual (AV) materials archivist, which means that any audio, video, or motion picture content on physical media found in manuscript collections or the university archives is within my stewardship to conserve, preserve, migrate, and make available. Special Collections, which houses approximately 12,000 manuscript collections found in over 86,000 individual physical containers, also manages substantial media holdings. Of course, much of the history of the twentieth century is contained in machine-readable formats, and a good number of these are time-based AV formats. At last count, my survey reports over 126,000 individual carriers of AV content located in our collections. We typically store the grooved and magnetic-based carriers with their related paper collections. While all our storage is temperature and humidity-controlled, motion picture film holdings are separated to cold storage (34 degrees Fahrenheit) to promote longevity of the carriers.

Within Special Collections, I have designated these holdings as the BYU Motion Picture Archive, which presently comprises over 500 classic Hollywood titles on 16mm film, as well as an additional 3,000 reels of historical university footage, home movies, and various other productions. Our collections are primarily on 16mm acetate film, but we also have some 35mm film holdings, as well as some on polyester film stock. Branding the motion picture film materials in this way has proved valuable in our efforts to raise awareness of the AV media in our collections,

as it is an easily recognizable and marketable moniker.

There is no formalized curriculum taught on campus specifically about libraries or archives. While I do not teach formal, semester-long courses where I could introduce students to these concepts and the work of media archives in greater depth and detail, I sometimes offer informal tours and presentations for promotion and exposure among the student body and general community. While I am happy to provide tours of the archive's storage and work area for interested students and discuss what a media archive is and what a media archivist does, these tours are irregular and infrequent compared to the coordinated motion picture projections and presentations I provide to various class sections. During the course of a semester, it is common to team up with teaching faculty to screen a film on legacy media in the library's auditorium. In these course-based screenings, in addition to presenting the selected film title to the class, I take time to emphasize the physicality of AV carriers and how each format's specific attributes impacted the production, distribution, and exhibition of content for several generations. I also highlight the disparity between what is available on streaming, on disc, and other formats.

The Reynolds Auditorium at the BYU Library, where I host these and other regular screenings from the BYU Motion Picture Archive, is equipped with an impressive vintage Eastman Kodak Arc 25B 16mm film projector (outfitted with a newer Xenon light source). While the projector can handle large reels for projections of up to two and a half hours of film at sound speed, I typically project one storage reel (approximately 1,800 ft) at a time for academic presentations, which allows for a momentary pause for reel changes to remind audiences of the physical nature of the film medium. During projection, I keep the projection room door open so that the slight clatter of the projector can be heard in the background, and I invite the audience to observe the film running through the projector before, during, and after the presentation. This invitation creates opportunities to demonstrate the components and mechanics of the apparatus as well as to explain how motion pictures are composed of single images, which are animated in real time. I also invite students who demonstrate particular interest in the media or technology to attend subsequent archive presentations, or even a tour of our Special Collections. I also conduct these types of tours when I am hiring students to assist with the digitization of content from analogue carriers for preservation and access purposes. These tours help effectively communicate what the employment position entails and evaluate a student's level of interest. Since not all prospective student interviewees are hired, this increases—however minimally—the number of students who have heard an explanation about what Special Collections, media archives, and archivists do.

I usually begin tours by explaining the role or function that special collections performs within a library, primarily defined by the status of its items as non-circulating due to a variety of reasons—mainly those of value, uniqueness, and fragility. I also explain how time-based, machine-readable media formats depend on specific technologies for playback, which highlights the threats posed by obsolescence and the media carriers' own fragile physical nature. I then enquire as to what kinds of images and concepts the terms “film archive” or “media archive” conjure in the stu-

dents' minds. Anecdotally, their answers are primarily focused on either the physical shelves of carriers, a secured vault, or a digital repository (like a media asset management system). I then transition by explaining a few key concepts and terms related to archives, their purpose, the actions they take, and the considerations archivists must deliberate on.

Selection, description, preservation, conservation, restoration, and promotion are loaded vocabulary terms that I am careful to unpack and define. A curator is responsible for selecting, acquiring, and collecting materials deemed of sufficient historical value, as determined by each collecting area's specific mission statement and collecting policy. Collections are described using very precise terms, formats, and levels of depth to communicate the collections' profile. I define preservation as keeping these materials safe, secure, and organized, while conservation is the active measures taken to prevent further deterioration and damage. Restoration, on the other hand, would comprise the active steps taken to rebuild materials and/or bring content back to a condition prior to its current, possibly damaged, extant state. Finally, promotion includes actions taken to raise awareness of the existence of content as well as to demonstrate its continued importance or relevance. I explain to students that, as BYU's AV archivist and curator, it is my role to shepherd AV materials through all these steps and to take stewardship for both the physical material items and their intellectual content.

When discussing collecting and curating, I emphasize the importance of mission-fit appraisal through collecting policies that describe what should be collected and why. Curators are called upon to make tough decisions based on specific criteria regarding what should be acquired, preserved, or deaccessioned from their collections. For a typical example, I profile an archive housed within a television station, which will archive their stock footage, finished stories, aired broadcasts, and the raw production content so that variations of news segments may be created. In contrast, many cultural heritage institutions serve local communities and geographies, or seek to document specific histories. I try to make a point of encouraging students to think about media archives as resources for research and discovery. I point out that while YouTube may *appear* comprehensive, there is a great deal of material that can be found and accessed only through a media archive, and perhaps only with the help of an archivist.

It is critical to introduce and stress the concept of the uniqueness of materials and content in archives. Each physical media item is unique, based on the conditions of its initial creation, and the history of its use, treatment, and storage. To illustrate these points, I briefly walk students through the photochemical process of motion picture film production and preservation:

- Motion picture materials are processed in a photochemical lab, where they can be expertly or poorly handled, dramatically affecting the attributes of the image on the new film stock.
- Film can go through several rounds of duplication after the camera original is developed, which may add additional artifacts—intentional and not.

- Inherently, image sharpness and detail are lost with each successive “generation” from the original film that ran through the camera.
- Additionally, *any* physical action taken with film can result in damage: scratches can be introduced on the image surface, as well as breaks and tears that must be spliced back together.
- Storage conditions, particularly temperature and humidity, have a significant impact on film’s physical condition.
- A myriad of variables contribute to the quality of the content, including format specifics and the quality of equipment used to initially capture or record the information on a carrier.
- Variant versions *intentionally* created for specific uses or audiences compound the multiplicity even further.

All these considerations result in the fact that each individual reel of film has its artifactual history and characteristics. This also applies to any other type of AV carrier, including magnetic audio and videotape. Therefore, providing very specific identification and description of each item is integral to archival stewardship.

Having established the value of maintaining each individual piece of media, I reverse direction, pointing out that this understanding must be tempered by the reality of physical space limitations. I illustrate this by introducing our 16mm print copy of *Casablanca* (1942). It is certainly a unique artifact—while not a unique edit, the print has its own history, shows unique wear and tear, and demonstrates other physical characteristics such as a poor optical soundtrack. Although the 16mm film print may be illustrative to help recreate how audiences may have experienced the film in the previous century, we must ask whether this uniqueness justifies its preservation. When space is limited, keeping one item may potentially result in turning others away. What would be our justification for keeping this poor 16mm projection print when Warner Bros. maintains vastly superior production elements on 35mm fine-grain film stock? In fact, with the recent restoration and digital presentation of films on Blu-ray or Ultra HD Blu-ray discs, whose quality easily surpasses our 16mm print in sharpness and detail, these disc sources are understandably the preferred access formats for instructors and students alike. Again, this leads to making a strong point that an archive must describe its collections and items’ condition in great detail and have a clear mission statement and collecting policy.

The final part of the tour and discussion centres around the promotional tasks of archives that involve both passive and active initiatives. Ensuring the discoverability of content in AV archives through adequate description in searchable registers or catalogues facilitates what I term “passive” access. While cataloguing and description require significant effort on the part of the archive’s staff, the access it provides relies on the patron’s own initiative to find resources in its holdings. Among “active” promotional initiatives, I list presentations, exhibits, displays, and screenings that seek to engage audiences and raise awareness of archival holdings. One significant consideration that impacts—and sometimes curtails—active promotional initiatives is securing performance permissions. I explain that rights do not auto-

matically accompany physical copies—if an archive owns or has been granted the rights for the public performance of its content, it can readily exhibit presentations accordingly, but these rights are often not granted without permission or paid fees. Current and upcoming exhibits and presentations are encouraged, and the tour ends with a call for questions. While I actively answer questions throughout the tour, this overview helps lay the framework for a more engaged and thoughtful discussion with the students.

Film Restoration Internships

As part of my attempt to consistently and actively create opportunities for education, one particularly rewarding initiative has been the “film restoration” internships I have been able to offer students with support from the library. I typically employ two interns each fall and winter semester, resulting in four projects completed each calendar year; so far, I have been able to accommodate all students who have expressed interest, so it has not required a competitive application process. The internship allows a student to progress through all the steps and make all the decisions necessary to create a new digital restoration of a film by the end of the semester.

The final component of the internship is a public screening of the restored project with presentations by the student and myself. This provides an intensive engagement with rare media materials for the small number of interns involved, as well as an educational opportunity for a broad general audience. We invite the filmmakers and actors to attend the public screenings and take part in a question-and-answer session after the presentation. The screenings are promoted throughout campus and the community, and while the titles are often unrecognizable to all but a few, the series itself has garnered a positive reputation and developed an audience willing to see what we have uncovered. The internships and screenings also serve as successful promotional events for the archive.

The internships were inspired by a university-wide initiative to engage students in ways that transcend traditional teaching interactions. From 2016 to 2019, university president Kevin Worthen defined a new direction for the university with the motto “inspiring learning.” It was a call to increase experiential learning opportunities for students, and for faculty to remove barriers and decentralize the classroom. It was a call to develop opportunities to work alongside students and actively involve them in research. Listening to information disseminated from the front of the classroom in a lecture is not substantially different from watching a video about the same topic on YouTube (there it is again!). Instead, Worthen called on BYU to promote greater student involvement in their own learning through hands-on experiences and practical applications of skills through problem-solving and by working on real-world projects. Worthen was careful to point out that “inspiring learning” can be an adjective and a noun, describing the kind of learning we want to take place on campus—a learning process that inspires; it can also be a verb and a noun, meaning that as faculty and staff we want to inspire lifelong learning habits in our students. It was with this focus and challenge in mind that I began looking closely at what I could do to incorporate these ideals into my work as a curator in Special Collections.

Answers to the question of how I could best engage students with the archive were not readily apparent to me, but after some time, potential opportunities began to come to mind. I also considered the types of students that would want to engage in archival actions with media. We have a good media arts production program on campus, but often these students are interested in *creating* new media, not necessarily looking at past media that is not conveniently available. Humanities students are interested in *studying* film as a cultural or artistic expression, but are most often not fascinated by obsolete technologies. Finding the right project was key. I needed something that generated enough excitement in a student to overcome any aversions to technical subjects, as well as dealing with “old things.” I reviewed the duties I perform to identify which would be the most feasible and appealing to students. Selection and acquisition: it is not really appropriate to take students with me on donor visits to appraise collections. Description of archival holdings: I did not think labelling physical items or data entry captured the vision of “inspiring learning.” Preservation and conservation could potentially provide some memorable hands-on experiences for students, but these tasks mostly consist of winding, smelling, and rehousing film elements—more tedium than inspiration.

One of the most enticing aspects of media archiving is uncovering something lost or forgotten or bringing something out of obscurity and presenting it to audiences for reconsideration. I have long enjoyed following the process of high-profile restorations like those performed on *Metropolis* (1927) and *Nosferatu* (1922). Since documentation of film restorations are common disc extras, and restoration descriptions from UCLA’s Festival of Preservation are popular publications, I deduced I was not alone in finding this work fascinating. If I could get *these* kinds of projects going, I hoped that would attract students to work with me.

For decades, the restoration and presentation of motion picture films was prohibitively expensive for all but a few of the largest and most well-funded archives. Restoration required new film stock, expert lab services, and expensive restorative techniques and tools. It required more than a three-month-long semester window to collaborate with international archives to compare the condition of unique materials from across the globe. However, in the last decade, technological advances for digital restoration tools have brought these processes within the reach of smaller organizations and made collaborations easier. Restorations would be ideal projects to work on with students, but many factors needed to miraculously coalesce to make these types of projects feasible.

To justify and perform a restoration action for a given title, access to film materials of superior quality is necessary. Locating a film element which is uniquely complete, or multiple film components that could be combined, allows for successful restorations of superior quality and/or which achieve greater completeness. Original camera film will contain the most visual information and allow for the highest resolution scan, while intermediate printing materials will often yield mixed results based on their generation. Projection prints can be used to create decent-quality digital scans and, depending on their condition, may even contain enough visual information for a restoration project, but there is limited latitude for further enhancement or

improvement of the image. Film prints are typically only used as a final resort when no production elements are extant or available. For me to offer adequate restoration opportunities, unique source materials were necessary.

Around the same time as I was developing ideas for what these projects might look like, an opportunity presented itself to recover film elements from the BYU Motion Picture Studio (MPS). BYU had been home to the MPS from 1953 until the studio was separated from the university in 1989. The MPS provided media production students with practical experience working in a professional studio environment, provided supplementary teaching materials for various departments and faculty at the university, and furnished the Church of Jesus Christ—the sponsoring organization of BYU—with audiovisual training and teaching materials to distribute to its congregations worldwide. The MPS also produced a good number of educational films and public service presentations. The physical studio facilities featured two soundstages as well as a backlot with outdoor grounds featuring some frontier-era buildings and a small stream, which were used in various productions. At the height of its activity, the MPS typically completed between six and ten productions a year.

In 2018, it was determined that the titles produced during the classic BYU MPS era (1953–89) had either been sufficiently transferred to videotape for historical preservation or were too outdated for use in churches or classrooms, so all the actual motion picture master element materials were prepared to be discarded. Loath to throw it away themselves, the materials were dropped off on pallets at the library so that anything of interest could be maintained or permanently consigned to disposal. The final decision had been delegated to me—I had eight pallets containing over 3,200 individual reels and video materials to review before decisions could be made. With very limited storage space—both cold storage and regular climate-controlled shelving—the acquisition of materials by Special Collections represents a significant commitment, so careful review was necessary.

The review of these materials could not have occurred at a more fortunate time. At the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the campus was closed, and everyone was sent home to work remotely, but I was able to appraise these materials in a remote storage area where I could work in solitude. As expected, the majority of the materials would not fit our current collecting mission. Keeping the “inspiring learning” focus in mind, I recognized that some of these materials would support fantastic student film restoration projects. Many of the original camera materials and master audio elements for several titles were extant. Most of these titles, produced from the 1950s through the 1980s, only survive as faded pink 16mm prints or degraded VHS copies. Using the original elements, we could engage in projects of reconstruction, remastering, and restoration that would generate very satisfying results. These materials would require significant labour and funding to realize exhibit or research value. If I had reviewed these materials solely with my previous collecting mission in mind, I might have overlooked many materials that I was now keenly searching for in support of experiential learning opportunities.

In order to perform a reconstruction or restoration project, the timing could

not have been better for the availability of improved and affordable film scanning equipment, which has become more accessible to smaller archives over the last decade. Like many smaller archives, we had been caught in a conundrum for decades: truly unique materials were likely too fragile for regular projection, yet that unique content was *precisely* what we should prioritize for access and promotion. Hearkening back to our tour of the media archive, we were comfortable regularly projecting our print of *Casablanca*, but it is very different projecting original camera reversal film that might result in potential irreversible damage to a unique artifact. With the reduction in cost and improvement of image quality available with today's film scanners, it is now much more affordable to both outsource scanning projects or purchase a scanner for in-house digitization of motion picture content. Gentle, sprocketless film scanners can now safely scan shrunken and slightly damaged film. Once, providing access to rare materials was a nerve-wracking process with the risk of potentially disastrous results, but can now be regularly planned and successfully completed through digital means. This has made it possible to safely, consistently, and sustainably create digital files from motion picture collection materials, specifically when working with camera originals.

Now, having both the film materials *and* greater access to the necessary technology to undertake restoration projects, I was only missing students. Through my tours and projecting activities, I was already aware of a few students who were interested in film history and restoration, and I simply contacted them to see who had the time and desire to partner on a restoration project. We received an "Inspiring Learning Grant," which the university established to support the president's vision, and we embarked on our first project. With this funding, I was able to send out conformed camera original A/B-roll reversal film elements for two titles to one vendor and outsource the transfer of the 16mm composite master magnetic film reels to another. The initial grant paid the student a small hourly wage for their time spent on the project. The scans of the camera originals would need to go through a shot-by-shot colour grading process, so the grant also paid for some training with a local colourist, who agreed to demonstrate colouring our files. After the initial observation in colouring was completed, we started the project over from scratch, performing our own grading to bring the colours from the flat digital scans back to brilliant life. We learned how to do the work ourselves from things we had gleaned from watching the colourist work, by consulting YouTube tutorials, and by just trying out various settings in the software until we found satisfying results.

During the colour balancing phase of this first project, the library approved the purchase of a film scanner, so that our motion picture film collections could be made accessible and digital proxies could be preserved. Having a film scanner in-house supports greater access to all our unique and treasured motion picture content and also allows these types of restoration projects to continue without the constant need to seek more external grant funding. Scanning directly from camera originals, we can capture and reproduce an image quality that previous generations could never enjoy because they could only ever see a third or fourth generation print. Outside of overhead, this reduced the cost of a restoration project to the price of having the film

cleaned in a local vendor's ultrasonic film cleaner and the wages for the students' paid internship. Since our first project in 2021, we have completed sixteen restoration projects and further refined all aspects of the internship.

The first few weeks of the internship consist of discussion-based presentations on concepts related to restoration, the photochemical process of motion picture filmmaking, and the work of film archives, as well as an overview of the history of the BYU Motion Picture Studio. In preparation for the internships, we identify motion picture printing elements in our archive that could support a successful restoration project. From those pre-selected materials, each student gets to select a project that sparks their interest and imagination, typically having no information about the film beyond its title alone.

Throughout this process, students gain an understanding of several facets of archival work, including selection, description, and preservation. The student performs a physical inspection and carefully describes the film elements to complete a restoration plan, outlining what elements will be necessary for the project. Select materials are sent for cleaning and scanned upon return. If the scans are satisfactory, the project moves to the reconstruction and colour grading phase. Occasionally, additional elements have needed to be cleaned and scanned after the initial elements were found to be incomplete. The various elements of motion picture film are then brought together to reconstitute the completed picture edit, the soundtrack is synchronized, and original titles may be reconstituted depending on the method used originally.

Most students do not have experience performing colour grading, especially from a scanned photochemical film element. Students typically require several weeks to develop a feel for how the film should look and to learn the tools that help them achieve satisfactory results. The work is tedious, as each individual shot must be balanced and corrected. They quickly learn that variant element types, such as reversal, positive, negative, and intermediate film stocks, support different visual qualities. We have found that it is best to perform multiple colouring and exposure passes on segments of the project, rather than seeking perfection with each shot from the beginning. Through repetition, the desired visual look is developed as the student adjusts their colouring based on the photochemical elements. We enlist others with "fresh eyes" to review our work and to help us anchor our image decisions to reality and to expectation. It is a very repetitive and iterative process, but students develop confidence in their colouring choices and become very invested in their projects.

All this work is done using DaVinci Resolve post-production software. Since we are typically working from conformed A/B-roll originals, the original edit is relatively straightforward to reconstruct once synced on the timeline. While we often have multiple picture or sound elements to compare, it is invariably the earliest generation that has the greatest detail, information, and fidelity. We also often have access to the studio's production records, which we consult during this process to enlighten our understanding of the production's history and the choices and challenges that were faced decades ago. The limited number of times we have had to make interpretive decisions, the production histories have shed light on the original producers'

challenges, frustrations, and intentions, which have empowered us to conservatively apply corrective actions using the range of current software capabilities—primarily in a few instances where effects came out poorly during the initial production. Finally, audio equalization, noise reduction, and sweetening are applied to the soundtrack to optimize the audio and reduce tape hiss.

As the projects near completion, students begin preparing for their public presentations. We are working with productions that were created for distribution, and the University still owns the copyright to the materials, so we are free to share the films through campus screenings. We are also working on finding a platform to allow online viewing of the restorations for even greater audience exposure. We presented our first restoration premiere screening in October 2021, alongside an overview of the film restoration process and the production of the film. Since our first title was filmed locally in and around Provo, Utah, we were able to find and identify many of the filming locations, take pictures of them, and compare them to what they presently look like. Our first project was a scripted narrative, which didactically presented teens with suggested solutions to moral dilemmas. The two teen actors from the film, now in their sixties, joined us to answer questions and shared behind-the-scenes stories.

Our public presentations have continued to feature similar components, yet each project is unique. Some films document an event, and the students have researched newspaper archives to provide additional context. Others highlight historical figures or artists, and we have been able to further elaborate on the subject explored in the film with additional decades of perspective. This format is flexible enough to invite students to explore the most appropriate approach to their specific project and invest themselves in their presentation. I ask the students to introduce the restoration process and discuss their personal experiences working on the project before introducing the film to the audience. This allows the students to reflect on what they have learned about media archiving and media restoration over the course of the semester: asking them to explain to a public audience what media archives do and how restorations are performed, and to position their projects' relevance to contemporary viewers, solidifies in their minds—and hopefully the audiences'—the value of archives and their contents.

Conclusion

The film reconstruction internships are now in their fifth year, and each semester, I have become more organized and clearer in my instructions. The internship process and schedule have grown more streamlined, and the learning experiences have improved. My own experience, comfort, and confidence with colour grading software have also increased significantly, and my feedback regarding students' restoration work has become more articulate. I am also continuously exploring opportunities to integrate new and developing restoration software tools as they become more commonly used in the field today.

My goal is for students to come away with an experience that transcends *hearing* or *reading* about media archives by instead *practicing* and *doing* media ar-

chival work through projects that incorporate the use of both archival materials and methods. While theory provides a helpful foundation, application and practice through a specific project really helps students understand the principles of our work. Throughout the process, students also develop a greater understanding and appreciation of filmmaking itself. For example, students express recognition and gratitude for the wide range of media manipulation tools that have been developed over the past few decades, realizing how challenging the simple mechanics of media production were during the first century of filmmaking. Students also develop an understanding and appreciation for the often-invisible backstage work that archives do to preserve our media history, and I try to encourage students to see media archives as both resources for their research and as repositories of media content that could be re-used in new productions, and to feel empowered and inspired to utilize the archive for both purposes. As I reflect on how all the moving parts of the internships came together, with timely resources coalescing to support a successful program, I myself am feeling quite inspired.

Praxis is Paramount: NYU MIAP's Approach to Educating Media Archivists Today for Collection Stewardship Tomorrow

Kimberly Tarr

Introduction

Since its founding in 2003, the Moving Image Archiving and Preservation (MIAP) program at New York University (NYU) has trained nearly 200 students for careers in the archival profession. Housed within the Tisch School of the Arts' Martin Scorsese Department of Cinema Studies, MIAP's graduate-level training program collaboratively models ways to support student development, the growth of cultural heritage initiatives, and community-driven archiving projects. Hands-on, practical work with archival film, video, and audio has been core to the program's pedagogical foundation since its inception. This article argues that archival studies programs must cast practical skills as an essential component of the training curriculum to ensure graduates are armed with the real-world experience to care for collections.

To support the expansive collections of media recorded on analogue and digital carriers, training programs must not only provide opportunities to engage with the theoretical elements of film archiving, but simultaneously offer students a practical forum to develop the competencies essential to archival stewardship. Critically, programs must go beyond just theory and practice and build in opportunities for ongoing reflection. The increased need for specialized pedagogy and training results from the proliferation of archives. This article will explore the factors that have promoted the increased need for training and discuss recent changes within the education and training field. Illuminating key aspects of the NYU MIAP program, this article will further interrogate how its dialogic approach and emphasis on praxis trains professionals to steward collections. I base this article partly on my own experience as an alum of the program, as the instructor of the program's "Directed Internship" seminar since 2012, and in my role as associate director of the program between 2018–19 and 2023–25. Over these decades of experience, I have seen first-hand

how effective training—and thoughtful reflection—can support the development of audiovisual archival professionals.

A Growing Need for Trained Professionals

Advanced training programs focused on audiovisual archiving and preservation have emerged over the past decades to address the staggering number of film, video, and audio recordings in collections worldwide. Since the publication of *Synoptique's* special issue, “Institutionalizing Moving Image Archival Training: Analyses, Histories, Theories,” in 2018, ongoing shifts and tremors continue to mould and reshape the training landscape (Keidl and Gosvig Olesen 2018). The ubiquity of digital video and audio recording technology, compounded by the two-headed issue coined “degralescence”—a portmanteau fusing degradation and obsolescence—conspire to create a growing demand for trained professionals (Casey 2019, 10).¹ The ease of use, availability, and quality of born-digital video technology have expanded the narrower film archiving niche into a broader field of audiovisual archiving, preservation, and digital stewardship. Archives of all stripes must now contend with the seemingly endless creation of new content—cell phone camera video, law enforcement body camera recordings, security footage, as well as event and performance documentation—while also responding to the rise in demand for access. At a moment in time when the public expects all content to be accessible online, how are archives shifting practices to meet these needs? According to a recent study, the global digital asset management market size is projected to grow from \$3.96 billion in 2023 to \$16.18 billion by 2032 (Fortune Business Insights 2025). The demand for digital asset managers and associated digital asset management systems (DAMS) is at an all-time high.

The 2020 global pandemic and resulting shutdowns limited the opportunities for hands-on training, as health and safety were rightly prioritized over *in situ* work and gave rise to new considerations on working remotely on AV collections, while also providing an opportunity to reevaluate how Machine Learning and Natural Language Processing might impact the field. The staggering increase in the volume of media to care for, a rise in demand for digital access, and the new challenges of AI percolating alongside the decades-old obstacles related to degradation and obsolescence make praxis an essential framework for training future media archivists.

Praxis and Critical Archival Theory

The staggering volume of audiovisual materials and digital data provides an opportunity to contemplate growing collections and (re-)consider the significance of this growth historically and culturally. Whose lives are represented in (or absent from) the collections amassed, and who has the power to determine collecting policies, priorities, and preservation? Brazilian educational theorist Paulo Freire developed the pedagogical approach of praxis which can be defined as “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (2014, 51). In a dialogic approach fostering praxis, theoretical understanding informs practice, which is then followed by reflection. Without integrating opportunities for reflection, practice remains just that: practice. Purposeful reflection, guided by a theoretical and value-based framework, is the key element that elevates practice and is a foundational element of the MIAP education.

Reflection can take many forms, such as seminar discussions during audiovisual archiving training, reviewing workflow and program documentation, and reflective writing and evaluation of institutional practices. Dialogue and reflection are foundational elements of praxis, and threaded throughout the MIAP program.

Freire's approach, in tandem with the essential archival-specific scholarship of recent years, grows out of Hannah Arendt's landmark work in developing her "theory of action." Arendt viewed participatory democracy, among other things, through a threefold *vita activa* (labour, work, and action), with the action not just reflecting plurality but being dependent on it. Her scholarship revived the Aristotelian concept of *praxis*, but she endowed it with an inherently political dimension. To Arendt, it is through considered action that the actor's true self is revealed, and the pluralism she emphasizes stands in contrast to the "bureaucratized and elitist forms of politics so characteristic of the modern epoch" (Tömmel and d'Entrevés 2025).

We see clearly how Freire's scholarship on praxis, his foundation of "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it," is a continuation of Arendt's articulated approach. So, too, have those archivists who have contributed so much to the notion of praxis over the past decade. They might ask: how do we bring into being this virtuous cycle where a student learns theory, skills, principles and values; learns to apply all of the above through mentored fieldwork; and is given the space to adequately reflect on the entire process, thus beginning the cycle again? How does Arendt's notion of praxis in participatory democracy, and Freire's notion of transformation through praxis, extend to the critical mission of archiving in a universe with finite resources trying to preserve seemingly limitless material?

First, we would do well to acknowledge the history of archival practice which we have inherited. J.J. Ghaddar and Michelle Caswell (2019) articulated a critical archival theory that Boyles et al. later built upon, as "reproducing the ways in which archives reinscribe existing settler colonial power structures" (Boyles et al. 2022). We are looking not at the inert collection of mislabelled audiovisual materials that inevitably awaits us in a collection. We are "dealing instead with a complex of human communities, tacit knowledges and techno-cultural assemblages, calls also for a deeper understanding of gender, race, class, labour, geopolitical inequalities, and to which extent they are implied in the archiving, access and distribution of resources and data" (Università degli Studi di Udine. n.d.).

Though the term dates back to the 1940s, "community archives" as credible institutions capable of ensuring the long-term preservation of audiovisual materials truly emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, as the widespread availability of film and open-reel video enabled marginalized groups (including women, people of colour, and the LGBTQ+ community) to cement their own narratives without the hierarchical (and restrictive) decision-making of larger cultural institutions (Poole 2020, 658).

The emergence of community archives has served as a counterweight to the behemoths of well-funded archives within museums and universities, though the only constants amongst community archives have been a lack of resources and concerns of co-optation. Archivists have faced the paradox that, try though they might, their work inherently undermines the marginalized groups whose work they

are trying to preserve: “Through traditional community-engaged academic projects, extractive practices have been positioned as ‘empowering’ or ‘enfranchising’ communities, reifying hierarchical relationships and positioning archives as the sole expert of what constitutes cultural heritage” (Boyles et al. 2022).

In recent years, critical archival studies has emerged as a topic in archival theory and practice, urging practitioners to interrogate what is unjust with the current state of archival research and practice and how the field can be critiqued to activate change. Archival students train to accession, process, arrange, describe, preserve, and provide access to collections containing film, video, audio, and digital files. But the development of these collections—and the items that comprise the collections—was not created in a vacuum. In this way, “critical archival studies, like critical theory, is emancipatory in nature, with the ultimate goal of transforming archival practice and society writ large” (Boyles et al. 2022). Having inherited the legacy of hidebound approaches to archiving, contemporary scholars have tried with urgency to forge a way forward, informed by philosophers like Arendt and Freire.

A Rising Tide: The Collecting Landscape

“Audiovisual materials are the fastest-growing segment of our nation’s archives and special collections,” reported the Library of Congress in 2012 (Nelson-Strauss et al. 2012, 6). In addition to maintaining paper and photographic materials, archives that collect twentieth-century personal papers and institutional records regularly encounter audiovisual materials. Accessioning film, video, and audio in more traditional “paper” archival repositories may have once been an anomaly; now, archives may encounter reels of super-8 home movies, answering machine microcassettes, or performances captured on VHS videotapes when accessioning collections. For example, audiovisual holdings in New York University Special Collections represent an average of 23 percent of archival collections accessioned since 2019.

Universities in the U.S. collect and maintain audiovisual materials within many corners of the broad academic setting. Special collections and archives, university producers (such as campus television or radio stations), and academic libraries are all entities that have become increasingly interested in caring for their materials and thus seek support from those trained in handling and preserving audiovisual materials. Some universities maintain archives dedicated to the care of film and video, such as the University of California, Los Angeles’ Film and Television Archive or Indiana University’s Moving Image Archive. In recent years, Preservation Departments within academic libraries—historically the home of book, paper, and object conservation—have expanded to include media preservation units, reflective of the volume of AV materials now held in these institutions. Furthermore, the field’s early exhortation “nitrate can’t wait!” has faded as the volume of the urgent pleas to care for the plethora of twentieth-century recordings on magnetic media drowns out concerns about the early nitrocellulose film base.

Arts organizations, such as dance- or theatre-focused institutions, which have utilized film, video, and audio technology to document their events and performances, now face the challenges of preserving both their legacy holdings, and

considering ways to grapple with digital content. Many of these organizations have established internal archives and are developing systems to digitize, describe, and make their historic and artistically rich collections available. Production companies and distributors, invested in their archives for cultural value and potential back-catalogue and reissue revenue streams, are also strategizing on storage, reformatting, and reissuing. Considering the abundance of institutions with audiovisual materials in their “collections,” the field has expanded to include not simply theatrical motion picture film, but all kinds of audiovisual recordings, agnostic of carrier.

As the creation, collection, and desire to continue exhibiting time-based media art has increased in the last decades, many art museums now grapple with these late-twentieth- and twenty-first-century media artworks. Time-based media artworks may include video, film, slide, audio, or computer technologies that have “duration as a dimension and unfold to the viewer over time.” (Guggenheim n.d.). Time-based media conservation has evolved into its niche, albeit overlapping and allied with audiovisual archiving, and requires the support of curators, conservators, registrars, and technologists.

The Twentieth Century Film Archive

Film archives and museums that collect motion picture films have contended for decades with the deterioration and degradation of photochemical film bases—nitrate and acetate deterioration—and associated magnetic soundtracks. Film collectors created the first film archives in the 1930s. Many of the early film archives were “created and established thanks to the altruistic work of a few talented, farsighted individuals who realized the importance of collecting their national heritage of moving images” (Wibom 1988, 23). Ernest Lindgren, curator of what would become the British National Film Library, and Henri Langlois, head of the Cinémathèque française, are the two names most synonymous with early film archiving (Sterritt 2012, 55).² In 1938, four founding members—including Lindgren and Langlois—created the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAP), with the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) Film Library and the German Reichfilmsarchiv. For these early film archive players—primarily national archives and museums—membership in FIAP supported their development and collaboration. Many of the early film archives were directed by their founders for decades and a professionalized workforce did not begin developing until the last decades of the twentieth century.

UNESCO’s “Recommendation for the Safeguarding and Preservation of Moving Images,” issued in 1980, was the “first instrument to recognize the cultural necessity of preserving moving images, then primarily embodied in film and analogue videotape” (FIAP n.d.), and thus supported the creation and proliferation of national film archives. Ray Edmondson’s seminal *Audiovisual Archiving: Philosophies and Principles* codified the field’s principles while arguing that subjectivity and value pervade the work of “custodians of the memory” (2004, 81). One’s philosophies and values inherently, if unconsciously, guide this work, and attention needs to be paid to *how* and *what* we collect and preserve, as well as what cultural heritage is potentially overlooked in this endeavour.

The opportunity to reflect, and to allow such reflections and dialogue to further inform practice, is the praxis-orientation inherent to MIAP. Interrogating Freire's theory, Mayo argues that "praxis finds its place in any organisation or movement striving for the greater democratisation of society" (2020, 1). The MIAP program seeks to foster this approach globally in its work with partner institutions and through its international collaborative project, the Audiovisual Preservation Exchange (APEX).³ As Freire asserts, "It is not enough for people to come together in dialogue in order to gain knowledge of their social reality. They must act together upon their environment in order critically to reflect upon their reality and so transform it through further action and critical reflection" (2014, 106).

In the early years, training programs focused more explicitly on identifying and caring for motion picture celluloid films. Some programs keenly focused on film, while others addressed other media types, such as audiovisual content on magnetic, optical, and digital media. The first university-based MA degree in film archiving was the School of Film and Television Studies at the University of East Anglia (UEA). The UEA program, which was able to take advantage of the rich collections held in the East Anglian Film Archive (EAFA) for pedagogical and practical purposes, was Europe's first professional qualification in moving image archiving, although the program shuttered in 2011 due to budgetary constraints. The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) has offered a two-year MA program since 2002, but due to administrative changes, the program no longer exists in its original form. The Media Archive Studies (MAS) concentration can now be pursued within UCLA's Library and Information Science program; the resulting degree is a Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS), as opposed to the previous MA.

Founded in 1996, the George Eastman Museum's L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation is the longest-running training program in the U.S. However, only the one-year (non-degree conferring) certificate program was offered until the Selznick School partnered with the University of Rochester in 2005. The first-year curriculum remains consistent for both the certificate and MA students; while the second year of studies takes place in the Film and Media Studies unit of the Department of English at the University of Rochester.

NYU's Moving Image Archiving and Preservation (MIAP) Program: Bridging Theory and Practice

New York University launched its MIAP program at the same time as the University of Amsterdam launched its Preservation and Presentation of the Moving Image program, and both celebrated twenty-year anniversaries in 2023–25 (Elsaesser 2018).⁴ Mapping the current landscape for audiovisual archival training, it must be noted that two early seminal programs—the University of East Anglia in the U.K. and the University of California, Los Angeles Moving Image Archival Studies (MIAS) program in the U.S.—have shuttered or altered dramatically since this time. A review of the new and burgeoning programs will be provided later in this paper.

From its early days, and at its founding director Howard Besser's prescient advocacy, MIAP has always interpreted the "moving image" broadly and trained stu-

dents on the array of formats one may encounter when working with audiovisual materials. From nitrate to DCPs, wire recordings to Digital Audio Tape, and two-inch Quadraplex to Apple ProRes digital files, the MIAP program aims to provide students with a broad foundation in all audiovisual formats.

Field Work and Internships

With a cohort size of an average of ten students, nearly 200 students have graduated from the program since its founding. Each MIAP student completes two semester-long internships and one full-time summer internship, which total approximately 700 hours of critical fieldwork experience. Since the program's founding in 2003, MIAP has arranged over 500 internships, the majority of which have been paired with stipends funded by public or private sources, including the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, and the Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation.

MIAP has partnered with more than 150 institutions to support their essential work caring for audiovisual materials. As part of a site application to serve as an internship host, MIAP faculty and administrative staff conduct site visits. In such meetings, the MIAP team considers the potential work activities; seeks to better understand the day-to-day operations; assess potential supervisors' experience overseeing internships and mentoring students; and gauges whether the proposed project is feasible in the available timeframe, considering the cohort's academic training to date. As graduate students are required to complete three internships over the course of the MA program, scaffolding is intentionally developed around the internship projects, allowing the activities to build upon one another requiring increased oversight and expanded skills to complement the students' progressive training. For example, as students gain experience with analogue-to-digital reformatting of magnetic media in year two of the MIAP program, internships that require such skills are often reserved for the student's third semester in the program.

Defining clear goals, establishing structure, and ensuring accountability are the key components of the internship relationship. In advance of the internship start date, supervisors and students develop an Internship Agreement, a document template which the student completes with the supervisor, reviewed by department staff and faculty before the internship start date, which is then counter-signed by the intern and supervisor. Toward this end, the student and supervisor meet in person, or via phone or teleconference, to discuss the semester's goals and planned activities. This initial meeting allows students to introduce themselves and share their background and experience. At the same time, the supervisor provides a broad overview of the internship site's history and defines how the planned work aligns with the internship site's short- and long-term goals.

MIAP internships require supervisors to have training in archival studies or previous experience supervising MIAP interns. Twenty-four percent of MIAP internship sites have MIAP alumni on staff, demonstrating the program's professional reach. MIAP alumni proceed to lead archival efforts within institutions following

their MIAP tenure and frequently advocate to bring an MIAP intern on board. In the event that an on-site supervisor does not maintain the required qualifications, MIAP can pair a paid archival consultant to serve as an external advisor. In these instances, the external advisor meets regularly with the intern and site supervisor to address questions and work through any issues specific to working with AV materials.

At the internship's end, the intern and supervisor each complete a brief survey. The intern also produces a summary report that includes a background and overview of the internship site; an overview and history of the collection(s) worked on; physical description of the collection(s); description of projects and tasks performed; skills developed or strengthened; and an explanation of any changes made to the goals or tasks outlined in the internship agreement. MIAP faculty and staff review the summaries and explore ways in which work at partner institutions may be further supported in the future.

Over the last two decades, internship sites have included archives and special collections (21 percent), arts organizations/artist studios (15 percent), museums (14 percent), public and research libraries (12 percent), production studios (10 percent), distributors (5 percent), film archives (5 percent), vendors (4 percent), regional archives (3 percent), and national archives (3 percent). In addition to receiving course credit for completing a required number of hours per semester, most students also receive monetary compensation for their work from previously-noted funders and/or local institutional support to offset living expenses in the NYC metropolitan area. Compensation in the form of a stipend, hourly wage, or tuition remission is essential to the MIAP internship program.

Placements within and outside New York City provide practical training, mentorship, and professional networking that complement classroom learning. Funded MIAP interns also make a deep and lasting impact on the condition and accessibility of audiovisual collections locally, nationally, and internationally. Following graduation, many alumni become mentors to newer cohorts of students and early career archivists, sustaining a cycle of training and career support in a small yet broadly impactful field.

Since 2012, I have led a seminar course concurrent with MIAP's semester-long "Directed Internships" to complement the students' practical experience with reflective discussion. In this seminar, the students and I have attempted to unpack the thorny complications that emerge when students attempt to make sense of best practices while interning. Real-world budgets, limited physical and digital storage space, sourcing the essential yet obsolete equipment required for digitization, incompatible collection management systems, and uncertainty—or sometimes antipathy—toward the audiovisual collection materials all challenge students' progress. A dialogic approach in seminar discussions—emphasizing meaningful dialogue and interaction as a "core method of learning and knowledge construction"—allows students to surface issues in a supportive environment, among peers and with the experienced audiovisual archivist instructor as the facilitator in that "both are simultaneously teachers and students" (Mayo 2008, 43). In seminar sessions, we collaboratively seek to democratize knowledge in our demonstrating conservation

treatments, sharing of out-of-print resources, defining acronyms for universal understanding, and eliminating jargon. Students are invited to present their in-progress internship projects and regularly participate in “skill shares,” which may include command-line tutorials or tips on identifying film generation. Sessions are tailored to the students’ current needs and priorities, many of the topics emerging from their real-world priorities at internship sites. If students struggle with a particular skill, or observe a gap in their understanding, I nimbly integrate these lessons and activities into an upcoming class session to address the learning gap.

The internship program’s goals have always centred around the development and education of students; however, another outcome of the program has been the development and expansion of the infrastructure at cultural heritage institutions across New York City due to the MIAP program and interns’ support. In some instances, MIAP interns are tasked with unpacking a box of analogue videotapes left untouched for decades or winding through films that staff feared were too degraded to have any remaining value. Because the students arrive on-site with the training and skills to work with these vulnerable formats, they can be privy to content that may have been previously unknown to other staff. Two key supervisor-intern dynamics have been observed in the last two decades. The first is “AV ambassador”: current staff may have limited or no familiarity working the specific media types and thus lean heavily on the student’s training to advise on collections’ care, storage, reformatting, transfer specifications for digital reformatting, and access strategies. These institutions may be familiar with traditional archival practices but have limited experience with film, video, and/or audio. Such internships can be broad in scope, and interns can find support in classroom seminar discussions. Waves of imposter syndrome can be common in such internships. The seminar course explicitly identifies this issue and how students build confidence in their abilities and knowledge through communication and program support. As opposed to serving as “AV ambassadors,” some internships are guided by a supervisor steeped in the field, often a MIAP alum. These relationships allow interns to dive headfirst into a project stewarded by staff familiar with the vocabulary and intricacies of the film, video, audio, and digital collections.

During his internship at the Indiana University Libraries Moving Image Archive, MIAP alum Rob Anen (Class of 2017) discovered a home movie while processing the Edward Feil collection. Due to the student’s observation and attention, the discovery helped the Library of Congress (LoC) restore a landmark multimedia production. Anen visited the Library’s National Audio-Visual Conservation Centre as a first-year MIAP student and remembered that LoC was restoring *Think* (1964), a multimedia production by Ray and Charles Eames that had been shown across 22 screens of various sizes in the IBM Pavilion at the New York World Fair. A 16mm reel in the Feil Collection, labelled *NY Fair 1964–1965*, included shots of *Think* that the Library of Congress team had not seen, and proved essential in completing the restoration project. Mike Mashon, then-Head of the Moving Image Section at the Library of Congress, noted that “[i]t’s hard to find a better example of organizational cooperation than the nexus between IU’s Libraries Moving Image Archive, NYU’s MIAP program, and the Library of Congress. Sometimes it really does take a

village to restore a film” (NYU Tisch 2016). Later, this remarkable discovery—and the MIAP student’s role in supporting the project—was highlighted in *The New York Times* (Barron 2016). Another film on which Anen worked during the course of his summer 2015 internship, a 1968 medical education film, *The Inner World of Aphasia* (Naomi and Edward Feil, 1968), was later added to the United States National Film Registry.

In Fall 2017, Frannie Trempe (MIAP Class of 2018), interned at the Girl Scouts of the USA. During this internship, Trempe identified a 1926 nitrate film, *World Conference of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts*, featuring the earliest known moving images of an African-American Girl Scouts troop, as well as some of the latest recordings of Girl Scouts of the USA founder Juliette Gordon Low (1860-1927). Trempe’s handling of the nitrate reel, research on its history, and guidance on reformatting, exemplify the power of the MIAP internships. Presented at the Orphan Film Symposium in 2018, the footage is relevant to multiple intersectional fields, including gender studies, African-American studies, and international relations. It epitomizes the technological and scholarly contributions MIAP students can provide.

Threading Practical Projects into Course Work and Labs

In addition to the required internships, students also experience the practical application of theory in courses such as “Collection Management,” “Handling Complex Media,” and “Film Preservation.” Collections care is central to the work of any library, museum, or archive but determining how to provide the best care in all settings and circumstances is not always evident. The “Collection Management” course encourages students to weigh best practices against financial costs, the availability of resources, the desired use of collections, and the probable long-term effects of their choices to determine the best working solution with the least risk. The primary responsibility of a collections care professional is to make sure that these compromises are the result of careful assessment and decision-making, and are not allowed to happen merely through inaction or neglect.

This course examines the daily practice of managing collections of film, video, audio, and digital materials. With an emphasis on project planning, budgeting, and fundraising, students serve as “student consultants” to various cultural heritage institutions in the New York City region. Recent collection assessment sites include the Asian American Arts Alliance, Jacob Burns Film Center, Videoart Foundation, Visual AIDS, and independent experimental filmmakers. Attention is placed on supporting institutions whose holdings may expand an understanding of the region’s diverse people and creative output. A seminal course since the program’s inception, former MIAP associate director Mona Jimenez’s instrumental work in designing the course still today allows the course’s emphasis to focus on supporting real-world institutions. As emphasized by Freire, pedagogical activity is examined not in isolation, but through the lens of power dynamics and their structural expressions. The political nature of educational activities is encapsulated in this approach, as the MIAP faculty seeks to support a wide array of institutions, thereby supporting audiovisual collections that may exist on the margins or periphery, including within community

archives.

Taught *in situ* at New York City’s Museum of Modern Art, “Handling Complex Media” students embrace the opportunity to learn in the Conservation Department as they consider conservation strategies for time-based media. The cohort delves into both conservation and exhibition, routinely puzzling through, for example, wiring complexities for various multi-channel analogue video works. The seminar increases students’ knowledge of primary issues and emerging strategies for the preservation of media works that “go beyond single channels/screens,” per the course instructors and MoMA conservation staff Peter Oleksik and Amy Brost. In this dynamic course, the instructors model learning as a dialogue between the teacher and the students, rather than a mere transmission of information from the instructors. The Handling Complex Media projects are rarely prescriptive and developing a conservation plan for each artwork may introduce an array of software, hardware, and concomitant ethical choices that students dynamically work through with the instructors. The de-hierarchical structure of the exploration is indicative of the praxis philosophy.

Students gain practical skills with identification and risk assessment for works as a whole and their component parts, particularly in the areas of audiovisual media and digital, interactive media projects that are stored on fixed media, presented as installations, and existing in networks. Case studies are woven throughout the semester and allow students to grapple with complex media in a museum context, identifying preservation and storage needs of media installations (including slide, film, video, and sound), video games, and interactive media. Documentation plays a key role in time-based media conservation, and this course allows students to review existing documentation and consider avenues for expansion, including developing artist interview questions to capture elements of a specific artwork.

In 2022–23, instructors anchored coursework around the exhibition “Never Alone: Video Games and Other Interactive Design,” and MIAP student Brian Dunbar (Class of 2022) then further delved into software artworks as an intern, allowing him to apply the knowledge gained in the course in a practical context developing signal and wiring diagrams for the exhibition of the work “Prayer Companion” (Interaction Research Studio, Goldsmiths, University of London, 2010). The success of these past projects in “Handling Complex Media”—both for student learning and for the museum’s time-based media conservation efforts—contributed to the development of a Spring 2024 independent study project, allowing three MIAP students to research the history of three software-based artworks, explore the artists’ intentions, and the works’ technical components; understand the function and characteristics of the technologies utilized in the works; design and implement potential solutions with contemporary software and hardware; and develop potential interview questions for the creators, curators, and conservators.

Since 2003, artist and film preservationist Bill Brand has served as the instructor for the “Film Preservation” course. As established in his classroom, film preservation is not simply relegated to written texts; instead, the student cohort addresses film preservation projects in progress. With support from the National Film Preser-

vation Foundation (NFPF) and other funding sources, these class projects are not abstract exercises but instead real-world jobs that will require, for example, timely notes back to the lab following a review of the current answer print. Each student is assigned a film project on which they will focus over the course of the semester. Even if the film preservation projects have already been funded, Professor Brand requires students to engage in the task of developing a film preservation grant application. Modelled on the NFPF Basic Preservation Grant application, each student researches their assigned film's cultural and historical significance; inspects the existing film elements; proposes a course of action; contacts photochemical laboratories for cost estimates; and develops a project workplan. This assignment models a common task that archivists charged with caring for motion picture film may encounter post graduate school and allows students to gain acumen in proposing technical plans, communicating with real-world vendors, and developing preservation summaries. In the classroom setting, Professor Brand provides a student-centred learning experience, actively listening to students' ideas, responding to their needs, and adjusting instruction accordingly.

Taking the Pulse of the Field: Expansions and Contractions within the Training Landscape

The training landscape has diversified in the last decade, as certificate- and degree-conferring programs have emerged to support the need for trained professionals to steward collections, curate exhibitions of archival films, digitize magnetic media, develop digital preservation solutions, and advocate for the care of cultural heritage recorded on deteriorating and degrading formats. Situated within various departments within their home institutions, some programs are embedded in film schools, cinema and media studies departments, library and information science programs, and conservation/materials science departments. It is worthwhile to shine a light on the training landscape to identify changes since *Synoptique's* discussions of AV preservation and archiving training in 2018. In 2023, following the Eye Film Institute's Activating the Archive conference, EYE and the University of Amsterdam organized the inaugural Audiovisual Heritage Education group to support global collaboration and promote a shared understanding of AV training programs. Over 25 institutions participated in the initial meeting (with remote and in-person meeting options in Amsterdam) to outline their respective programs and identify opportunities for collaboration. This newly created group has the potential to further inform the field's development through reflective conversations and ongoing dialogue.

In July 2019, the American Archive of Public Broadcasting (AAPB) and the University of Alabama (UA) collaborated to provide public media preservation fellowships. The UA EBSCO Scholars Program in audiovisual preservation and archiving within the School of Library and Information Studies places student fellows in public media broadcast stations to gain practical experience to support the online MLIS program.⁵ "By prioritizing public broadcasting organizations holding under-represented content as host sites for Fellows, the Fellowship will play a key role in ensuring that these voices are represented in the AAPB as well as providing the Fel-

lows with the opportunity to work with unique, valuable, and at-risk material,” noted the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program Public Broadcasting Preservation Fellowship grant application.⁶

A number of training initiatives have emerged in the U.S. to provide archival studies students with the opportunity to gain hands-on AV experience. Funded by the Community Catalyst Project Grant from the IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program, the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) Pathways Fellowship developed a program “to forge pathways in the media preservation field for people from groups historically underrepresented in the profession.”⁷ The Pathways Fellowship offers paid internships in combination with mentorship and professional development training, with a specific emphasis on diversifying and expanding the workforce. Additionally, AMIA first initiated its Online Education program in 2015 and, over the course of the pandemic, expanded its offerings through its Continuing Education Task Force offering webinars and virtual training opportunities.

A statewide initiative in the U.S., California Revealed introduced a Post-Graduate Fellowship in 2024, a program that supports two paid internships for recent archival or library degree graduates. Collections that reflect traditionally underrepresented communities in the historical narrative will be prioritized. California Revealed Director Pamela Vadakan noted that this professional development opportunity was designed for “early career librarians and archivists to gain experience in the field and to support collections care for organizations in need” (California Revealed 2024). The inaugural cohort will begin work in 2024 and the archival projects may include writing or implementing a collection assessment and preservation plan; processing and rehousing a collection; and selecting, arranging, and preparing materials for digitization. Fellows work with an archivist, librarian, or preservation professional who serves as the Project Lead and mentor.

Programs Launched Since 2017			
MA	Film Preservation Studies	Elías Querejeta Zine Eskola (EQZE)	Spain
MLIS	EBSCO Scholars Program in Audiovisual Preservation and Archiving	School of Library and Information Studies, University of Alabama	U.S.
BA	Conservation and Management of the Audiovisual Heritage	Fondazione Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia ⁸	Italy
MA	Archives and Records Management	School of Library and Information Studies, University of the Philippines Diliman (UP SLIS)	Philippines
MA	Film and Photography Preservation and Collections Management	Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University)	Canada

Globally, the expansion has been more pronounced as programs in Spain, Italy, the Philippines, and Canada have all emerged since 2017. In Germany alone, a proliferation of training opportunities currently in operation and in development may soon be available at five separate institutions, totalling eight programs (2 BA, 5 MA, and one PhD).

Program	Institution	Degree
Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design (ABK Stuttgart): Institute of Conservation - Art History	Conservation of New Media and Digital Information	BA, MA, PhD
HTW – University of Applied Sciences, Berlin	Conservation/Restoration/Field Archeology (BA); Conservation/Restoration (MA); Audiovisual Cultural Heritage track	BA, MA
DFF – Deutsches Filminstitut & Filmmuseum, Frankfurt am Main, Germany	Film Culture: Archiving, Programming, Presentation	MA
Goethe Universität Frankfurt	Filmkultur: Archivierung, Programmierung, Präsentation	MA
Film University Babelsberg	Film Heritage	MA

The following institutions are currently exploring opportunities to develop new audiovisual archiving and preservation training programs:

- Národní filmový archiv, Prague in collaboration with Film and TV School of Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (FAMU), Czech Republic
- Department of the Arts, American University in Cairo, Egypt
- Department of Media and Communication, ELTE Institute for Art Theory and Media Studies, Budapest, Hungary
- Cinema and Media Studies, Università degli Studi di Torino, Italy⁹
- The British Film Institute, Education / Fundraising & Enterprise / Knowledge & Collections, United Kingdom

Conclusion

Economic forces and administrative decisions have prompted shifts in the audiovisual archiving and preservation training field. Some programs have shuttered, but even more training programs have launched, or are in the early stages of planning and development. The field is not immune to the vicissitudes of economic downturns. Although a decade ago, questions about the field’s ability to absorb an increasing number of graduates emerged on professional listservs, today 85 percent of MIAP graduating classes of the last five years are employed in the field (Frick 2014). The

field is both niche and expansive, with MIAP alumni securing jobs as art conservators, digital preservationists, collection stewards, curators, and audiovisual archivists. The benefit of applied theory—and the dialogic approach to explore best practices superimposed on real-world scenarios—prepare audiovisual archiving students for the working world.

The development of the nascent Audiovisual Heritage Education Task Force—launched by University of Amsterdam in 2023—may further promote this goal, offering program leadership the opportunity to exchange ideas to strengthen curriculum in the task of training students to preserve cultural heritage. Having trained hundreds of professionals for work in the field, the MIAP program models praxis in action. Burgeoning programs can learn from and build upon the decades of experience of the training programs that have come before, codifying praxis as a key element in the classroom and in the development of the field.

Notes

¹ The neologism portmanteau coined by Mike Casey, formerly of Indiana University, to identify the twin factors of degradation and obsolescence.

² The National Film Library was founded in 1935; its first curator was Ernest Lindgren. In 1955, the institution became the National Film Archive. In 2006, it was renamed the BFI National Archive. <https://www.bfi.org.uk/features/history-archive>

³ For a detailed exploration of the APEX project, please see Vizner, Pamela and Juana Suarez. 2017. “Education through International Collaboration: The Audiovisual Preservation Exchange (APEX) Program.” *Synoptique* 6 (1): 102-112.

⁴ For a detailed history of the University of Amsterdam program, see Elsaesser, Thomas. 2018.

⁵ EBSCO, a leading provider of research databases and electronic journals, maintains an office in Birmingham, Alabama, in close proximity to the university. “EBSCO is a leading provider of research databases, e-journal and e-package subscription management, book collection development and acquisition management, and a major provider of library technology, e-books and clinical decision solutions for universities, colleges, hospitals, corporations, government, K12 schools and public libraries worldwide.” <https://www.ebsco.com/about/mission>

⁶ <https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/project-proposals/re-250145-ols-21-full-proposal.pdf>

⁷ “Intentional Transformation: AMIA Pathways Fellowship,” <https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/project-proposals/re-250174-ols-21-preliminary-proposal.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.fondazioneccsc.it/en/corso/corso-di-conservazione-e-management-del-patrimonio-audiovisivo/>

⁹ Currently only offer a single course in Film Preservation, but exploring Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage, located in Venaria (TO) as a collaborative partner.

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Supporting the 36%: A Teaching Guide on Student Mental Health in Media Archival Education

Michael Marlatt

In the summer of 2022, as part of my PhD dissertation (Marlatt 2024), I interviewed several alumni of moving image archival education programs about how accessible they felt their programs had been. These were students who identified as disabled, neurodivergent, or as having a chronic illness. While the students did not need to disclose any specific health condition as part of the interview or my research, mental health was brought up repeatedly, and while their experiences were not all negative, many felt that some part of their education had had a negative impact on their mental health.

Working in the field of media archiving has certainly had an impact on my own mental health. Elsewhere, I have discussed my experience as a film archivist with epilepsy (Marlatt 2022a). What I did not discuss in that initial article was my own experience with mental health. I am diagnosed with social anxiety disorder and depression, both of which are quite common for people with epilepsy. Between 30 and 50 percent of people with epilepsy have depression, and about 30 percent have social anxiety disorder, according to the International League Against Epilepsy (2019). Thankfully, my graduate school experience did not have as much of a negative impact on my mental health as others I have spoken to. What really did have a long-term impact on my mental health after graduation was interacting with films about epilepsy that related to aspects of my own experiences as a person with epilepsy. It was not even necessarily the content of the films that impacted me emotionally, but how they had been programmed, catalogued, and made available and accessible. I found it hard to separate my own experiences as a person with epilepsy and my role as an archivist caring for these materials. My experiences working, writing, and teaching in the field of moving image archives are certainly not separate nor isolated from my identity as

a disabled person.

In the 2021 Association of Moving Image Archivists' Salary and Demographics Survey, 36 percent of respondents shared that they had depression, anxiety, or other mental health issues (Marlatt 2022b). In 2021, the reported rate of mental illness was around 25 percent of the total population in both Canada and the United States, according to Statistics Canada (2023) and the National Institute of Mental Health (2023), respectively. The self-reported rate of media archivists' mental health issues is larger than those national averages. While further study would be needed to explain why media archivists reported a higher rate of mental health difficulties, there are things we can do to try to mitigate these difficulties as well as make the field more accessible for persons with mental health conditions. This starts with fostering a positive environment for students newly entering the field.

Knowledge mobilization—translating research into tangible action items—is critical when addressing mental health. This article is directed at educators and is purposely not framed as a scholarly essay. Instead, I aim to present a series of action items, recommendations, and general guidelines on how to further support students who may be experiencing difficulties with their mental health. Your course or program may not be able to address all the points presented below, but I encourage you to take some time to reflect on what is possible within your institution—you may be able to implement more of these suggestions than you initially think.

Be Proactive

With such a high rate of mental health issues reported across the field, it is all but guaranteed that there will be students in your courses who have had, or continue to have, difficulties with their mental health. Think of strategies that can best support the mental health of your students prior to requesting accommodations from your school's student accessibility services. In fact, speak to student accessibility services yourself, and try to learn more about some of the common concerns students currently face while in school. This may prove particularly important if your own graduation was not recent. Speaking with student accessibility services staff may also help them better understand what goes into teaching media archiving, and how they can best support you and your students.

Moving image archival education programs often require students to spend time offsite at different archival institutions, whether in the form of group site visits or some sort of individual internship for course credit. Speak to these archives ahead of time about being mindful of mental health concerns. Be aware of the type of collections students may be working with and address any concerns about accessibility with these archival institutions. Beyond mental health, this may include architectural barriers such as elevator access or physical tasks required of the student during the interview process. This is particularly important if any of your students have a disability or chronic illness that limits or interferes with their mobility. Being proactive about making the classroom and archive accessible for everyone ahead of time saves students from potentially having to disclose a medical condition when they are not comfortable doing so.

Be Upfront

It is imperative that we address specific challenges to archivists' mental health early in our students' education. This is not to deter them from pursuing the profession, but to help prepare them for their future work in archives. In media archives in particular, this means making students aware that they may eventually work with problematic content that is both graphic and emotionally challenging. Share the fact that processing collections can mean a heavy workload—and that the work is almost never complete. There is always more material to process than there is labour and funding to process it. Manage expectations by explaining to students what will likely be required of them when working in an archival space and be honest with them about salary ranges. While you may not be able to give a full and accurate representation of archivists' pay scale, perhaps go over recent job postings with students to give them a sense of what they can expect, and request that your peers post salaries on their job listings for the purpose of transparency.

Be Accommodating

Fostering a culture of care around mental health means being accommodating. Meeting deadlines is important, both in education and professionally, but as a mentor you can try to be flexible when possible. Demonstrating that you can be slightly lenient with deadlines ahead of time will make students more comfortable approaching you for an extension when they need it. This also benefits you, since if a student is scared to approach you about a deadline, they may leave their work to the last minute or miss the deadline altogether, making it difficult for you to plan ahead and keep the course on track. Being accommodating helps with course planning, creating accurate grading timelines, and a positive classroom space for students to feel comfortable participating in.

Formal accommodations approved by the university need to be followed, but try to also be open to accommodations even when they are not formally required by your school's student accessibility office. Graduate school is expensive, time-consuming, and stressful, which can have an impact on anyone's mental health. A student may not realize that they are experiencing any sort of difficulty with their mental health until they are well into their program. Healthcare can also be expensive, exclusionary, and slow, leading to delayed diagnoses. Informal accommodations may not always be possible, and when that is the case, you should be kind and explain why a certain accommodation may not work. Refrain from simply stating that "it would not be fair to the other students," as we all have different strengths and learn at a different pace.

The COVID pandemic made digital learning popular, and students may sometimes request to attend class via Zoom or another video-conferencing platform. While some remote classes are still offered, many institutions have returned to offering in-person instruction only, though some still allow exceptions for COVID-related reasons. Be mindful that immuno-compromised individuals' health may still be at risk not only due to COVID but also other viruses such as influenza. If you are not teaching a hands-on course, you may consider allowing a student to attend lectures

or discussions via video platform, when appropriate. This allows students to participate even if they need a mental health day or have a temporary injury or chronic illness that occasionally makes it painful to come to campus. Conferences should also continue to explore potential hybrid-attendance models for similar reasons.

While taking courses during my doctoral degree, I unexpectedly had to care for my sick wife. I was planning to drop one of my courses because I could not come to campus due to the risk of getting her sick and it leading to complications. The course director recommended that instead of dropping the course, I could attend virtually. This was pre-pandemic. Doing so not only kept me on track with degree requirements but also led to my own positive feelings about the program when it supported me as a student going through a very rough time.

Be Supportive

Disclosure of anything health-related can be intimidating. This can include a student disclosing a disability, chronic illness, neurodivergence, or their struggles with mental health. Be sure to take care when a student discloses something to you about their health and ask what you can do to support them. Also be sure to keep anything a student tells you in confidence private. The last thing you should do is to share their personal information with other faculty members or students.

You can also be supportive by informing students of existing media archival-related support initiatives, including career-related professional committees like the student chapters of the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA). Getting to meet fellow students in different programs not only broadens students' networks but also helps foster a culture of community within the media archives field. We are, after all, quite a niche group. If your course is based at a North American university and it focuses on media preservation, there likely is already an AMIA student chapter at your school. If not, you could encourage your students to start one. If there is not enough interest or if that is not possible, you could at least inform students of AMIA's Education Committee. You could introduce this during the first class and include it on your syllabus as a reminder throughout the term.

Be Adaptable

Students have different learning styles. Being adaptable allows playing to their strengths. Students may be verbal learners or visual learners, so try to share instructions in both written and verbal form so that students can best process the information. If your course is more hands-on, you may consider altering how you have students present their work. Having the entire group watch a student physically handle material may make them feel intimidated, anxious, or uncomfortable, like they are performing in front of everyone. This is not generally how archives operate. If you have enough equipment, allow students to work at different stations and check in with each student one at a time. This allows students to work at their own pace without feeling like they need to perform.

Be Collaborative

If possible, offer multiple choices for collections that students can work with in your class. Not only does this allow students to follow their interests but it also helps students avoid being forced to work with material that they may find emotionally triggering, including material that is violent, sexual, or includes outdated and harmful stereotypes of marginalized communities.

Have conversations with your colleagues about mental health in the media archival profession. Bring awareness to the fact that mental health strategies need to be implemented into the field. Mental health awareness in the archival profession is something we all can and should collaborate on in some capacity. This could take the form of organizing a themed conference, hosting a one-time workshop, adjusting institutional policies, or guest editing a journal issue. Whatever shape these activities take, it is important to be receptive to students' ideas for mental health and wellness and to find ways for them to participate.

Universities often have evaluation surveys that students fill out after completing a course. Encourage and remind students to take these surveys, and welcome course feedback outside of formal course evaluations. Programs should also actively reach out to former students to learn about their experiences in the workplace and get a sense of what may have been missing from their education. Learn from this feedback and implement these recommendations within your course.

Be Familiar

Being up to date on literature that addresses mental health in the field will benefit you and your students. Try to include such material in assigned course readings and discussions throughout your course. Unfortunately, there is still very little written specifically about mental health and moving image archives. However, you can look to related work that advocates for inclusion and compassion in our field. Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor (2016) have written about the ethics of empathy in the archive. Kristen Wright and Nicola Laurent (2021; Laurent and Wright 2023) provide reports on trauma-informed archival practice. Jennifer Douglas (2021) and her collaborators (Douglas, Alisauskas, and Mordell 2019; Douglas and Alisauskas 2021; Douglas et al. 2022) have also written about archival grief and the person-centred archive.

Be Aware

It is important to be aware of the mental toll that media archiving can take on an individual. Since the birth of the film medium there have been plenty of collections that include and display acts of violence, human rights violations, hate-filled material, and more. Our job in media archives is to visually inspect this material and to potentially examine it repeatedly, which re-exposes us to traumatic content. The damage can be worse when finding problematic material in a collection by accident or by not being warned in advance.

Learning media preservation best practices sometimes requires looking at examples in a classroom setting. Take some time to consider whether material you

are using to teach a course may end up emotionally triggering someone. Triggers are not voluntary and only cause further emotional harm for the student. If you are unsure, perhaps ask a colleague for insight. It is important to note that not all material that may emotionally trigger a student is obvious. Different people have different emotional triggers and much of this is based on personal experience. You will not be able to tell what everyone's emotional triggers are. Instead of trying to guess, inform students ahead of time about the content that will be used as a teaching aid. Warning students ahead of time allows them to prepare for the upcoming material or make the choice not to participate, without having to disclose any past trauma. You may also want to take this opportunity to talk about the concept of trauma as it relates to objects, collections, or entire media archives. This is where teaching students about trauma-informed archival practices proves particularly beneficial. You may consider getting a guest speaker who works with particularly difficult collections to speak to your students. These guest speakers can not only teach students how and why to preserve difficult content but can also provide first-hand insight about how to prepare and protect themselves emotionally when working with such difficult material.

Be Inclusive

Marginalized communities are reported to have higher rates of mental health difficulties. These rates climb when a person is a member of multiple marginalized communities. According to the 2020 AMIA Salary and Demographics survey (Real and Schneider 2021), the media archival field is predominantly white, cisgendered, and heterosexual. While the survey did find a higher representation of women in the field than men, there was a significant gender disparity that favoured men at the leadership level.

Those I spoke to as part of my research, who identified as part of one or more marginalized communities, were quite aware of their underrepresentation in the field and acknowledged that it impacted them emotionally. While inclusion efforts need to be increased archives-wide, there are ways to help students from different communities feel more welcome. Programs need to hire more faculty and administrative staff from underrepresented communities. Teachers could invite guest lecturers from these communities who may be willing to discuss their experiences and perspectives. I myself have hosted a couple of guest lectures at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign on moving image archival accessibility, and I have discussed my own experiences. I have found doing so to be quite rewarding.

All the strategies listed above present opportunities to help address the current state of mental health in the field of media archiving. Many of these recommendations can also be applied outside of the classroom and across all types of archival spaces. I have found that people in our field are well intentioned and want to support each other, and we can do so by creating an archival environment of care. Your students will appreciate it, and it may just help support those 36 percent.

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Reparative Description in 'Project Naming': Toward an Anti-Colonial Practice

Tyisha Murphy

Introduction

In its most ideal form, archiving involves the preservation of objects so that they may continue to be accessible in the future. The reality is that, as these objects enter institutional collections, they are often valued less for their unique qualities than for their cumulative effect, as archivists attempt to contextualize them as part of a larger, cohesive collection. Materials are typically grouped by creator or donor, or by a vague thematic link. This organizational structure can pose various challenges for those seeking to find a specific object within the archive. The context provided by the creator or donor becomes essential to a collection's initial description, but due to the time constraints of the acquisition process, assessing each individual object is not always possible. Often, descriptions of archival objects can also be inconsistent—partly because of the prevalent turnover of short-term labour—and as a result, the information being sought after might be obfuscated or was never fully elaborated. While the archive is established as a space that safeguards history through its custody of unique objects, these un(der)described materials often remain inaccessible.

Archives must often find a balance between enhancing descriptions of the objects already within their collections for improved public access and expanding the scope of their collections by seeking out other objects that fit within their mandate. This often results in a backlog of objects, at risk of neglect and obscurity, which need to be more thoroughly documented and researched for their cultural specificity or uniqueness. This work may involve reassessing objects that have been described using outdated, inappropriate, or outright offensive language, resulting in descriptions that may have represented the intentions of a creator or donor but that also misrepresent the people or culture depicted therein. In this article, I argue that reparative description can effectively address these issues by expanding the kinds of knowledge

and information that is recorded to make objects more discoverable, creating more nuanced understandings of materials and histories that have been overlooked, and acknowledging the impact of bias in archival description. As I suggest, this work runs parallel to the physical repatriation of cultural artifacts. The practice of reparative description can not only change how archival objects are understood and interpreted culturally; it can also help acknowledge the role of the researchers and archivists whose perspectives and labour shape that interpretation. In the conclusion of this article, I reflect on how the conditions of short-term contract labour hampers this work, relating my own experiences as an archival intern.

Ann Laura Stoler describes the condition of “ruin” as an unsettling of imperial attributes. Ruins are the sites of reflection through which processes of decimation, displacement, and reclamation can be unpacked. While Stoler reflects on cultural heritage sites broadly, she acknowledges the specific possibilities of the archive as a site for reflection. As she argues, “Colonialisms have been predicated on guarding the natural and cultural patrimonies for populations assumed to need guidance in how to value and preserve them” (2008, 198). To “unsettle” this position, we must recognize the ways in which archives have upheld and maintained biases and challenge the systems of hierarchy that determine the importance and value of a cultural object. In other words, the descriptions of these objects should reflect how they are recognized and understood by those communities so that these objects remain identifiable for them.

In this article, I present the successes of Library and Archives Canada’s “Project Naming” as a case study to discuss how the archive can be mobilized beyond its physical space and how the colonial object can be reconnected to its cultural milieu. This case study reiterates the responsibility of archives as custodians and shows how pathways for intergenerational knowledge exchange can be created. While archives are trusted facilitators of history, they do not represent the only, nor always the most relevant, perspective. This article explores the use of reparative description practices within an institutional collection with the aims of expanding and democratizing our understanding of “cultural heritage.” In Canada, the concept of cultural heritage was codified through the Multiculturalism Act of 1988—the first of its kind—which former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau claimed was the best way of “assuring cultural freedom” (Berry 2020). The act officially mandated that the government protect Canada’s cultural diversity, but, as this article makes clear, preserving images of Inuit communities within the archive, and describing them using colonial terms, does not assure the cultural freedom of the Inuit.

Project Naming

Initiated by Murray Angus, an instructor at Nunavut Sivuniksavut (NS), an Inuit college program in Ottawa, Project Naming was conceived in 2001 as a collaboration between NS and the National Archives to re-examine images representing Inuit communities created by explorers and ethnographers who deposited their materials with the archive (Library and Archives Canada 2005a). These materials perpetuate colonial ideology since they were created as documentation of “peripheral” commu-

nities perceived to be “on the verge of extinction,” but neglected to provide relevant information which could be used to help identify the individuals in the photographs. The images used in Project Naming were part of a broader collection, “Photographs from the North.” As senior project manager Beth Greenhorn describes:

The Canadian North has fascinated and inspired generations of photographers from the South since the latter half of the 19th century. Drawn by the austere beauty of the Arctic and the people from this region, they captured images that provide a visual legacy and link to the past. Navy personnel and topographers on Arctic expeditions were among the first photographers to document the people and the landscape of the Northwest Territories, or what is now Nunavut. (Greenhorn 2005)

Ariella Azoulay (2019, 10–11) explains that to unlearn imperialism we must aspire to be there for and with those who are targeted by imperial violence, and that we must understand that the photographic record is not neutral, but intentionally framed to structure historical narratives from the perspective of the documenter, perpetuating imperial violence as visual evidence. For Azoulay, engaging with the subjects of these captured moments is part of “unlearning.” Unlearning means working with those with embodied knowledge, which may have been passed down through generations, to expand the information represented in the archival record. Ultimately, responsible custodians of these objects must engage in this practice, or risk perpetrating imperial violence through erasure.

While the photographs preserved in the archive may be significant to the institution because of their historical representations of the Inuit, we need to acknowledge their simultaneous erasure of Inuit identity and specificity. When creators, donors, or archivists have failed to document or record this important information, the embodied knowledge of the communities represented can help us recover information to make the archive more discoverable and accessible. Archivists cannot recover this information on their own but need to engage and collaborate with these communities to learn from their lived experience. Specifically in the case of Project Naming, it was crucial for the process to involve Inuit youth in order to expand on how embodied knowledge can be understood. They were able to connect more deeply to their cultural heritage, while archivists were able to better describe the collections of Inuit photographs held by Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

Before the project officially launched in 2004, the descriptions of the photographs were quite limited: the only notable pieces of information provided by the photographers were the locations of the images and the dates they were captured; though several of these photographs featured Inuit communities, they were only recorded as “unknown” individuals. Although Inuit peoples could be visibly seen in the archive, prior to Project Naming, information about these historical representations was scarce.

There are two distinct moments over the course of the project’s evolution which signify how this project can serve as an example of an archive’s reparative ac-

tion in order to better reflect and engage with the communities that it seeks to represent. The project began modestly with the digitization of 500 photographs from the Richard Harrington fonds (Library and Archives Canada 2005a). Harrington was an explorer based in Toronto who travelled North to photograph Inuit communities in the 1940s and 1950s. Based on Harrington's documentation of where he visited, NS students from several communities—Igloolik, Kugluktuk (formerly Coppermine), Taloyoak (formerly Spence Bay), and Padlei—were invited to search through Harrington's photos. The students then transferred the digitized images to CD-ROMs which they could bring home to share with Elders of their respective communities. Angus spoke about how connecting over these images overcame the language barriers between the students and the Elders, as the students did not speak Inuktitut and the Elders did not speak English (Library and Archives Canada 2005a). This not only resulted in students experiencing a deeper understanding of their heritage, but it was an opportunity for the Elders of the community to see photographs of their relatives for the first time.

It also proved successful for LAC, as over 75 percent of photographs received a positive identification (Curtis 2018, 52). As Louise Curtis notes, the digital copies were provided only with their file numbers and the names of the communities they depicted; since participants' responses were very close to the supplied titles used by the archive, this verified the accuracy of the new information and identifications (52). This process also caused the archivists to rethink the reliance on anglicized names to represent these communities: Greenhorn herself described how this project led her to question how the archive historically privileges Western information systems over Indigenous knowledge (53). Yet, the archivists do not simply replace or remove outdated language or inaccurate terms from the archival record. Instead, old descriptions are included in a new field to document and preserve the ways in which these objects have previously been contextualized and historicized. Meanwhile, the new information is recorded in the database by entering the names of people in the title field in square brackets, and their family history, living descendants, and other notes in the additional information field. Since these are all fields which could have several inputs, the accessibility and searchability of data is also enhanced (53).

After the success of these student-led identifications, Project Naming continued the investigation of other private and public image collections documenting other regions in Nunavut. Inuit Elders were invited to LAC for two weeks to research and select images, which were then digitized to be sent to Nunavut's Department for Culture, Language, Elders and Youth for further identification (Library and Archives Canada 2005a). The project also included community-based events in Ottawa where photographs were projected onto a screen and participants were invited to call out the names of people they could identify (Library and Archives Canada 2005b). As these were open community events, the LAC hoped it would encourage non-Indigenous members of the community to learn about the project, while showcasing its recent successes. Throughout, LAC recorded participants' comments to document the significance of this process. In 2002, during an event at LAC, participant Qulu-aq Pilikapsi made the following statement, translated into English for the project's

public website:

It is . . . our future . . . all of our futures together. It is our focus. . . There are still people alive who have a lot of this information and they won't always be there. So in fact, there are things in storage [in buildings like Library and Archives Canada], but they are also in storage with people who are still alive [in the memories of the Elders]. This is something that has become very [important to] Quluaq because . . . our future, our *Sivuniksaut* [is connected to our past]. (Library and Archives Canada 2005b)

These events not only facilitated connections between participants and the archivists but also achieved the project's larger goals of revitalizing and grounding these communities' connection to their own histories by rediscovering their families and loved ones within the archives.

Project Naming initially focused on regions in Nunavut but, since expanding its online presence to social media platforms like Facebook and X, it has broadened to include images which were taken from all over the country, with most of them dating from the early twentieth century to the 1970s. It is estimated that since 2002, almost 10,000 images have been digitized, which has contributed to the positive identification of individuals and places equivalent to about 1 or 2 percent of the overall collection (Curtis 2018, 52). Even though the project no longer operates in a face-to-face capacity, online participation through social media has been crucial to maintain progress on identifying the photographs.

This project would not have been feasible without the participation of students and youth who wanted to learn more about their cultural heritage—something they typically did not discuss in their primary or secondary education—and the participation of the Elders, who were uniquely able to supply the necessary information. In fact, in their introduction to the Project Naming website, LAC acknowledges that identifying people in the photographs is time sensitive, as the Elders may be the last generation able to identify their relatives in these images (Library and Archives Canada 2005a). Were it not for their identifications, these collections would have continued to exist at the periphery of the archive, obscured by their lack of description. Instead, Project Naming gave identities back to individuals who would have otherwise been relegated to permanent anonymity, provided familial connection to those who had been searching for it, and offered points of reflection to the archivists and researchers who serve as custodians of this material.

Project Naming's attempts to make the LAC photographs more accessible can be considered a reparative act on two accounts. First, the archive attempted to bring awareness to the colonial biases that determined the description of these photographs—to acknowledge that the descriptions of most of these images recognized the land which was lived on rather than the people who inhabited it. Second, in its intergenerational approach to rectify these descriptive oversights and providing more thorough and appropriate context for these images, the project initiated a pedagogical relationship between the students, who are using recent digital technologies to

foster their connection to the past, and the Elders, who are able to pass on stories about their past and their cultural heritage. This method of sharing knowledge about these photographs is fostered by the custodians of the archive, who actively engaged with the community that the archive represents. In doing so, they acknowledged that what the archive might deem “historical” still has a very active connection to the present: contrary to Harrington’s fictions of the Inuit, the people who lived on these lands have not disappeared. By acknowledging its biased position of power and incorporating descriptions provided by those who it is meant to represent, the archive moves toward the idealistic goal of “assuring cultural freedom.”

Project Naming is far from the only archival effort to engage in collaborative description by inviting direct participation from communities. The British National Archives’ online catalogue, Discovery, has tagging and transcription tools which help users crowdsource metadata to exist alongside the official descriptions. Curtis writes that, whether or not this material is integrated into the official descriptions, it fosters “positive cultural engagement” while building relationships with communities (2018, 53–54). Moreover, “the allowance of parallel information to co-exist with, and be linked to, the traditional finding aid begins the process of making space for those voices, whilst still keeping in place a standardized form of description—that helps users by enabling access across repositories” (54). A similar approach was taken by the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure project and the Polar Bear Expedition Finding Aid (54–55).

The Centre for the Study of Black Canadian Diaspora also centres its work around reparative description by engaging community members in collaborative cataloguing. During a course discussion on curation practices at Toronto Metropolitan University in 2023, co-founder Andrea Fatona described how galleries, libraries, archives, and museums canonize a particular colonial cultural ideology which creates hegemonic knowledge. Though history is preserved within these institutions, she questioned how the documentation of these objects reflects the process of legitimizing particular perspectives. As part of her work, she prioritizes discoverability and accessibility. Discoverability, she noted, is the process of searching through catalogues from various institutions to assess their holdings of Black representation. To “discover” them is to acknowledge that there are other perspectives outside the archive, which are informed by different approaches to a particular object or image. Accessibility means working with curators and researchers who can share their lived experiences to build fuller descriptions of these objects. As such, Fatona’s project engages researchers in collaborative cataloguing practices to bring awareness to the positionality of Black diasporic perspectives, ultimately widening the scope of individuals’ experiences of and responses to objects meant to be understood as collective “representations” of Black history. This practice of embodied knowledge fills in gaps of “undocumented” histories which may already be recorded in archival holdings. Additionally, the co-creation of metadata preserves historic terminology alongside new terms that would otherwise have been overlooked. Fatona describes this project as an effort to help people understand their respective cultural histories and expose the gaps in the documentation of non-European-American cultures.

As these other projects show, methods of repatriation and decolonization are not universal. Project Naming represents only one possibility for how these efforts might be achieved. Reading the testimonies of participants and those involved in the project reveals their deep understanding of the impact it has had on the Inuit community by bringing together those who are present and those who are in memory. The knowledge shared in the early stages of the project paved the way for its later, larger successes, including the archivists' reconsideration of what their role as custodians is in facilitating community connections and providing access to these materials, which are too often (dis)possessed under the guise of guardianship.

Archival Labour

In this concluding section, I want to reflect further on the role embodied knowledge plays in archival work by considering my own experiences as a budding archivist, and particularly my experience working with precarious images while simultaneously being a precarious worker. Conversations around representation are often centred around what is made visible through an image-based apparatus; less focus is afforded to that which remains out of frame. Writing about ethnographic cinema, Fatimah Tobing Rony describes how cinema “appears to bring the past and that which is culturally distant closer; likewise, anthropology, which posits that indigenous peoples are remnants of earlier ages, has been largely concerned with the description and preservation or reconstruction of the spatially and historically distant” (1996, 9). Her research on “ethnographic spectacle” is informed by an approach she dubs “the third eye,” building on W. E. B. Dubois’ notion of double consciousness, or the “internal splitting” caused by recognizing oneself as “Other” (4). I have learned to approach film preservation with a “third eye,” recognizing how the technical apparatus itself was built on specific biases, including how most film stock was historically calibrated for white skin tones. Genevieve Yue writes compellingly about the “China Girl,” the image of a (typically white) woman accompanied by a colour panel included at the beginning of most film prints as a control mechanism for colour and exposure. As Yue notes, “The name ‘China Girl’ and its variants circulate as part of laboratory vernacular and are only infrequently mentioned in the technical literature. As a result, it forms a kind of shadow history to the well-documented accounts of film stocks and the development of standardization methods for the film industry” (2015, 99). Though the China Girl only appeared as a brief footnote during a discussion about how to identify different film stocks as part of a class on film production processes, this discussion forever changed how I perceive and interact with film. It was at that moment that I realized that bias does not only surface as visual representation but is inherently embedded in the technical systems of film production and preservation.

This was further cemented when I spent a summer as an intern at the Mark S. Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies, cataloguing donations acquired as part of the Sexual Representation Collection, the largest collection of adult film in Canada. One of the most extensive sub-collections I worked on, the Albert Steg fonds, included a range of films with personal comments written by the donor, which had to be maintained as part of the finding aid. I listed them under “keywords,” but

often also elaborated on them in a miscellaneous notes field in the form of content warnings for potentially offensive material. As we had no prior discussion on how to integrate the donor's comments within the finding aid, I decided to format the finding aid in this way, preserving the donor's record while acknowledging his potentially offensive terms—such as stereotypical language used to describe racialized performers—to pre-emptively inform interested researchers of potentially offensive content. It was clear that the tone of these descriptions needed to be addressed within the finding aid, which I tried to do through the content warnings. This was a personal choice, as I experienced an array of feelings in putting this finding aid together because of my own experiences being subjected to similar fetishistic comments. However, the impact this had on my ability to assess the film material is not acknowledged anywhere in the record, other than in those content warnings.

The finding aid also notes that the information listed requires further verification and corroboration due to the limited amount of time given for the primary inspection. Here, I want to reflect on the persistent turnover caused by internships and short-term contracts, and the ways in which short-term labour challenges efforts toward reparative description. Short-term labour is common in most archives. Even the LAC, one of the largest archival institutions in the country, relies on the labour and knowledge of short-term workers—workers who are essential to processing the “backlog” of materials that cannot be managed by full-time archivists. When these short-term workers discover issues with descriptions or metadata for specific objects or collections, the constraints of their contracts may not allow them to address these issues properly themselves, and they may instead bring them up to full-time staff in the hope that they will investigate further. Frequent turnover also makes the need for consistent practices more acute, and the ability to develop long-term community relationships and trust more difficult. Whether or not these issues are addressed by full-time staff, the short-term workers' interactions with the material leave indelible marks, especially as they work to better inform the institution about materials that could be of potential interest.

In my training as an archivist, I had the pleasure of working with smaller archives, faced with interminable backlogs. In my work with these institutions, I was diligent in describing each object I worked with as fully and attentively as possible. I left each of those institutions with the sense that I had accomplished something. Yet, it is likely that if some of the research or work I did results in new research or discoveries, my labour will be described as the collective and anonymous effort of the institution. While it may not be possible to credit every archivist who helped process a collection, short-term workers' efforts to implement reparative description practices deserve to be acknowledged. Students and other precarious workers should be recognized for doing important work, whether that means being credited in the finding aid or more.

Project Naming is distinct in its decision to recognize both the archivists who cared for the materials and the community members who provided their insights and improved the archivists' understanding of the photographs. Providing access to the spaces where cataloguing and description work happens is vital to make the archive

truly inclusive. If institutions are committed to adopting anti-colonial practices, this cannot extend solely to how they present their collections to the public. If institutions truly want to democratize the archive, they need to decentre the archivist and acknowledge the collective effort of communities to preserve our shared cultural heritage. Though there have been several attempts to integrate multiculturalism into Canadian legislation, beginning with Trudeau's ambitious act almost 40 years ago, their impacts and execution must be continually interrogated to understand who is actually able to participate in these archival processes.

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‘In A Way I’m Coming Out to All of You Tonight’: Activist Media, Digital Curation Pedagogy, and the Future of Queer Archives

Travis L. Wagner

Introduction

As society continues to move toward an understanding that LGBTQIA+ individuals and communities should not merely be an addendum to the historical record, so comes a demand for more content documenting unique spaces and moments within LGBTQIA+ history. For example, while some archivists have pushed for a tangible and increased emphasis on queer-inclusive histories within archival collections, such advocacy has typically reified document-based materials at the expense of other, alternative modes of documentation (McKinney 2018). Additionally, presumptions about queer culture happening exclusively within queer metropolitan spaces like New York and San Francisco reproduce what Jack Halberstam identifies as “metro-normativity” (2005, 36)—the belief that queer individuals could only be visible and thrive in urban spaces, rendering rural places and states without major metropolitan areas synonymous with queer erasure and impossibility—within LGBTQIA+-focused archives (Cloe 2020). Until recently, one such region suffering from chronic underrepresentation was the state of South Carolina, which possesses its own robust, media-rich LGBTQIA+ history. This article reflects on a still-evolving project engaged in the digital preservation and curation of queer activism in the state of South Carolina. While the article contextualizes the emergence and evolution of this collection, the article’s primary focus concerns methodological and ethical challenges latent in preserving queer media histories across both temporal and geographical moments of preservation and curation. Understanding that projects related to queer media histories and their archival iterations challenge traditional recordkeeping, the article builds upon and extends both queer archival theory and the application of archival science related to questions of archival collection, description, and access.

Further, by emphasizing that the mediated histories of LGBTQIA+ com-

munities exist at a particular intersection of archival endangerment, the article reveals how innovative and expansive methods for digital preservation and access can emerge through unique experiential contexts. To do this, this article highlights graduate and undergraduate courses as integral to simultaneously preserving and teaching queer media archives. Using two examples from experiential learning courses focused on digitally preserving and curating South Carolina queer media as a case study, the article homes in on lessons learned in documenting the queer archival record. The article concludes by identifying future directions for this project and the preservation and access of queer histories within media archives, with a particular focus on the increasing impact of state-sanctioned erasure on past and present work done by LGBTQIA+ individuals within South Carolina and beyond.

Queer Archival Theory and Practice

In her study of lesbian archives, Ann Cvetkovich (2003) reads both historical records and literary productions as sites wherein lesbian and proto-transmasculine identities existed in states of struggle and suffering. Building on this idea, Heather Love (2007) contends that the impacts of loss and cruelty on the queer archival record directly correlate to the contemporary notions of queer grief that render the queer past wholly negative. Others, like Jack Halberstam (2005), instead read the queer archive as a site of hope by looking to depictions of trans identities within both media and state records as a method for dealing with contemporary issues like anti-trans legislation in generative and intersectional ways, using the not-too-distant past as a site of pedagogical intervention rather than emotional avoidance. Additionally, examinations of queerness within archival holdings, as multiple scholars suggest, allow for refiguring otherwise essentialized notions of identities such as womanhood (Eichhorn 2013) and blackness (Snorton 2017). Moreover, media scholars such as Cait McKinney (2020) and Avery Dame-Griff (2023) assert that archival holdings produced by queer communities, such as lesbian newsletter networks or trans bulletin board systems, offer both tools and technologies ripe for replication within contemporary activist work. This particular line of scholarship has emerged in response to and works alongside archival practices related to acquiring, processing, and producing LGBTQIA+ identities within archival collections. Examining archival practice in this way extends the critical work of queer archival theory to the technical and administrative choices of archival work that historically intensified rather than alleviated representational concerns.

As Melissa Adler notes, archives' categorical and descriptive methods function to demarcate and constitute normative bodies. Adler observes that institutions like the Library of Congress throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century "reinforced psychiatric norms" through the "development and refinement of categories" in an attempt to "gain a conceptual mastery over perversion to define both desirable characteristics for citizenship and deviations" from this desired ideal (2017, 30). Operating in ways not dissimilar to the Diagnostic and Statistic Manual of Mental Disorders, which until recently identified multiple LGBTQIA+ identities as disorders (Drescher 2010), library subject headings and description practices fixat-

ed on queerness as non-normative. More broadly, the resulting practices meant that, when present, queer individuals were either conflated into broadly incoherent categories—such as “sexual minorities”—or were described with embodied identities not utilized for non-queer individuals—denoting transgender in descriptions of trans people, without also denoting cisgender in descriptions of cis people (Olson 2013, 145). Attendant to these failures, libraries and archives professionals proposed two fundamental methodological shifts aimed at reframing representation to be more explicitly inclusive.

Ellen Greenblatt (2014) argues that the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals within cultural heritage institutions requires both the institutions and their staff to acknowledge the damage done by previous misrepresentations, while also attending to the reality that, in response, these same communities formed their own counter-institutional, activist spaces, many of which produced historical collections and information that affirmed queerness when others treated it as a site of abnormalcy. Accounting for queerness within contemporary archives, as a result, meant looking to community archives whose tenets and procedures already imagined new methods of archival representation. Critical examples of this work included the New York-based Lesbian Herstory Archive, which documents queer history, explicitly centring on queer and femme experiences. The Lesbian Herstory Archive uses unique subject headings and organizational standards that extend new possibilities for the documentation of gender and sexual orientation within archives (Corbman 2014). Building on the established practices of these queer-centred and community-led archival projects, queer-identifying and LGBTQIA+-allied practitioners turned toward demanding systematic changes, intent on making institutional collections adopt more inclusive archival description and cataloguing practices (Dobreski, Snow, and Moulaïson-Sandy 2022; Cifor and Rawson 2023). While these efforts were critical to surface and prioritize queer bodies within archives, enacting change also necessitated acknowledging archivists’ embodied biases, which informed how and when queerness appeared as worthy of description.

Leah DeVun and Michael Jay McClure argue that queer archival “circulation inextricably depends on bodies,” and further that those “uncategorized bodies” remain “inseparable from . . . the touch of human hands” (2014, 122). For them, the gaze of scholars and practitioners alike must make bodies discoverable and *usable* within libraries and archives. Marika Cifor (2015) reflects on her own engagement with femme embodiments when processing the personal belongings of transgender activist and sex worker Victoria Schneider. Cifor discusses finding a strand of what she believes to be Schneider’s hair within a brush, reflecting on what it means for Schneider to insert her trans femininity into the archival object—even if through a remnant—and notes that the likelihood that her hair remains there accidentally is both a tangible example of her embodiment and a stark reminder of her absence. As Cifor notes, nothing about this encounter explains how or why the hair might be there in the first place, concluding that this temporal encounter with embodiment warrants that she reflect not on the ways that she might *correctly* define Schneider’s identity within the record, but how Schneider’s affective remnants offer a reminder

that trans embodiment persists in such historical records despite systems that aim to exclude, silence, and destroy their presence.

To begin alleviating such challenges, I argue for a “body-oriented” approach to cataloguing and archival description work, which aims to name gendered ways of being through gestures and actions associated with societal constructs of gender (Wagner 2022). This approach contends that acts of dress represent a gendered way of being and suggests that archivists might describe someone as wearing “feminine clothing” instead of ascribing womanhood, trans or otherwise, to the record. Moreover, in line with Cifor’s work, I extend the body-oriented idea to the practitioner and suggest that they disclose how their own embodied identities inform their descriptive work, when it is safe to do so. A body-oriented approach provides library and archives staff an all-too-necessary reminder of the broader social challenges of cis- and heteronormative binaries and the ways in which they impact culture, while also opening up space to consider the parallel impacts such systems have on Indigenous populations, people of colour, and individuals with disabilities (Curliss, Wagner, and Marsh 2024; Antracoli et al. 2020; Brilmyer 2022). The description of queerness within archives, however, only represents one element within the larger effort of preservation and curation. The artifacts themselves often surface other biases and failures within cultural preservation initiatives—especially when those artifacts become obsolete or experience unusual amounts of physical decay.

Audiovisual Artifacts and Queer Documentation Work

Magnetic media, such as VHS tapes and cassettes, were among the most prominent forms of audiovisual documentation, archival access, and preservation during the second half of the twentieth century (Compton 2007). Magnetic media suffer from what Mike Casey (2019) calls “degralescence,” meaning that magnetic media degrade over time regardless of how well-preserved they might be, and that the technologies used to play and preserve these tapes have become obsolete and continue to decrease in quantity. Institutional and cultural neglect intensify the challenges of degralescence, as audiovisual collections remain overlooked and undervalued as archival objects. Additionally, the size and shape of most audiovisual materials prove unwieldy from a storage perspective, leading not only to the deprioritization of their preservation but, in some instances, the deaccessioning and destruction of content. Rich cultural histories, queer or otherwise, have been thrown in university dumpsters. While magnetic media prove particularly volatile within this archival landscape, the emergence of new methods of recording and documenting, and the myriad corresponding technologies these different media formats rely on, appear to repeat such preservation failures as even well-meaning archives fail to identify necessary preservation practices in a timely and proactive manner. For instance, similar challenges have emerged around preserving broadcast television formats, disc-based materials, and born-digital video (Bratslavsky and Peterson 2025; Weaver and Blewer 2023; Albuquerque 2019).

This loss of magnetic media matters especially for LGBTQIA+ communities. As both Alexandra Juhasz (2006) and Lucas Hilderbrand (2006) have shown,

the use of portable, magnetic media was integral for documenting and archiving the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Moreover, scholars within both media studies and archival theory suggest that objects and their utilization offer ways of understanding the cultural contexts of queer activist work and embodiment (McKinney 2018; Lee 2020). This affective value results in a desire for a haptic and tactile relationship with queer historical artifacts that often leads queer archives to prioritize use over preservation, even at the threat of destruction (Wagner 2018; Gilmore 2023). Nonetheless, endeavours to digitally preserve queer media histories remain a site of underexplored practice; digital curation and archives classrooms offer one such site of exploration.

Experiential Learning and Inclusive Histories

Experiential learning can allow students to work within community-oriented contexts (Speck and Hoppe 2004). For graduate students—especially those pursuing professional degrees like a Master’s in Library and Information Sciences (MLIS)—experiential learning can help scaffold learning objectives and outcomes important to, but not necessarily required of, their profession. Experiential learning is about gaining institutional knowledge or learning the daily tasks of a profession, and serves to fill in necessary and critical gaps not addressed through coursework.

Given that MLIS degrees, as well as undergraduate information science degrees, already prepare students for the practical elements of librarianship and information work, including archival science, experiential learning affords students a chance to scale tools and technologies for information work to unique needs and settings. For example, focusing on diversity within experiential learning work makes experiential learning one of the most efficient tools that LIS programs can utilize to prepare students for the needs of their communities, while also helping them understand that inclusion is both an issue of representational importance and a practice requiring meaningful engagement and collaboration with a community and its desires (Wagner and Keeling 2019). Experiential learning can help students see historically marginalized communities and their archival records as richly complex rather than absent or poorly configured. While students could read about chronic failures to practice inclusive description within archival records, having them confront these issues directly within the constraints of a pre-existing archival database reveals how these ethics are negotiated with infrastructural limitations and disparate understandings about what queer inclusivity means. Of course, models of service learning focused on aiding minoritized populations run the real risk of providing an extractive experience that fails to sustain meaningful connections with the community and can produce tenuous relationships between students and the populations with which they work (Valiente-Riedel, Anderson, and Banki 2022; Fenlon et al. 2021). Archival preservation and digital curation coursework, when applied to a specific community and its needs, allow questions of best practices to be complicated and reoriented, whether it be shifting naming conventions to challenge patriarchal logics for community archives focused on feminist activist work or prioritizing accessible digital files over archival preservation copies in digital curation work while working remotely during COVID-19 (Wagner, Martell, and Oltmann 2024; Post

and Hof-Mahoney 2022). Given the unique complexities latent within documenting and making visible queer histories, these types of reflective pedagogies offer the chance to identify chronic problems within both archival praxis and ethics, many of which emerged within our work to archive and preserve the queer media histories of South Carolina.

The LGBTQ Columbia History Project and Media Collections

The preservation of queer media histories within South Carolina emerged as the direct result of a grant-funded project titled the LGBTQ Columbia History Project, an “interactive project” that “documents the often unseen and untold stories of [the] LGBTQ+ community through the creation and dissemination of oral histories, historic site interpretation, and archival collection” (Historic Columbia 2023). The project brought together a collection of disparate yet overlapping endeavours conducted by the University of South Carolina and the Queer Cola Oral History and Digital Archive Project with the shared goal of documenting LGBTQIA+ history within the city of Columbia, South Carolina (Wagner and Whitfield 2019). At the onset, the University of South Carolina followed collection endeavours, much like other LGBTQIA+-focused institutional collections, which centred on HIV/AIDS activism and queer figures associated with the university itself. In response, the Queer Cola Oral History and Digital Archive Project engaged with absences identified within archival representation and documentation, highlighting contemporary ephemeral activist materials—such as posters protesting the “bathroom bill,” S. 1203—and voices absent from previous oral history work, including two-spirit individuals and trans people of colour (Gill-Peterson 2013; Wagner and Whitfield 2019). Historic Columbia, a local nonprofit focused on historical preservation within the city, established the LGBTQ Columbia History Project to provide staffing, support, and digital infrastructure to expand access to these ongoing projects. Notable materials within the audiovisual artifacts include 1980s drag show performances at gay bars within and around the city of Columbia, home video recordings and news coverage of South Carolina Pride Parades throughout the 1990s, and footage of the establishment of the first LGBTQ Community Center in the state of South Carolina in 1990. While only a sliver of the more extensive holdings, these materials provide tangible evidence of often underexamined sites of queer history. Upon realizing their value, the LGBTQ Columbia History Project endeavoured to find viable methods to digitally preserve the materials in an expedient, sustainable, and sufficiently archival fashion. This discovery led to the establishment of one of two experiential learning courses centred on the digital preservation and curation of these materials.

First Case Study: MLIS Course on Archiving LGBTQIA+ A/V Materials

Historic Columbia worked with the University of South Carolina’s College of Arts and Sciences to support the digital preservation of at-risk media across institutional and community archives. This support included the administrative and technical costs of offering an MLIS course to preserve and document the identified media digitally, which resulted in an eight-week intensive experiential learning course I taught

in summer 2021, “Archiving LGBTQIA+ A/V Materials.” The course enrolled three graduate students pursuing their MLIS at the University of South Carolina, two with interests in pursuing archives-related work and one pursuing school librarianship, who saw the course as an opportunity to attain the skills necessary to digitally migrate her library’s vast audiovisual collections. The students were given boxes containing the following formats and materials: 30 VHS tapes, 50 DVDs and music CDs, and over 100 CD-Rs storing organizational documents, fliers, software, and additional moving-image materials, in addition to more obscure formats like Beta-max tapes, MiniDV cassettes, and some born-digital materials. Since the LGBTQ Columbia History Project was an ongoing initiative, more materials also emerged during the course.

The course followed the structure of similar experiential learning courses by identifying community needs and potential service-related skills students might offer (Bringle and Hatcher 1996). The students engaged in biweekly reflections—a typical assessment within experiential learning courses—to identify the technical challenges associated with their digitization efforts as well as critical and ethical questions that arose from documenting the materials to be digitized (Molee et al. 2011). The course description noted that students had the opportunity to “engage in a digital archiving project” focused on “LGBTQIA+ activism in South Carolina” and that their work would address “the needs of multiple stakeholders (donors, institutional archives, and historical societies) to digitize and prepare AV materials for online access.” The learning objectives outlined that students would be able to “display a working knowledge of the metadata and taxonomies for audiovisual content,” “document the process for digitizing physical documents,” and “reflect on the challenges and acceptable practices of queer community archives.”

Additionally, given the emphasis on LGBTQIA+ media history and archival labour, the course included multiple theoretical readings on queer activism and queer archival theory, some of which are cited above. I provided the students with individual technical training, and they scheduled lab times to digitize the VHS tapes and transfer disc-based media to cloud-based and external hard drives following the concept of “lots of copies keep stuff safe” (LOCKSS) within digital preservation work (Reich and Rosenthal 2000). LOCKSS contends that, due to the intersecting threats of data loss, hardware failure, and institutional turnover, saving materials in multiple physical and digital storage formats across multiple locations offers greater redundancy and probability that at least one of those copies can be accessed in the future. Additionally, and especially valuable to the students learning this work, LOCKSS helps distribute preservation obligations across individuals and organizations, making digital preservation work collaborative rather than isolated. Given COVID-19 restrictions, students worked individually and communicated remotely, creating collaborative documentation for a digital preservation workflow and project plan. By the conclusion of the summer, the students had digitized 20 VHS tapes and prepared 30 DVDs and CDs for digital ingestion. These numbers reflect the COVID-based restrictions on in-person meetings, the identification of decayed media or duplicate copies, and the avoidance of digitizing materials under explicit copyright protection,

such as documentaries recorded from television. Figure 1 represents a sample section of metadata created for the digitized materials, while Figure 2 represents a sample of digitized footage from a tape titled “3rd Miss Altered Affairs Kalendar Girls 1992.”

File Name	Metadata Contributor	Title	Creator	Subjects	Content Description	Contributing Institution
1999 SC G&L Pride Newsclips	TAT	1999 SC G&L Pride Newsclips		Gay Pride Celebration 1999; News coverage, Columbia, SC	News coverage of 4-day 10th anniversary Gay Pride celebration weekend WIS TV, 10 WOLO 25 WACH (Fox) 57 Description of Gay Pride events being held in Columbia, SC Saturday June 12, 1999	the University of South Carolina
AIDS Quilt @ Coliseum October 8, 1995	TAT	AIDS Quilt @ Coliseum October 8, 1995		AIDS; Names Project: Memorial Quilts;Columbia, SC	Video of quilts displayed at the Coliseum, located on the the University of South Carolina campus as part of the Names Project memorial quilt October 8, 1995.	the University of South Carolina
1995 SC Pride Vigil at Riverfront Park Part 1	TAT	1995 SC Pride Vigil at Riverfront Park Part 1		Gay Pride	4/9/1995 Personal statements and reflections of weekend by attendees; including musical tribute to Harriet Hancock of Columbia, SC; moment of remembrance for victims of AIDS, statement of support from member of clergy	the University of South Carolina
1995 SC Pride Vigil at Riverfront Park Part 2	TAT	1995 SC Pride Vigil at Riverfront Park Part 2		Gay Pride	4/9/1995 Candlelight vigil with music	the University of South Carolina

Figure 1: Metadata created by students within the Archiving LGBTQIA+ A/V Materials course.



Figure 2: Screenshot of digitized footage from the Archiving LGBTQIA+ A/V Materials course.

While the Archiving LGBTQIA+ A/V Materials course graciously benefited from financial support to pursue digital preservation, this support only covered the acquisition of basic hardware and digitization software, along with administrative overhead. Beyond access to consumer-grade technologies, the students had to rely on innovative and often cost-effective solutions for digitization. For example, while not an industry or archival standard for digitization work, the VHS tapes were transferred by connecting a proprietary VidBox Video Conversion system to an on-loan Apple desktop computer paired with a VCR from my previous audiovisual archiving work. In a more professional setup, these students might have dedicated VCRs for preservation alongside dedicated computers, hard drives, and cloud storage. By allowing students to use a shared VidBox software suite, they could engage in digital

preservation work that was otherwise cost-prohibitive. The students also utilized a series of open-source tools to view and digitize both magnetic media-based and disc-based materials. Tools like Audacity helped transfer video and audio files from discs, while software like VLC became critical in allowing students to view transferred files in formats not native to MacOS or review files on their own operating systems, which ranged across both Windows and MacOS.

While the three students were generally knowledgeable of the physical formats they were working with, their awareness of open-source software remained limited. For instance, the students required training in identifying the file structures of a DVD ripped from Audacity, which decoupled the audio, image, and text files. Surprisingly, I also needed to remind them of the importance of rewinding a VHS tape before beginning the digitization process. Moreover, since many of these students were engaging in audiovisual digitization for the first time, mistakes and poor transfers inevitably occurred. While it would have been ideal to re-digitize or edit these files, the size of the class and the length of many videos meant that videos often had one chance to be digitized. In some instances, students transferred videos with hour-plus runtimes unattended, resulting in blue screens or irrelevant footage at the end of a video. These excesses were seen as acceptable since the content was nonetheless digitized, creating a digital surrogate that previously did not exist. In line with other community-based digital archiving efforts, the course adopted “good enough” practices rather than best practices. Beyond learning about these technical aspects, the class also helped challenge the students’ preconceived notions about where and how queer history emerged within the United States.

While the students within the course expressed support for LGBTQIA+ community members, all were genuinely surprised at encountering examples of queer visibility within the state of South Carolina from the 1980s onward. While no members of the course disclosed being members of the LGBTQIA+ community themselves, one did imagine how she might use the materials as teaching tools for her openly queer students at the school where she served as librarian. While this is partly because the footage represents otherwise unaccounted-for moments within the queer history of South Carolina, it also destabilized the students’ metronormative presumptions that active queer communities were centred around large cities and urban areas and did not exist within the American South (Halberstam 2005). The impact of this realization was two-fold. It provided the students with new archival objects to make the case that queerness, in all its forms, was hardly a new phenomenon, as well as new ways of imagining support for and advocacy on behalf of queer individuals. Within the context of a state like South Carolina, which for the past few decades has served as a testing ground for state-level as well as national anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation (Morris 2018), the students saw this archival trove of counterevidence of resistance as a vital resource. The discovery of this rich evidence of queer activism within the state also led the students to reconsider where and how they look for similar communities in contemporary contexts. Moreover, the students drew wide-ranging conclusions from the general inaccessibility of documentation of queer history to argue for the likelihood that communities of colour and undocu-

mented communities, among others, similarly suffer from having their rich media histories chronically under-documented.

Though this finding could easily be taken as an invitation for archivists to go out and *find* community stories, reifying deficit models of extractive community knowledge acquisition, the students instead explicitly discussed wanting to take what they had learned and provide these tools *to* historically marginalized and under-documented groups to aid them in preserving and curating their own histories. This critical distinction follows a series of LIS-driven arguments for tool and resource provision to groups doing community-based information work by yielding discursive and structural control back to communities (Gibson and Martin 2019; Floegel and Costello 2019; Kitzie et al. 2022). By digitizing and placing in conversation multiple media artifacts about queer activism in South Carolina, the students increased visibility of the robust documentary work of South Carolina-based LGBTQIA+ individuals, revealing the work these communities had undertaken to ensure the preservation of their stories.

Perhaps one of the most startling challenges was the myriad formats documenting the lives of queer South Carolinians. While VHS tapes and floppy disks were expected and plentiful within the holdings, Betamax tapes and Zip drives proved more surprising and unusual. While the project did have funding to pursue digitization, Historic Columbia and I decided that obtaining a Betamax player to digitize just two tapes with less than thirty seconds of content was untenable and prohibitive. Additionally, while finding hardware to transfer files from a 3½-inch floppy disk was easy, other less common disk formats were similarly avoided. This choice, crucially, was not one the class was in a position to make itself, and reflects that even community-led work remains beholden to some degree of stakeholder support. Ultimately, while the class provided a site to test new possibilities for digitization work, it failed to alleviate the challenges of broad format support found within institutional archives (Wagner and Keeling 2019).



Figure 3: Digitized WIS-TV footage from the graduate course.

While the students accepted that they would not be able to digitally preserve every kind of audiovisual artifact, the students made deliberate choices to digitize some materials that were still protected by copyright. Specifically, the students digitized a news story from local news station WIS-TV focused on the 1990 South Carolina Pride Parade, which included interviews with individuals discussing what informed their decisions to attend the event publicly (see Figure 3). Though the students were careful not to make the video publicly available, we extensively discussed the likelihood that WIS-TV no longer held this footage. Evoking Verne Harris' (2002) idea of the "archival sliver," wherein institutional archives intentionally or unintentionally destroy materials about marginalized communities, we attempted in good faith to learn whether this material was preserved elsewhere by contacting the archive that holds almost the entirety of WIS-TV's extant media archives, but we were unsuccessful. While this could have been because of intentional destruction, it is more likely that WIS-TV reused their tapes and did not retain a preservation copy, a common practice that has caused the loss of countless television materials and the public media histories they represent—perhaps most infamously the BBC's myriad lost episodes of *Doctor Who* (Bratslavsky and Peterson 2025; Braithwaite 2021). Because of this common practice of media reuse, much public media has only been preserved thanks to personal recordings, as evocatively explored in Matt Wolf's 2019 documentary *Recorder: The Marion Stokes Project*. Similar records, such as the ones found within the LGBTQ Columbia History Project holdings, emphasize the importance not only of individual and communal queer media preservation, but also counter-institutional documentation. This realization only further evidenced the cohesion and care of the South Carolina LGBTQIA+ community's community information spaces and activist work. These home recordings of 1990s news footage of South Carolina pride parades and home video documentation of 1980s queer organizing meetings suggest a visual record of LGBTQIA+ activism far richer than previously imagined (Sullivan 2022).

Second Case Study: Undergraduate Information Science Course on Digital Curation

Following the Archiving LGBTQIA+ A/V Materials course, I completed my PhD and moved into a position at the University of Maryland (UMD), where I deployed the digital files from the MLIS course into a new experiential learning course for undergraduate students pursuing their bachelor's degrees in Information Science. The course, "Introduction to Digital Curation," as the course description noted, offered students the chance to "explore various dimensions and contexts for digital curation" with an emphasis on "all activities involving the management, representation, and preservation of both born-digital and digitized information." This course included less explicit discussions of queer theory and archives and instead treated the digitized videos as a case study of a potential collection of complex digital objects a practitioner might encounter in their day-to-day work. The course was taught over sixteen weeks during the Fall 2022 semester and enrolled 40 students within UMD's information science undergraduate program. The career interests of students ranged from data

analytics to cybersecurity. Very few students had experience with digital curation or critical engagement with storing, sharing, and using their own digital files.

Within the course, students received a folder of digitized VHS tapes and DVDs along with documentation from the previous MLIS course. Given the size of the course, sub-groups emerged with focuses on documentation and preservation, data definitions, data ingestion, database design, and data re/use. Documentation and preservation students worked on standardizing file formats across the digitized materials and created tools for checking the quality of the digital files over time. The data definitions team focused on identifying relevant metadata fields for the digital objects, creating definitions for the metadata fields, and creating a workflow for creating metadata records. The data ingestion team established standards of practice for editing and converting files in preparation for ingestion into a database aimed at functioning like a video-streaming platform. Ingestion work included editing out dead time on video files, compressing any notably large files that experienced issues when attempting to stream them, and identifying ethical methods for removing any non-consensually recorded footage—such as home videos shot in a gay bar—or potentially copyrighted material—such as the WIS-TV news story—from a video. From the ground up, the database design team created a wireframe for a database that allowed users to both view and potentially download the videos for use. The database design team also built scaffolding into their database wireframe, allowing only approved users—with database-specific usernames and passwords—to view and download videos. Finally, the data re/use team worked on identifying user experience needs for the database, which included establishing potential user types for the database and creating user personas. Examples of user personas included LGBTQIA+ historians as well as queer youth who might use the materials to explore their still-evolving queer identity. Figure 4 represents example metadata fields from the data definitions team, while Figure 5 shows the database layout, including digital objects and their requisite metadata fields.

I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R
Captions (y/n) - IN DATABASE	Source IN DATABASE	Level of bias (low, medium, high) IN DATABASE	File type MP4 IN DATABASE	Suggested Use (Research, Quotes, Fun) IN DATABASE	LGBTQ Language Tags (standardized drop down list) DOES NOT HAVE TO ACTUALLY INCLUDE THE "#" SYMBOL IN DATABASE	Keywords IN DATABASE	Split Timestamps NOT IN FINAL DATABASE	Content Tagging IN DATABASE	Checksums NOT IN DATABASE
Yes	Someone holding a camera, new stations, interviews	Medium	MP4	Quotes	#LGBTQ, #lesbian	Pride march, fundraiser		Alcohol	10c45886f57 aacae57546c 16bd70b7b
Yes	Someone holding a camera, new stations, interviews	Medium	MP4	Quotes	#LGBTQ, #lesbian	Pride march, fundraiser			959a43a96ee 9318fe99793 37f56c5b91
Yes	Someone holding a camera, new stations, interviews	Medium	MP4	Quotes	#LGBTQ, #lesbian	Pride march, fundraiser	1:41:51 / 1:55:13		b96c8a94c02 fa17e9a798f5 e85f0f5be
	Camera	Medium	MP4	Research, Historical	#queercommunity #gay #lesbian		None	None?	
Yes	Georgia State University Library	Low	MP4	Fun	#pride #gay #lesbian #pride	Parade	1:08:25	None?	8ad6c5f225c 530220e95b7 25801e853f

Figure 4: Database-unique definitions created by undergraduate information science students based on digital files from the LGBTQIA+ A/V Archives course.

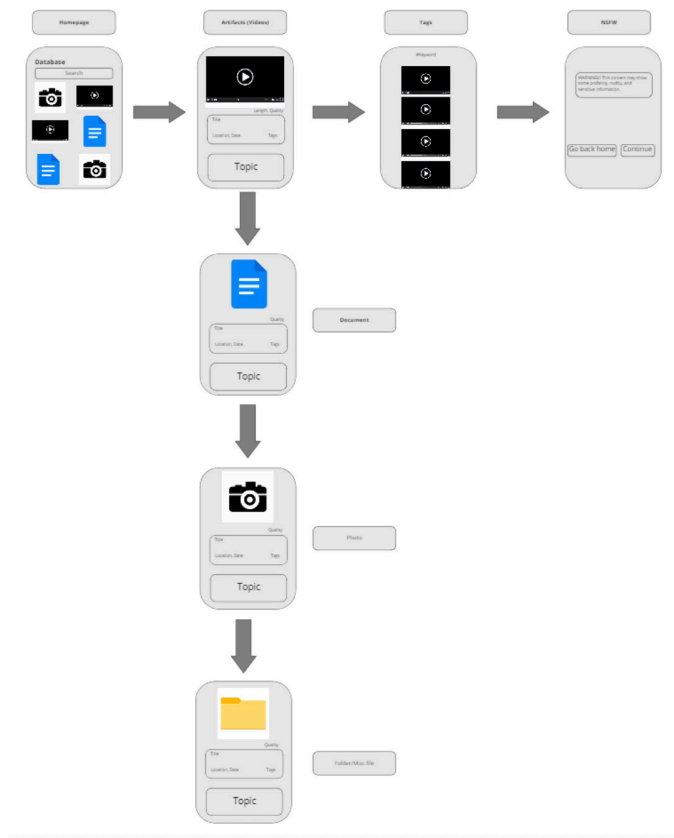


Figure 5: Sample database layout designed by undergraduate students, which addresses the multiple types of digital objects in the LGBTQ Columbia History Project.

When the project moved to UMD, the undergraduate students treated documentary evidence of queer activism, candidly speaking, as unimpressive. When pushed on their lack of surprise, many disclosed that they were either themselves LGBTQIA+ or that they had personally known or encountered queer individuals in their daily lives both socially and culturally. Additionally, UMD is located within the District of Columbia/Maryland/Virginia (DMV) region, which is far more metropolitan and has a more queer-inclusive reputation than South Carolina. Indeed, UMD consistently ranks as one of the most LGBTQIA+-inclusive campuses nationwide (Campus Pride Index 2023). For this set of students, regularly seeing queer people within their own daily lives led them to presume that queer people were similarly visible throughout the rest of the country. We were careful to avoid reproducing the ideas of metronormativity by acknowledging that these materials represented a unique geographic location, and we allowed this knowledge to dictate considerations around archival practice. An archive in Maryland, for instance, might approach access and visibility by imagining the value of this footage of LGBTQIA+

South Carolinians as universal—but by accounting for anti-queer sentiment and legislation within the state, we considered how these materials could be used as tools for harm as much as for liberation. Once students understood the varied experiences and expressions of queer visibility across different geographic locations, this helped challenge potentially implicit presumptions about where and how queerness emerges and expresses itself. This is not to say that these students could not imagine the existence of queer communities within the American South, but that their notions of queer visibility mapped onto what queerness looked like in more metropolitan contexts, replete with their own political and cultural privileges.

While the students found the presence and representation of queer communities within media hardly unusual, the aesthetics and formats of the digitized materials proved confounding. Since the students understood the historical value of the footage, they instead fixated on the aesthetics of the digital files, revealing how a group of students whose experience with analogue media was minimal at best used, engaged with, and approached these digitized materials. Students observed that the videos were of “poor quality,” assuming they were poor digital transfers. This confusion required me to explain to students that this was what VHS tapes looked like. The students took to referring to the videos as having a “deep fried meme” aesthetic, a term often used to describe a meme whose repeated distribution and reediting has led it to suffer from visible compression and degradation (Trillò, Hallinan, and Shifman 2022).

While many students were familiar with different file formats for text-based documents, engaging with media-based file formats resulted in unanticipated hurdles. Students noted that they needed more experience interacting with video and audio files outside the graphical user interfaces of streaming services such as Netflix or Spotify. During a class discussion on file formats at the onset of the course, not one of the 40 students recognized that MP3 was a digital audio format. As such, students across the various groups often needed help with opening the files once removed from Google Drive, as they assumed that the files were corrupted rather than incompatible with their operating system and software. Fortunately, some students in the class knew about tools like VLC Media Player and suggested it as a resource for viewing and listening to the files.

Given the public support for queer communities at UMD, the students in the course assumed that sharing positive images of LGBTQIA+ individuals—regardless of their location—was a universally positive and ethically uncomplicated practice, resulting in conversations about digital curation practices and the impact of sharing pre-internet media in a hypermediated landscape. Evocative of Elizabeth Groeneveld’s (2018) discussion of the ethical concerns around digitizing the lesbian pornography newsletter *On Our Backs*, making analogue queer materials digitally accessible not only highlights tensions around privacy and consent, but further lays bare how digital access to materials discursively marked as “adult” result in state-to-state attempts to block access and erase materials. This conversation required the class to step outside of the otherwise neutral presumptions of digital curation work and examine the impact such technologies and access might have on historically margin-

alized populations as well as, in the case of LGBTQIA+ individuals, the still-ongoing discrimination and tangible social and legal ramifications they might be subject to. The conversation highlighted two key points.

First, when it comes to documenting queer history and its mediated representations, the notion of public space remains tenuous. Since spaces like a pride parade and a gay bar are *technically* public, most institutions argue that this circumvents participants' rights to privacy. However, historically, entering either space came with significant risk to individuals, especially prior to the shift toward LGBTQIA+ equality in the 2000s (as signalled by the achievement of marriage equality). A person entering such a space did so with a presumption of safety and likely did not imagine footage of them would appear online. Since the students had no method to seek retroactive consent from people who appeared in the footage, their response was to deprioritize videos with large groups of individuals for digital ingestion. The students also developed a method to redact footage should an individual request that they do so, while identifying tools and techniques for blurring individual faces as needed.

Second, this particular challenge made students aware that access to and teaching about queer history within the United States remain contested topics. The very same students who were openly supportive of and affirming toward queer communities lacked an in-depth awareness of both prior and ongoing anti-LGBTQIA+ legislative efforts in states like Texas and Florida and the potential for such legislation to take effect in states like South Carolina. This backdrop meant that even a recording of an openly gay man talking to a University of South Carolina social work class about his experiences being queer in the early 2000s became a site of curatorial contention (see Figure 6). While the students were aware that the subject had consented to having the video used as the project saw fit, we still discussed how such consent might not have accounted for how the video might circulate beyond the project and how shifts in state legislation might make its availability, even for educational purposes, illegal. Realizing that this incredibly cautionary approach might result in being unable to upload any videos whatsoever, the students shifted toward thinking about tools and processes to control who has access to the content, not unlike creating a patron account for scholars and researchers hoping to use archival reading rooms. While not an ideal solution, it helped to create access methods and aided in identifying the intent of the database users to weed out anti-queer malevolence. Moreover, this emphasis on restricted access, despite ongoing perceptions of universal access to all digital media, echoes Julia Gilmore's (2023) observation that efforts to preserve minority media histories digitally should push us to rethink the ethics of instant and unfettered access, especially as these communities themselves face continued barriers to accessing their own institutionally preserved histories. This implementation of procedures to curate, and sometimes limit, access surfaced additional methodological questions around the digital curation of media, ones whose inquiries highlighted both universal challenges to digital curation as well as uniquely queer challenges.

Students invested in queer allyship and students who themselves identified as queer in some capacity often had differing opinions about the most appropriate methodological approaches. While many students initially argued that they could

identify individuals' gender based on what they looked like within the footage, or deduce sexual orientations based on the video file's name, a handful of students noted that gender and sexuality, because of their socially constructed nature, were impossible to name without explicit acts of disclosure. For example, some videos were initially titled things like "Gay and Lesbian Awards Dinner," and students quickly assumed that all in attendance were either gay or lesbian, without necessarily considering the presence of allies or even people with other sexual orientations across the LGBTQIA+ spectrum. Students, in response, identified and adopted alternative methods for describing apparently queer embodiments that named gendered potentialities—"a person wearing feminine clothing" instead of "a woman"—rather than explicitly ascribing an unknown gender identity or sexual orientation, following the "body-oriented" approach to describing identity within archival records I discussed earlier (Wagner 2022). Since the materials in the collection ranged from the late 1980s to the early 2000s, students encountered a range of self-imposed LGBTQIA+ terminology within the materials, some of which challenged their perceptions of appropriate, queer-inclusive language. Specifically, some records included historical, outdated terms for transgender individuals as well as reclamatory uses of historically anti-queer slurs, which led students to inquire about how best to acknowledge such language while being aware of its potentially negative impact on contemporary users of the database. For instance, some descriptions included the term "transsexual," reflecting the word's use in the video itself and acknowledging how individuals were referring to themselves or their community at the time. As a result, the database was designed so that users could access additional contentious or problematic terms and descriptions only upon creating a user account and requesting such access. Moreover, the data definitions group, ultimately responsible for naming choices across the records, worked with the database design team to implement an in-database button that would direct users to a form to provide feedback on terminology they felt was inappropriate or needed correcting. This ability to alter descriptions and representation to attend to contemporary uses mirrored another concern among the students about footage that included nudity and potentially adult themes.

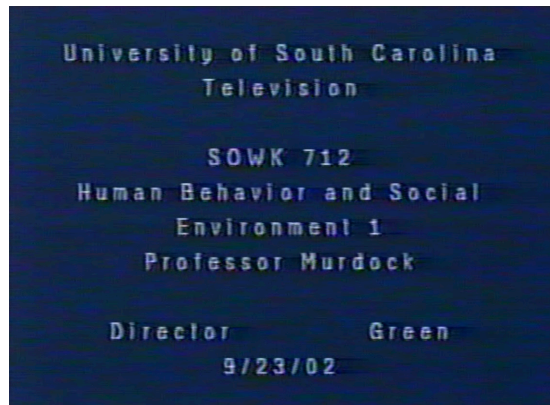


Figure 6: Title card of LGBTQ Columbia History Project video whose contents included explicit consent to be shared online.

Imagining that users for the database might include children, and acknowledging that the database might eventually become part of the public-facing LGBTQ Columbia History Project, students voiced concerns about footage that included either nudity, cursing, or depictions of alcohol consumption. The students' immediate response was to edit out any potentially adult materials. This prompted a discussion around the historic and ongoing impacts of content moderation and censorship related to queer digital communities. In particular, the data ingestion group questioned what it meant to protect users from controversial materials that happened to include LGBTQIA+ individuals. Further dialogue teased apart connotations between protecting vulnerable users such as children from seeing adult themes as a legitimate concern and implicit biases that presumed all queer content to be nonnormative and, therefore, unsuitable for children. Based on the work of Avery Dame-Griff (2017) and Oliver L. Haimson et al. (2021), ultimately, the class identified the disconcerting realities of over-moderating queerness as inherently pornographic and, yet again, imagined ways to curate the materials for contextual use instead of adopting a policy of blanket inaccessibility. As a result, the data definition group flagged potentially controversial or triggering materials and worked with the database design group to implement a content warning system for those media. This approach helped the data ingestion group to clarify their video editing standards to explicitly state that removing blue screens from the beginning and end of a video, along with copyrighted materials, remained within the scope of their work, while the non-requested removal of an individual or their activities became a curatorial overstep.

Experiential Learning, Mediated Activism, and the Future of Digital Queer Archives

The sociopolitical backdrop of resurging anti-queer sentiments meant that releasing these digital objects to the public might have done a disservice to the queer communities presented within the preserved media. Alternative approaches to our project could have included creating a sandbox database for the communities in question and training them in adding to, reusing, and making this digitized history sustainable, so that they themselves could raise awareness about the contemporary needs of LGBTQIA+ South Carolinians. While anti-queer discrimination is decidedly different from the experiences of systemic racism, reframing the project toward contemporary community needs would ensure that access to digital objects remains affirming and of value to those represented within the materials. This approach would support the findings of Fenlon et al. (2021) in their exploration of how Black communities impacted by the systemic racism of land grant universities sustain community beyond the mere creation of digital history projects by providing those communities with the means to use the digital materials for their own educational and fundraising purposes.

The project's findings reaffirm that adapting to community needs is more important than following any best practices within archives and digital curation work. A person's acceptance of visibility within semi-public spaces and their consent to be recorded do not necessarily translate to new contexts when materials are

remediated online. While making materials accessible and usable tends to be the preferred practice of archivists and information professionals, the reality that it remains uncertain how a queer individual will be perceived within different contexts and spaces necessitates caution and reassurances around consent. The “failure” to be visible might speak to agentic choices by queer individuals to remain out of sight, and their absence in archival holdings, institutional or otherwise, may be intentional. As Halberstam asserts, “failure” often reveals more about the limitations of institutions and their infrastructure than it does about those whom failure betrays or alienates. In their refusal to engage in the cisheteronormative logics of reproduction, queer people intentionally fail to reproduce, in the same way that they may intentionally fail to be documented. Refusing to see such failure as a defect, Halberstam contends that examining what arises from failure can in fact be generative and allows us to “potentially unlock new modes of knowing” (2011, 63).

While practitioners may often consider the ethical implications of their work, they may only sometimes reflect on how their own unique embodied experiences impact their choices. Having archivists acknowledge their positionality remains an area of contestation, especially as debates around the role of neutrality in curating information continue (Scott and Saunders 2021). By identifying their own biases, archivists might develop more careful and considered archival records, which would benefit users of all identities and backgrounds (Cooke and Kitzie 2021; Curliss, Wagner, and Marsh 2024). Furthermore, admitting the limitations of their own perspectives and experiences may make archivists more likely to reach out and work with the specific communities represented to ensure careful, correct, and community-centred curation. This reflection invites archivists, especially of community-produced artifacts, to curate *in conversation with* rather than *on behalf of* the community. While the curatorial strategies encountered and developed throughout the two courses described here hardly replace having meaningful community buy-in, they may allow practitioners to converse with community members and leaders who might help obtain retroactive consent for making footage available or help provide the most appropriate terminology for individuals represented within the collections. Such work engages in a more intentional archival process, or what Kimberly Christen and Jane Anderson (2019) identify as slow archives work. Echoing Christen and Anderson’s idea, LGBTQIA+ materials may be better served by taking the time to inclusively and ethically curate fewer records instead of producing many records at scale, quickly, and without pausing to reflect or check in with those represented within the materials. This community-led approach also builds on praxis-led ethics of care, such as those informed by feminist epistemologies (Caswell and Cifor 2016).

While the future of the LGBTQ Columbia History Project rests mainly on the assurance of sustainability enacted by the multiple individuals, organizations, and monetary support systems involved, the project invites and encourages possible future directions. For example, while the project emphasized the geographic boundaries of the city of Columbia, the materials handled by the students revealed a far broader regional network of LGBTQIA+ activism. Projects aiming to digitize and preserve queer history within a smaller geographic area might find better support

through regional efforts. Anecdotally speaking, many of the members working across the LGBTQ Columbia History Project were unaware of a similar project being developed just two hours away in Charleston, South Carolina, making clear that localized digital history work, without outward-facing goals, often remains hyperlocal.

Additional future work related to this project and other queer-focused media archives might also try to establish shared methods and an ethics regarding procedures for removing non-consenting individuals from historical images and videos. Efforts to make digital mediations of marginalized groups available without consideration for their consent can endanger rather than support inclusive endeavours, and impacts not only queer communities but also Indigenous communities, communities of colour, religious minorities, and otherwise colonized populations (Ghaddar 2016; Rév 2020). Given that this work also relates to the challenges of describing historically evolving LGBTQIA+ identities, organizations and institutions might build consortia focused on inclusive metadata and curation practices, sharing best practices and distributing the labour of seeking retroactive consent or improving terminological definitions. Though such consortia remain limited, the Trans Metadata Collective or the Digital Transgender Archive might offer models and guidance for this kind of work (Watson et al. 2023; Brown 2020).

Finally, since this project laid bare the limitations of even meaningfully supported digital curation projects, especially around preserving more challenging audiovisual formats, the intersections of obscure and obsolete media formats with LGBTQIA+ history warrants further examination. For example, a vast amount of AIDS activism is documented on video—digitizing and preserving this obsolete media while also attending to the unique curatorial challenges related to queer embodiment could prove a generative shift in focus in queer archival work (Juhász 2006; Wagner 2018). Some of this work may necessitate explicit buy-in from institutional holdings. However, this could also include extensions of experiential learning projects across MLIS- and public history-adjacent courses, wherein the production of digital queer media histories provides students with otherwise non-existent opportunities to learn how to scale practices to singular course projects or expand them to program-level initiatives that might evolve into regional or national endeavours.

Conclusion

This article offers a reflective analysis of my work related to the ongoing preservation of queer activism within the state of South Carolina. In emphasizing the historiographic and technical challenges latent across care-driven queer archival work, I examined the possibilities and limitations of using experiential learning as a site to radically reimagine digital preservation work. Given that the archival labour of LGBTQIA+ communities is often purposefully self-initiated and self-curated, and emerges through extra-institutional means, what have historically served as best practices for community digital history work often fall short for these communities, especially when many community members still experience and navigate anti-queer hostilities in their daily lives. In this current historical moment, these anti-queer hostilities, alongside the erasure of queer histories, seem to be intensifying rather

than receding. Tangible examples of the federal Republican administration removing contested material related to queer communities and their health from government websites show that relying on institutions to document LGBTQIA+ history remains risky, if not outright dangerous (Sarnoff et al. 2025). Alternative approaches to preserving queer history, outside of the shifting control of political ideologies, are plenty—this article has offered one such potential site of practice. By documenting the lessons learned from digitally preserving audiovisual materials documenting South Carolinian LGBTQIA+ history through various types of digital preservation and curation coursework, this article offers a modest set of pedagogical practices, ethical approaches, and technological strategies to iterate slow-moving albeit effective ways of increasing the digital memory of LGBTQIA+ communities.

The project further revealed that the movement of queer historical artifacts across geographic lines failed to map out in equal ways. As students worked on materials from a state they did not possess intimate knowledge about, they projected their own metronormative notions about queer culture, politics, and visibility onto that location. As a result, efforts to make these collections accessible clashed with the ethics of visibility, which was presumed to be a universal good rather than a deeply localized issue. While it might seem an exaggeration, working with these unique queer archival materials forced students to despatialize and detemporalize their presumptions about LGBTQIA+ history. While this careful work sometimes fails to produce the instant accessibility and visibility we have grown accustomed to, this is not due to a failure of the students on this project, nor is it due to an inability of LGBTQIA+ persons to produce meaningful artifacts of their existence; these failures, as Halberstam (2011) suggests, revealed how larger sociotechnical forces make the preservation of LGBTQIA+ culture and history a particularly challenging endeavour. The digital archives of queer people, both within South Carolina and beyond, wait patiently for a society that can acknowledge their pasts as real and their futures as a possibility.

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Obscure Cinema

Paolo Cherchi Usai

The tidal wave of upheavals in the world's politics and society that accompanied events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the addictive misuse of social media, the growth of regressive ideologies, and the emergence of artificial intelligence—not to mention the slower but all the more pervasive effects of global warming—is posing a major challenge to the cultural sector, unavoidably torn between the competing options of adapting to the status quo or seeking alternatives through persuasion, grassroots advocacy, or outright rebellion. The field of moving image creation, preservation, and presentation is not alien to this predicament (Meden 2021).¹ Willingly or not, practitioners of these activities must now cope with a conglomerate of crises and transformations at the planetary level, of such magnitude as to make the days of twentieth-century cinema almost unrecognizable.

The symptoms of this phenomenon are especially felt in the area of education. For more than half a century, film museums and archives have raised generations of archivists and curators through on-site internships, followed by introductory and specialized courses—first through summer schools organized by the International Federation of Film Archives since 1973, subsequently with the certificate program of the L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation at the George Eastman Museum, established in 1996—designed after traditional models borrowed from the humanities.² Academia belatedly followed suit, eventually formalizing the achievements of the “arts and crafts” method of hands-on training into formal graduate and doctoral programs—early on at the University of East Anglia in the UK, at the Eastman Museum in partnership with the University of Rochester, and in more recent years at the University of Amsterdam and other institutes for higher education—with a stronger theoretical emphasis. Despite their undisputable value, these approaches perpetuate an unsustainable cognitive model, dangerously detached from the urgency of the

issues that have emerged at the dawn of the third millennium.

What follows is a preliminary outline for the establishment of another kind of school for filmmakers, curators, archivists, and exhibitors as a response to viewing practices that encourage retinal bulimia, and to the allegedly positive correlation between the number of films watched and the expertise derived from their experience.³ Apprenticeship, a millennia-old learning path at the service of an art or trade in which trainees had to know their tools before being allowed to use them, is the backbone of the program. Its admittedly utopian framework is also far from new: some of its guiding principles are found in both religious and secular philosophy (Iyer 2025; Karlin 2025), from early Buddhism and Hinduism (Segnit 2021, 103–06, 139–42) to the teachings of Georges Gurdjieff (Bennett 1973), down to the extremist stance adopted by the Unabomber’s manifesto (Dooling 2008). The proposed curriculum makes no direct reference to any of these traditions and systems of thought, but hopes to cultivate an “out of the box” mode of thinking about why moving images are being made in the first place; how they may assist in building a more equal and just society; and how they might be preserved for posterity in order to achieve this goal without further contributing to the destruction of our environment. Regaining a sense of necessity in seeing moving images, making sense of them, and safeguarding their life for the benefit of future viewers is the central preoccupation of the program. The blueprint offered here has sacrificed many important details in the name of synthesis; it is hoped, however, that its fundamental components are portrayed clearly enough to encourage a long overdue debate on the future of audiovisual ethos and politics.

The program spelled out below can be adapted to the specific needs and available resources of the host organization, as long as it remains faithful to the school’s key principles: the prolonged and self-imposed abstention from the experience of artificially-made moving images and recorded sounds; the use of mechanical and analogue tools as the exclusive means for achieving the goals and objectives of the training program; understanding the moving image through manual work, championing the virtues of materiality in opposition to current digital normativity but also to fetishism and nostalgia; the direct involvement of students in manufacturing, designing, and presenting audiovisual works, with no external intervention or support; the merger of traditionally distinct actions such as making, exhibiting, experiencing, commenting upon, and preserving images that move and speak into a cohesive whole. In a nutshell, the school intends to nurture a genuine engagement with audiovisual perception, spectatorship, and imagination as non-commodified values to be harnessed through personal accountability, participation, altruism, and determination to regain a sense of wonder for the moving image in itself. When it comes to film preservation in the broadest sense of the word, being a good spectator and a good citizen are one and the same thing.

Year One: The Year of Withdrawal

Reflecting on cinema *in absentia* is not the only way to achieve an enhanced awareness of its possibilities and limits, but it does have the advantage of confronting the

student with the implications of its presence in a drastically unfamiliar territory. The introductory year of the school—stripped to its essence—is a full immersion prologue in reverse mode, the aim of which is to make the students more conscious of the media environment they come from. To this end, all participants will voluntarily refrain from perceiving analogue or digital moving images and recorded sounds of any kind, both during classes and in their personal lives.⁴ There is no AI imaging software, social media, television, radio, video game platform, or playback device at their disposal. Should this kind of apparatus be part of their domestic settings, they will not use it under any circumstance. Computers and smartphones will be muted and programmed in a way that enables students to read or exchange text and still images only, alongside normal telephone conversations. They will not, of course, watch any film or video in a theatrical context or at home. The self-imposed embargo will be maintained during the first five years of the program, with the sole exceptions of training exercises and practicums assigned by instructors to each participant or to the class as a whole.

It is expected that students will experience a feeling of acute media deprivation; its repercussions will be explored and regularly discussed at a collective and individual level. The detox procedure finds its counterpart in an intensive program of readings, lectures, workshops, and seminars on cinema and the moving image in general, organized with the aid of a well-supplied library of books and periodicals to be used for the entire duration of the course (this component of the program will not be mentioned in the following sections, but its ongoing presence should be assumed). This activity will be structured along four research strands of equal weight: a) film history, theory, criticism, and curatorship; b) filmmaking in all its aspects, from budgeting to scriptwriting and cinematography, from set and sound design to acting, costumes, and post-production; c) moving image technology including, but not limited to, cameras, sound recording, sound and colour grading, projectors and other exhibition tools; and d) film conservation, preservation, and duplication. It is of critical importance that the four components be organically blended: none of them is to be pursued to the detriment of the others.

It should also be noted that students will not study film theory and history in a vacuum. By virtue of their personal backgrounds, they will necessarily relate to the social and cultural contexts they come from. Lectures, readings, and activities will be informed by the memory of both high- and low-brow incarnations of audiovisual ecosystems, ranging from social media, video games, and streaming platforms to film festivals, art gallery installations, experiments in virtual reality, and image processing by means of artificial intelligence. The live performance of music, theatre, dance, poetry, and other readings—together with the study of other forms of aesthetic expression such as painting, sculpture, and architecture—will be encouraged inside and outside the classroom, and promoted through dedicated events. For their mid-term exam, students will draft a narrative text of 1,000 words (its theme will be previously discussed and agreed upon with the instructors) to be defended in a public session; from that moment, on a bi-monthly or quarterly basis, the same text will be resubmitted in shorter versions of 500, 250, and 100 words, culminating in a final

paper of 25 words. This text is very important, as it will serve as the foundation for a personal project to be developed through all activities to come.

Year Two: The Year of Concealment

The haiku-like project description that is part of the first year's final exam sets the stage for its follow-up, a curriculum characterized by the exposure to analogue moving images and recorded sounds in highly fragmented form. The voluntary withdrawal from access to audiovisual media remains in place, but is tempered by daily classroom sessions in which the students are shown randomly chosen films, projected with a special masking device that reveals only a small portion of the image. Its position changes according to unpredictable patterns, and at irregular intervals. The exposure will be gradually increased throughout the year, each time with a different film. In the last viewing session, the same section of the frame remains visible for the entire running time of the chosen work. The films will be narrative and non-auteurist in content, style, and technique, to discourage easy recognition of the excerpts and differentiate the exercise from a mere quiz-like game.

The opposite learning curve in the discipline of “close viewing” is applied to the “close listening” to recorded sound: in separate sessions held on a daily basis, two other films—also picked at random each week—are “shown” by making audible only the dialogue, sound effects and music, both jointly and separately. In each consecutive session the sound effects, dialogue, and music are progressively shortened until the last week of classes, when scattered one-minute soundbites are made audible to the attendees. For the mid-term exam, students are asked to identify a feature-length film shown in a combination of sound and image snippets as they were exhibited in the preceding months. As a final test, they are given a group of similarly incomplete image and sound extracts, which they are invited to arrange in a logical sequential order. The word “test” is to be understood as an evaluation only in a heavily mediated sense of the term: students will not pass or fail, but they will be required to provide a cogent justification for the outcome and significance of their reconstruction.

Meanwhile, a preliminary storyboard for a fictional or non-narrative film based on the sentence created at the end of the previous year will be drafted in no more than one drawing for each noun, verb, or adjective used in the text. Striving for necessity and seeking what is essential will be the students' core assignment. The storyboard will be defended in front of the school's instructors, who will act in this case as the imaginary producers of a film to be made.

Year Three: The Year of Perception

It is now time to get acquainted with film as an object and its physical characteristics. At the beginning of the third year, students will be allowed to “see” sensitized motion picture stock by holding it in their hands as short and disconnected strips of 35mm negative, with the opening and closing credits removed so as to prevent their easy authentication (its accidental or conscious achievement is irrelevant per se, but may negatively affect an unbiased scrutiny of the artifacts). The number of titles, their length, and the nature of the work assigned for close analysis are left to the discretion

of instructors, provided that only one film at a time is given to each participant. A separate set of strips will be handed over to each student for the purpose of exposing them to the natural elements, therefore accelerating their physical decay. Their effects will be studied and discussed in periodically held special sessions.

The amount of time allotted to each exercise also varies, depending on the total running time of the film and its complexity, but it is expected that during the first semester the examination of the fragments will take a minimum of one week but no more than one month. No viewing device will be used in the course of the year, other than a magnifying lens and a film inspection table with manual rewinds. By the end of each research cycle, students will be expected to arrange the 35mm strips in a plausible chronological order; to give each film a working title; and to draft a narrative report summarizing its overarching structure and aesthetic vision.

The formulation of hypotheses about the title of the film or its author is purely optional, as this is not the main goal of the third year in the program. For this reason, instructors will be encouraged to renounce the use of canonical titles. In the second semester, each inspection cycle will be held with miscellaneous shots from two different films of similar look, made in the same period, with identical aspect ratios and type of soundtrack (if applicable), with the goal of reconstructing both to the best of the students' ability, without the aid of any viewing or projection equipment. For the final exam, the working titles of all the films examined at this time will be listed according to their presumed year of production, along with a research paper outlining the rationale of the proposed chronological sequence. During this year, students will not be allowed to show the film clips to each other, but will be encouraged to communicate about their findings in oral or written form.

There will also be a practicum exam in which participants are asked to reassemble a five-minute sequence, presented to them as bits and pieces of 35mm positive stock. The sequence to be reconstructed will be one and the same for all students. All the various versions thus compiled will be compared in the classroom with the aid of multiple film inspection benches and discussed with the school's faculty. These will be the first and only artificial moving images actually viewed by the students in complete form—albeit as objects only—within the first three years of the program.

Year Four: The Year of Craft

Moving image carriers and apparatuses are historically dependent variables, subject to malfunction, decay, and obsolescence; knowing how they are made, operated, and repaired when necessary is the goal of the next two instalments in the program. Their implementation is predicated upon the awareness that shifting demands in the audiovisual marketplace will eventually lead to a complete stop in the production of analogue film. The fourth year will be therefore spent on manufacturing motion picture stock in a dedicated laboratory adjacent to the classroom. The first semester is divided into six parallel strands, beginning with basic courses in optics and chemistry, and the manufacture of 35mm film base from a set of organic chemicals provided to the students. The stability, transparency, and tensile strength of the base will be tested in collaboration with a team of technicians and scientists recruited as

guest faculty members for this occasion. The second strand is devoted to the making of photographic emulsion and developers. Contrary to common practice in the photo-chemical industry, however, the emulsion will be obtained and processed without recourse to animal remains and chemicals that are harmful to the environment; for instance, macroalgae or other materials may be used instead.⁵

For the third module, students will perforate the freshly made stock with various kinds of manual and semi-automatic equipment provided by the school. In the first three modules, students will work as a single team; each participant will be required to personally supervise every phase of the process, according to working shifts previously discussed with faculty members. The fourth module entails the drafting of a project for a small, non-polluting conservation facility where the films manufactured at the school will be kept for long-term storage under controlled levels of temperature and relative humidity.

Sound and applied colour are the themes of the fifth and sixth research strand. Each student will learn how to make a variable area optical soundtrack, and acquire the basic skills involved in tinting, toning, hand-colouring, and colour filtering techniques for motion picture film, bringing the first semester to its end. In the second semester, with the freshly made 35mm film stock at their disposal, participants will take their final exam by creating their own film with a camera and sound equipment, also provided by the school: its subject matter will be based on the previously drafted one-sentence text and its storyboard.

After shooting, students will process the resulting camera negative and a 35mm projection print, in both cases with the stock they have manufactured during the first semester. In doing so, if appropriate, they will personally apply the tinting, toning, hand-colouring, or other colour techniques to their film, as well as a synchronized optical soundtrack. They will have to wait another year, however, before seeing it on the big screen.

Year Five: The Year of the Machine

The entire fifth year of the program will be focused on the construction and operation of film projection equipment. In the first semester, students will learn how to build, disassemble, and reassemble two pieces of apparatus: first a 16mm projector, then its 35mm equivalent, both chosen by instructors from a range of models manufactured before 1980 (the reason for the chronological threshold is that the equipment should exclusively consist of mechanical and electrical parts). The learning process will also involve the installation and operation of analogue sound equipment for the projection of variable area and variable density soundtracks. For the mid-term exam, each student will be asked to assemble a projector from an assortment of scattered pieces. During this period, readings and classroom discussions of technical manuals on manufacturing film projectors and operating them will take precedence over the other three strands described in the first year's curriculum.

The second semester consists of a personalized introductory course on film projection. The prints used in the training sessions will be the very films made by the students in the previous year, with each student using a projection print made by an-

other participant in the course. The final exam is divided into two parts: in the first, all students will work as a team and install from scratch a film projector and sound system in an auditorium, with SMPTE picture and sound loops for pre-screening tests; in the second part, they will finally project their own film, in the presence of all other students and faculty members.

Upon completion of the exams, the self-imposed embargo on access to artificial moving images and recorded sounds will be permanently lifted, as spectatorship cannot exist without their perception. From now on, students shall be free to use all kinds of playback equipment without any further restriction, both in the classroom and in their personal lives, unless otherwise instructed in the two remaining school years.

Year Six: The Year of Spectatorship

The experience of cinema as a theatrical event is the theme of the sixth year in the program, articulated into monthly or weekly modules. For each of them, the instructor selects a feature-length or short film to be screened without opening and closing credits.

Fragmentation fosters reconstruction. In the first session, the work is presented in the form of complete but scattered shots exhibited in random order, with no sound, and later discussed in one or more plenary sessions. The same film is subsequently shown in the same way, but with sound only (or with the live performance of casually assorted music themes, if the film is silent), then with a combination of unassembled images and sounds (for silent films, musicians may perform the music as an improvised suite of motifs or arias). In the fourth instalment of each module, the film is projected in its entirety but backwards—from the end to the beginning—without sound, thereby compelling students to focus upon non-narrative aspects of the work; in the fifth, the complete soundtrack is played (the recording of a live performance may be used for silent films) with no accompanying moving images. At the end of each teaching module, the film is projected once more as a complete work, with the inclusion of opening and closing credits. Classroom discussions—again, in one or more sessions—follow each phase in the process.

The selection of films will be thoroughly international in scope. Films made in a language different from the mother tongue of the student body will be shown with their original sound, without subtitles or dubbing. Additional screenings with subtitles or in dubbed versions will be organized on a case-by-case basis, with the possible addition of standalone teaching sessions on dubbing and subtitling practices and techniques. For the mid-term exam, each student will be given a copy of the same unassembled short film to be edited in a logical order, as in Year Three, but with the aid of viewing or projection apparatus. Again, all the edited versions will be compared in one or more screenings, followed by collective appraisals of each iteration.

At the end of the year, a complete film with no opening or closing credits will be projected, and each participant will be asked to deliver a one-hour evaluation of the exhibited work in the presence of students and instructors.

Year Seven: The Year of the Show

The program finds its fulfilment in a comprehensive process of design, preparation, and implementation of a one-week film retrospective (each program not exceeding two hours in length), without limitation on the media, formats, and number of titles shown, provided that at least one title per day is shown on a photochemical carrier; the students' inexperience in handling non-photochemical carriers will be addressed by specialized staff hired for the occasion.

In collaboration with the other participants, each student will personally execute on a rotational basis all the roles involved in the organization of the film retrospective, including the selection of the works to be projected, the procurement of screening material from distribution or archival sources, and the negotiation of financial terms for their one-time exhibition; the inspection of film elements; the writing of program notes and their reproduction in a printed and online festival catalogue; management of the theatre where the screenings are to be held, also taking into account possible improvements to its interior design, acoustics, and atmosphere; public announcements of the film series; the actual projection of all the films, one of which will be held on a portable device in an open-air venue; and a brief live introduction to each program in front of a paying audience, tailored to what the community of spectators anticipates to see and hear.

Consequently, a key aspect of the exhibition programs is that their structure and content must be strictly site-specific: rather than working in a non-existent intellectual abstraction, the curator has the duty to consider the geographic, cultural, and socio-economic environment where the film series is to be screened, including audiences' profiles and expectations. In a similar vein, students are responsible for drafting an actual or imaginary collection policy aimed at the long-term preservation of the exhibited films in a museum or archival context, compatible with the physical and climatic conditions of the pertinent territory. Additional tasks may include the training of volunteer or paid performers of music for silent films in dedicated masterclasses.

The instructors' team will only play an advisory role in the process, which constitutes a *de facto* practicum doctoral dissertation. While each participant is required to cover all roles in partnership with the student body as a whole, all of them will exercise the role of project managers and curators for the one-week program (one for each student), whose outcome will be discussed as a narrative report in the form of an essay to be submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed or independent journal. Students who have successfully completed the film program will have the option to present it as a touring show in other venues under the aegis of the organizing institution. They may also be selected as mentors or instructors for the next cycle of the school, either as permanent staff or on an occasional basis.

Year Zero: A Pilot Program

Under the parameters outlined above, students are free to tailor their own education and cultural interests to their personal taste: no limitation whatsoever will be applied to their reading lists or to the nature of the film they will choose to make. Admis-

sion criteria include neither a particular background nor previous experience in the field, but priority will be given to candidates showing proficiency in writing, public speech, and manual labour, both individually and in collective modes, as well as a technical problem-solving attitude. While a letter of motivation may be required for the selection process, the very willingness to formally accept the course's admittedly demanding rules of engagement and readiness to champion them constitutes in and of itself sufficient proof of the candidate's suitability to the school.

The syllabus may also be reconfigured as a one-year pilot program where the basic principles applied in each of the seven years (a lengthy period indeed, but necessary to an authentically in-depth learning of an arduous and multifaceted discipline, more so than what is warranted by existing courses) are highlighted and implemented in a simpler format. This abridged variant is not to be construed as a potential substitute for the full curriculum, but should be presented instead as evidence that its seemingly idealistic concept can actually find its embodiment in a private or public institution endowed with the appropriate film collection, curatorial personnel, technical infrastructure, and openness to imagine a different world.

Either way, it must be emphasized that employment in a film collecting institution is not the primary driving force behind the program's philosophy and organizing principles. Job placement is, of course, a desirable goal; the main impulse to join the project should, however, be quintessentially vocational in nature. The term "vocational" is envisioned here as a back-engineering of Max Weber's concept of professional *Beruf* ("calling"). In aspirational terms, honing practical skills and developing students' attention, perception, and personal commitment (toward film materials and the world at large) are strictly interconnected in the Obscure Cinema program, nourishing each other through "the practice of systematic self-control in pursuing constant goals or purposes" (Barbalet 2000, 329) deliberately reframed here in direct resistance to the ethics of capitalism.

Notes

¹ A preliminary sketch of the concepts discussed here was presented under the title "The Lindgren Manifesto, Part 13: A Modest Utopia on the Story of Cinema, Followed by its Practical Application," the keynote speech for "All the World's Montage: From Cine-Eye to Cinematics," a conference in honour of Yuri Tsivian hosted at the Logan Center for the Arts, University of Chicago, on May 12, 2018.

² It is worth noting that the early manifestations of education in film preservation did not necessarily follow the *modus operandi* of filmmaking academies and film production courses within and outside universities in the last quarter of the twentieth century. This program proposes a transversal approach to the ethics of film culture, where making moving images and foreseeing their future preservation are both key constituents of an ecumenical view of media awareness.

³ For a discussion of the working hypotheses underlying this project, see the dialogue between myself and Jurij Meden (Cherchi Usai and Meden 2023, 112). My gratitude goes to Meden, Curator and Head of Film Exhibitions at the Österreichisches Filmmuseum in Vienna, for his review and comments to earlier drafts of this essay.

⁴ In the context of the proposed school, an “academic year” corresponds to a calendar year, foregoing the customary schedule followed in colleges and universities with the intention of avoiding the detrimental effects of frequent interruptions in the workflow. Students live and work in a dedicated campus where vacation time is allocated by the same standards used in a non-academic workplace. It is the students’ responsibility to ensure that their daily activities, jobs, travels, and leisure time are not in conflict with the methods and requirements of the program. No monitoring whatsoever will be exercised in this respect, thus making participants accountable only to themselves in their compliance to the behavioural principles described here.

⁵ At the time of writing, there is no known chemically stable *and* commercially viable alternative to animal-based gelatin for photochemical media. Independent research has shown, however, interesting possibilities for the use of non-polluting agents in the production of still and moving image works through analogue photographic methods. Dutch artist Esther Urlus has developed alternative methods for the manufacture of silver gelatin emulsion, as well as film developers involving the use of horse urine. See <https://estherurlus.hotglue.me/research>. Julia Parks also made a short film on 16mm stock, *BBC Bladderwrack* (2018), made and developed with a mixture of seaweed, washing soda and vitamin C. See <https://juliaparks.co.uk/bbc-bladder-wrack/> and an interview with the filmmaker (Parks 2021). The Sustainable Darkroom project of the London Alternative Photography Collective also used seaweed as film. See <http://www.londonaltphoto.com/sustainable-darkroom-about>. A recipe for developing motion picture film stock with macroalgae is reproduced in King (2021). For a discussion of sustainable techniques in photographic media, see Melody Jue, “Holding Sway: Sustainability and the Photomedia of Seaweeds,” a lecture delivered at “The (Un)bearable Lightness of Media: Critical Approaches to ‘Sustainability’ in Film and Audiovisual Production, Circulation and Preservation,” the 29th International Film and Media Studies Conference in Udine, Italy, on November 3, 2022, <https://ff2022.filmforumfestival.it/keynotes/melody-jue>. All websites listed here were accessed on December 19, 2023.

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ARCHIVES IN THE CLASSROOM

Teaching ‘The Film Archive’ at Yale University

Brian Meacham

When I arrived at the Yale Film Archive in 2013—then known as the Yale Film Study Center—to take the Archive and Special Collections Manager job, teaching was neither in the position description nor on my mind. In my first year in the position, I set to work getting a handle on the collection, inspecting unidentified film elements, and selecting titles to propose for grant-funded preservation. I designed a database to collect data on our holdings, devised guidelines for access, and began reaching out to partners on campus to collaborate on film-related projects. I gave a lecture about the material history of film to the annual introductory film class and hired an undergraduate student to help as a cataloguing assistant, but otherwise, I did not have extensive interactions with Yale undergraduate or graduate students. I did, however, work closely with faculty members in the Film and Media Studies Program, many of whom had long histories of building the collection and supporting the institution and vested interests in how the film collection was being shaped.

By the end of my first year, I was approached by faculty members Charles Musser and John MacKay, who together encouraged me to consider teaching a graduate course on the film archive. The goals of the course would be to provide students with a stronger background in the material history of film and an opportunity to interact with the archive. Providing such a course would also help to connect the Film and Media Studies Program and the Film Archive more closely. I agreed to propose a syllabus, and it was decided that the first iteration of the course—creatively named FILM 604: “The Film Archive”—would take place in the spring of 2016. At the time, it was also proposed that I teach the course every other year, providing an opportunity for every cohort of graduate students to take the course in one of their first two years in the program.

As I began planning the course, I thought back to my own time as a student at the L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation at George Eastman Museum in Rochester, New York. I studied there in 2005–06 and appreciated the multi-pronged approach to teaching film history and the history of film archives. I enjoyed gaining practical experience through the school's rotation system, where students work closely with different departments' staff for a week at a time. While the Yale Film Archive is tiny in comparison to the George Eastman Museum, and I only had a single thirteen-week semester to work with, I modelled my course in part on an abbreviated Selznick School curriculum, augmented with lessons I had learned from my time at the Academy Film Archive in Los Angeles, where I worked for seven years before coming to Yale.

I open the syllabus with the following statement: "The study of film is supported, oftentimes invisibly, by the work of film archives around the world. How do archives acquire, conserve, house, and share films? What aspects of the history of film production and filmmaking have presented challenges to film's long-term viability? How is the rise of digital technology affecting the creation, distribution, and preservation of film?" The course is designed to explore these and many other questions, with the aim of demystifying archives and archival work. I also hope to connect the concrete history of film technology and film archives with the more abstract idea of "films" in all the ways students can access them today, making clear that without archives, there would be no films to study. The scope of the course, which has remained roughly the same through its fifth iteration in the spring of 2024, includes lectures, discussions, written exercises, small creative projects, screenings, and guest lectures from experts in the field. During the first half of the class, students also participate in a practicum that provides them with hands-on experience inspecting, identifying, repairing, and researching their own 16mm short film print.

The first part of the class provides a brief overview of the history of film technology, focusing on film stocks, sound formats, aspect ratios, and colour technologies. Readings include selections from Paolo Cherchi Usai's *Silent Cinema* (2019), various articles from *The Moving Image* and *Journal of Film Preservation*, and chapters from Anthony Slide's *Nitrate Won't Wait* (1992) and the National Film Preservation Foundation's *The Film Preservation Guide* (2004). Next, we investigate film archives, looking at their history, mission, activities, and collection policies. Then, we explore the concepts of conservation, preservation, restoration, and recreation, pairing case study readings with 35mm and 16mm screenings of titles discussed, including *The Emperor Jones* (Dudley Murphy, 1933) and films from the Tyler, Texas Black Film Collection. Students are assigned exercises on film programming, in which they conceive and source materials for a hypothetical film series, and digital issues, for which they select a recent academic article covering the role of digital technology in film preservation and present an analysis to the class. Taking advantage of our proximity to New York City, I also ask each student to research and present a profile of an area repertory cinema. Over the years, I have also invited guest archivists, distributors, and filmmakers, including Oscar Becher of Vinegar Syndrome, John Klacsmann of Anthology Film Archives, Jake Perlin of Cinema Conservancy, and Katie Trainor of

the Museum of Modern Art, to discuss their work preserving and sharing archival film.

Throughout the academic year, the Yale Film Archive presents weekly screenings, all of which I encourage students to attend and some of which I make required screenings for the course. The first required screening is always an archival print from our collection, and students are asked to consciously watch the print rather than the film, paying attention to colour, sound, aspect ratio, material damage, and reel changes. While the prints are always worthy of a public screening, I select them specifically because they are not perfect and bear evidence of a long screening life, so the students have plenty to observe and document.

The heart of the course is the practicum, in which each student selects a single-reel 16mm short film of their choosing, which they source from eBay with a provided budget, and which is then added to the Yale Film Archive collection at the conclusion of the class. While the Yale Film Archive collection holds more than enough un-inspected materials for students to choose from, I prefer to let students wade through the sea of 16mm offerings on eBay: first, so they might seek out a film that fits better within their research interests, and second, because such a search provides a helpful illustration of the wide array of material available on the collectors' market, as well as a sobering illustration of the scourge of colour fading. In order to ensure that the selected films generally fall within our collection policy, I place limits on the types of titles students select. Many prints listed on eBay have qualities or characteristics I specifically prohibit in the assignment, including television shows, sporting events, incomplete prints, prints with colour fading, and items that are advertised as suffering from vinegar syndrome. Despite these restrictions, year after year, every student manages to find something within their fifty-dollar budget, and often considerably more affordable. One student's low-cost title ends up freeing up funding for the splurge necessary to take home another student's pricier film of choice. Within the first week of class, each student provides me with a list of three titles whose auctions are ending soon, and I place the bids necessary to win one print for each student. The Yale Film Archive collection is richer thanks to these student archivist acquisitions, which include an educational film on "stranger danger," Joris Ivens' city symphony *Regen* (1929), documentary shorts produced by the National Film Board of Canada, and a Technicolor industrial film discovered to have been shot by famed cinematographer Jack Cardiff.

Once the print arrives, each student works with me one hour per week outside of class time, learning one-on-one how to inspect, identify, repair, and catalogue their print. They learn how to operate a Steenbeck, thread up a small-gauge scanner, transfer the film, and make frame enlargements. Finally, each student writes film notes and prepares an introduction for their selected film. The project culminates in a screening called "Class Pictures," where each film is screened for the public as part of our "Treasures from the Yale Film Archive" series, with an introduction by the student. The size of the class is limited by the demands of the practicum; because of the extensive time needed outside of the class meetings, I typically limit the course to six or seven fully enrolled students participating in the print project, while additional

students are welcome to audit the course.

With readings, lectures, discussions, assignments, screenings, guests, and the practicum, the course still does not come close to the depth of the Selznick School lectures and hands-on rotations in the various departments of the George Eastman Museum. Nor does it provide enough time for a student to master the techniques and approaches I absorbed while working as a film preservationist at the Academy Film Archive. But it does provide a student—who may never have even touched a film print before embarking on six or more years of graduate work in film studies—the opportunity to learn about the material and technical history of film and gain experience handling film prints. As digital technology permeates all aspects of film production, distribution, and preservation, I value the opportunity to give the next generation of scholars and curators the chance to learn about the work of film preservation and engage with the film object itself.

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Ephemeral Media: Countering Transience through Alternative and Participatory (Meta-)Archiving

Marina Hassapopoulou

We cannot study or teach film and other media without an awareness of their precarious materiality—including their potential fragility and ephemerality, and the ever-present danger of obsolescence. Encouraging students to become actively involved in diverse forms of variable media preservation and digital historiography is one of the most effective ways to directly make them aware of the transient nature of media technologies we often take for granted and, furthermore, of the impact this ephemerality has on the shaping of often exclusionary or limiting media histories. Making new intellectual and practical contributions to film and media studies is a central objective in both my research and my praxis-oriented pedagogy. Creating new resources to accompany obscure or under-documented areas of media historiography, for instance, should not be seen as secondary to the research but, rather, an essential component of the process of covering new epistemological ground. My teaching practice, like my research, overtly acknowledges the political, economic, and institutional implications of the practical issues of access, preservation, and circulation of ephemeral and site-specific media. How can we teach media histories when the objects of study are disappearing or already obsolete? What are the pedagogical implications of teaching the histories of transient media when opportunities for students to experience these media are either limited or non-existent?

In the context of teaching film and media, the absence of the primary texts themselves—for reasons including a lack of archiving and preservation efforts, material disintegration, state censorship, and colonialism—can productively stimulate an anachronistic recreation of their contexts as a process of memorialization and historiography that is not materially focused. In other words, modes of subjective, speculative, and fragmentary media historiography and archaeology can be generative in terms of not only producing new critical contexts but also stimulating new questions about what it means to study and narrativize the past.

In tracing, for instance, multiple trajectories for cinema's pasts—and, consequently, cinema's futures—we must make room for new epistemological discoveries, and for productive discontinuities alongside unexpected overlaps. Thomas Elsaesser notes that sometimes gaps in our understanding of the past are seen as gaps in our knowledge, but “one would be careful not simply to fill in the blanks with new ‘facts’ before considering that a ‘missing link’ may well have its own meaning—as a gap” (2004, 104). As Paolo Cherchi Usai has famously asserted:

Cinema history is born out of an absence. Since, if all moving images were present in their original state, there would be no history of cinema; history can only explain why these images have disappeared, and their hypothetical value in the cultural memory of an epoch. (1988, 230)

Instead of apocalyptic and irreversible, the so-called *death of cinema*—whether in terms of the disappearance of material filmic objects or of original conditions of exhibition and reception—can conversely be considered as generative for new modes of historiography and media archaeology.¹

The burden of conclusive contextualization for objects of study can be lessened by the acknowledgment that there is value in our own analytical excavation of ephemeral and forgotten media, as a mnemonic placeholder for something that once was. The productive aspect of this acknowledgement is that our own subjectivity can play a part in ushering a new era of socially connected and interpersonal historiography that accounts for historical and material distance to create new paradigms of variable media analysis. This is all to say that a reflexive approach to issues of media access and preservation should be part of historical research and should constitute a more transparent and self-reflexive research methodology. Rather than using new technologies to smooth over the gaps of the past and attempt to answer unanswerable questions, we should adopt a more critical stance toward the tools we use to access and remediate audiovisual materials.

In addition to a reflexive approach toward the tools and interfaces we use to access and document older media or their traces, we should additionally approach media objects as self-contained *anarchives* that, in the Foucauldian sense, transcend conventional definitions and official functions of the archive and, instead, engage in “anarcheological” work (Zielinski and Winthrop-Young 2015, 121). Anarchives encompass variable possibilities rather than singular *originals* and hierarchical indexes: varying materialities (including software and hardware), multiple histories, different memories, and diverse sociocultural approaches.

To put theory into practice, the rest of this article describes specific collaborative, amateur, and DIY initiatives for accessing, archiving, and remediating nearly obsolete complex media and their fragmented histories that I have undertaken with my students. In particular, some main projects related to the histories and traditions of interactive cinema—including Interactive Media Archive: Collaborative Multimedia Resource, InterArchive: Digital Repository of Older New Media and More, and Interactive Media Exhibition—will be discussed as new models of participatory

media archaeology, collaborative historiography, and archival remix.²

Because most pre-digital and multisensory forms of interactive cinema were not deemed historically important or were dismissed as gimmicky—or, as in the case of many avant-garde examples, were intended to be short-lived—there is, retrospectively, a significant lack of documentation, archival practices, conservation, and even basic information about their actual content. Therefore, part of my research and pedagogy inevitably resembles a scavenger hunt for these *old(er) new media* forms. In my book, *Interactive Cinema: The Ambiguous Ethics of Media Participation* (Hassapopoulou 2024), I reflect on the difficulties of gaining access to such works and the function of electronic traces in ephemeral complex media historiography. I explore various cinematic practices that work to transform what is often seen as a primarily receptive activity into a participatory, multimedia experience, and particularly a range of largely transient and site-specific projects that consciously assimilate viewers into their production.

Media ephemerality was often regarded by artists as an inevitable and even welcome by-product of site-specific happenings (1950s and later), expanded cinema experiments, early computer films (1960s and later), and early disc- and net-based interactive media art (1990s and early 2000s). Compounded by the scarcity in documentation, archiving initiatives, and software and hardware preservation noted above, this ephemerality has created significant deficits in our collective memory of these important works. How can we study and teach these ephemeral media when opportunities to (re)experience them are scarce or simply non-existent? My research and pedagogy are responsive to these issues of physical access and material, mnemonic, and virtual preservation, and develop hybrid adaptable methodologies that take into consideration the instability of a time-based media object's variable reception contexts, its evanescence, and its ever-changing form.

Over a decade ago, I launched the Interactive Media Archive, which has since grown into a repository and incubator of student projects dedicated to ephemeral and site-specific media and their often-neglected histories. The website began by featuring student-produced analyses and documentation of a wide range of interactive media in order to supplement the theoretical discourse on interactivity and media participation with more subjective, audience-oriented, and experiential perspectives. This amateur, DIY, makeshift *archival* process often involves taking screenshots as documentation, recording playthroughs and reaction videos, creating videographic analyses, piecing together fragmentary digital traces, creating low-budget emulators, and recreating the social, cultural, and political histories of the media in question. These makeshift resources are akin to what Abigail De Kosnik calls “rogue archives” whose content “would never likely be contained in a traditional memory institution” (2016, 3). De Kosnik even goes as far as to predict that “the repertoire of [amateur and ad hoc] digital archive building that has been pioneered over the past few decades will likely outlast any actual archives that have been built” (7). The process of compiling new repositories is thus more reflexive and meta-archival than *professional*, as it is not overly focused on an impossibly *authentic* reproduction or material conservation of primary media but, rather, places second-hand subjective encounters with the

traces of historical artifacts at the forefront. Preservation, in broader terms here, takes the form of memorialization through analysis and fragmentary recontextualization of the materials that remain.

As an example of the type of student work included in the Interactive Media Archive, I will mention the media archaeology projects that are part of my “Interactive Cinema and New Media” course, which is offered both as an advanced undergraduate seminar and a graduate seminar.³ These projects enable students to have hands-on interaction with older modes of digital participatory cinema that are mainly in the form of CD- and DVD-ROMs or their emulators. Thanks to the Cinema Studies department’s embedded Moving Image Archiving and Preservation (MIAP) master’s program, I have been fortunate to work with MIAP alumni and technicians on preserving and emulating our complex media collection that contains a wide range of early disc-based forms of interactive media arts. Students access the media collection on site to reflexively analyze the works, paying special attention to the affordances and limitations of accessing variable media through newer hardware and software (including emulators).⁴ The inevitable glitches and lags that students encounter in this media archaeology assignment—normally seen as annoyances that prevent seamless content interaction—are instead reframed as instrumental to how we perceive mediated encounters with the past. Students thus experientially grapple with issues of digital transience and actively propose ways in which media archaeology can function as a creative sandbox of re-mediation and remixing of *original* content in new ways.

The media archaeology assignment is a productive way for students to realize that the digital is not a singular, monolithic period in media-making history, and that, in actuality, there are multiple phases of what can be categorized as electronic and digital media technology. By exploring various historical examples of cinematic interactivity, students become aware that each of the phases of so-called digital evolution has its own particularities that are connected to the specificity of the software, hardware, and other materially specific aspects. Therefore, this activity serves to highlight that, contrary to popular assumption, the *digital* is not immaterial and disembodied. Rather, anything digital is always tied to the apparatuses that *immaterialize* it and, consequently, those apparatuses—whether analogue or other—are always at the mercy of temporal progression, whether that means material disintegration over time or updates in hardware or software that result in past loss.

Collectively, the media archaeology projects have so far covered a diverse spectrum of interactive disc-based artworks from the 1990s and early 2000s, as well as a unique cross-cultural range spanning from Europe and the Balkans, to Asia, the U.S., and Australia. These projects collectively provide a much more nuanced and layered impression of *digital cinema* through an examination of some of its now almost neglected earlier phases, in addition to our study of other early electronic media, including computer films made between the 1960s and 1990s and early-2000s software-generated cinema in class. The assignment not only experientially teaches students what it means to conduct media-archaeological study, but it also generates new content—related to precarious media—that serves as a form of memorialization

and experimental historiography. By excavating hidden layers and alternative paths of media traditions, the resulting student projects exemplify Erkki Huhtamo's notion of media-archaeological art as "a form of spatialized, conversational 'historical writing,' as a way of maintaining a dialogue with the technological past" (1995).

In the Fall 2024 semester, the media archaeology project culminated in a larger curatorial project that coincided with the book celebration events for *Interactive Cinema* in November 2024. For the curatorial project, students virtually and physically curated an Interactive Media Exhibition featuring some of the ephemeral CD- and DVD-ROM works covered in the book and beyond. As a class, we all collectively worked on aspects of the exhibition, including the website, catalogue, design, organization, and artist and participant interviews. Since we were working with a very low budget and other limitations, the curatorial project has productively challenged students to creatively come up with DIY and low-budget, low-tech curatorial models that have the potential of providing more democratized—or bottom-up participatory—and sustainable alternatives to more traditional institutional models of media curation and archiving. The curatorial project has provided an opportunity to put into practice Garnet Hertz and Jussi Parikka's notion of *zombie media*—forgotten and repressed media that come back to life in new forms and through new contexts and interfaces. According to Hertz and Parikka, zombie media have the capacity to circuit bend media archaeology into an art method that not only excavates the past, but also actively reassembles the past into new and forward-moving work that challenges the political economy of technology and runs counter to the "planned obsolescence" of consumer culture by recycling, hacking, and repurposing older media forms (2012, 425).

Over the years, and with an increasing number of online visitors from several parts of the world, the Interactive Media Archive has expanded into a non-traditional, multi-authored, and multi-cultural research platform. The site now includes teaching resources, final student projects, collaborative class assignments, alternative modes of writing such as multisensory visualization projects with a teaching guide, and the aforementioned, ongoing media archaeology and curatorial projects.⁵

Students' intellectual and material labour is frequently undervalued within the traditional humanities and, arguably, even more exacerbated in large-scale digital humanities initiatives that often leave uncredited the labour students do behind the scenes. The ongoing projects and initiatives I discuss in this article aim to highlight the importance of student contributions to building new resources for research and creative development. By becoming content creators rather than only content consumers, students not only have a bigger stake in the expansion and critical interrogation of the fields they are studying but also help shape their future directions. Publishing and making student projects visible online through the Interactive Media Archive and the Interactive Media Exhibition websites validates their contributions to the production of new inquiry and innovative multimedia scholarship, and ensures it is archived and available for future reference and to inspire fellow students and educators. Some of my students and I also co-authored a chapter for *The Handbook of Remix Studies and Digital Humanities* titled "Hacking the Digital Humanities:

Critical Practice and DIY Pedagogy” (Hassapopoulou et al. 2021), featuring projects curated on the Interactive Media Archive. Collaborating with my students for this theory-practice chapter, as well as brainstorming together to produce an *extended* interactive augmented reality version of our writing, has resulted in what I hope is the first of many fruitful initiatives to co-produce new syntheses of pedagogy *and* research alongside, rather than distinct from, our students.

In conjunction with the Interactive Media Archive, my latest in-progress project is InterArchive, a digital repository and meta-archive of nearly obsolete media featured in my book, with contributions from artists’ archives and cultural institutions. While it does not feature student contributions yet, the site is meant to function as a pedagogical resource for teaching the histories of disappearing media, and it advocates for greater accessibility to collections related to the prehistory of the digital humanities. In my courses on interactive media, I use InterArchive to teach about issues of media access and preservation, as well as to highlight the benefits of DIY *memory archives* as alternatives or complements to institutional big-budget archival projects and conservation. The InterArchive site serves the dual purpose of preserving the memory, history, and meta-media of often neglected ephemeral works, and of reflexively creating a repository that proposes several approaches to writing about—and capturing—transient media encounters. Furthermore, I provide suggestions for media preservation and remediation practices that attempt to counter the ephemerality of digital work, and some practical recommendations for ethically sharing content containing copyrighted material. The Interactive Media Archive and the InterArchive both reflect on and propose different ways of conducting (meta)archival work in precarious digital environments with precarious media and tools.

The above-mentioned rogue anarchives’ makeshift, open-ended, and low-budget means of collectively creating, documenting, curating, and analyzing ephemeral media is appropriate, given the informal and ad hoc conditions through which many of the featured media archaeology projects came to exist in the first place. These rogue anarchives are meant to inspire students and fellow educators to think beyond institutional and academic boxes. Through amateur, collaborative, and experimental modes of knowledge production, students can have an active stake in the future development of their fields of study, and even provide viable alternatives to institutional paradigms of archival creation and cultural preservation.⁶

Notes

¹ For a discussion of one of the possible resurrections of cinema, in this case in/through the gallery, see Erika Balsom (2009).

² You can visit these projects at <https://interactivemediaarchive.wordpress.com>, <https://interarchive.net>, and <https://interactivemediaexhibition.net/>, respectively.

³ You can review some of these projects at <https://interactivemediaarchive.wordpress.com/2024/10/19/media-archaeology-projects-updated-for-fall-2024/>.

⁴ Our former MIAP technician, Ethan Gates, details the beginning of the media archaeology initiative on his blog. See <https://patchbay.tech/blog/2017/09/29/class->

[room-access-to-interactive-dvds/](#).

⁵ You can view these resources at <https://interactivemediaarchive.wordpress.com/2020/12/11/online-teaching/>, <https://interactivemediaarchive.wordpress.com/visualizations/>, and <https://interactivemediaarchive.wordpress.com/2022/11/01/more-media-archeology-projects>. New additions are posted on the main page every semester. You can also view sample projects and writing at <https://marinahassap.wordpress.com/interactive-pedagogy/>.

⁶ The Interactive Media Archive has also inspired the creation of other resources that were designed to fill in gaps in existing histories, theories, and practices, including the Transformations online directory, which is focused on cross-pollinations between cinema, media studies, and digital humanities, and, most recently, Expressive AI, dedicated to the history of cinematic, activist, and civic engagement through creative experiments with artificial intelligence and computation. A growing initiative that I launched with students from my “Greek Weird Wave” courses is the Weird Wave Archive, which is the first English-language site dedicated to the study of contemporary Greek Cinema and other *weird wave* cinemas that emerged during times of sociopolitical crisis. It aims to serve as a resource for marginalized cinemas from various cross-cultural perspectives.

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Film Programming as Archival Research at the University of Leicester

David Christopher

There has been significant interest in film and media archival education among film scholars as of late. However, despite this interest, there has not been a corresponding rise in attention to the practical realities of pedagogy and instruction. Left unchecked, this oversight may stifle efforts to improve educational endeavours in this growing field. Thus, it is timely to explore strategies to activate student interest in archives and media preservation, bridging a gap between film and media education and the archival profession. In this regard, I find the research questions posed by the call for this special issue of *Synoptique* useful for structuring an inquiry into how, exactly, such gaps can be bridged: namely, how do educators actually teach media archives, what strategies and practices have they developed, and what actually happens in the classroom? In the following essay, I discuss a course I teach in the Department of Film Studies at the University of Leicester, HA1115: “Film and Art Installation.” This module was originally conceptualized as an addition to the curriculum for first-year students that could mutually satisfy the department’s previous connection to art history and the mandate to incorporate employability skills training into the curriculum.

In the course, student groups are expected to submit a proposal for some sort of cinematic installation or screening (other than a straight commercial model of exhibition for entertainment and admission receipts) based on an art-historical or social theme. Students then develop and present this event, and, finally, conclude by reflecting on the process of its realization. The module is designed to get students from film studies to work together on a project that will develop a range of skills that are not always addressed in university film courses (like vetting a location and negotiating the terms of its use) but which are nonetheless essential for the kinds of workplaces and careers many of the students will wish to pursue, a “unique selling point” that arts and humanities programs are increasingly required to integrate

into their recruitment marketing. As the module handbook informs students, these skillsets include “team-working, archival investigation, web design, proposal writing, public presentation, and self-reflection.” Cumulatively, these objectives indirectly call for the need for a form of archival research. For this purpose, I broadly take “archive” in the cultural studies sense to mean any collection of related materials from within a specified historical framework. These “archives” could be early twentieth-century Canadian films, 1970s American television commercials, or short-form online videos, for example.

In the three iterations of the module for which I have been responsible, enrolment has fluctuated relatively minimally between twelve students in 2022–23 (resulting in three groups of four students each), eight students in 2023–24 (two groups of four), and eleven students in the 2024–25 module (who were divided unevenly into three groups). The module runs in the second term of the academic year, from January to March, and includes four assessments, each worth 25 percent of the students’ grade, concluding with the event presentations in April (see Figure 1). In this essay, I reflect on the ways in which this module has been successful, but also in need of ongoing adjustments as it attempts to encourage students to undertake archival research. In addition, I proffer some summary notes and reflections on how the reading assigned in the module and integrated into the lecture presentations, taken almost exclusively from Peter Bosma’s *Film Programming: Curating for Cinemas, Festivals, and Archives* (2015), encourages and specifies the ways in which students might engage with different kinds of archival inquiry for their projects.

Weekly Module Outline:

Week	Topic	Reading	Assignment
Week 1:	Module Introduction and Outline, Group Assignment, Meetings Schedule, and Event Planning Template.	Peter Bosma – <i>Film Programming</i>: “Curating Film Archives,” pp. 82-93. - great examples of events	Attend/Participate Groups – Agreement Groups – Meetings Review E.P. Template
Week 2:	Film Art as Event, Event Planning, and Venues. Group Work: Project Proposal and Event Planning Template.	Peter Bosma – <i>Film Programming</i>: “Curating Film Theatres,” pp. 51-67. - venues	Attend/Participate Group Work: Project Proposal and Event Planning Template
Week 3:	Copyright Limitations and Screening Rights – Costs and Budget Planning. Group Work: Project Proposal, Event Planning Template, Budget Plan	Peter Bosma – <i>Film Programming</i>: “The Network of Intermediaries,” pp. 33-50. - copyright / costs	Attend/Participate Group Work: Project Proposal and Website Design
Week 4:	Website Design Plan. Group Work: Project Proposal, Event Planning Template, Budget Plan, Website Design	Peter Bosma – <i>Film Programming</i>: “Curating Film Festivals,” pp. 68-81. - website insights	Attend/Participate Group Work: Project Proposal, Event Planning Template, Website Design
Week 5:	Assignments Outlines and Review, Progress Reports, Group Work.	Peter Bosma – <i>Film Programming</i>: “Conclusion,” pp. 114-121. - summary film as art	Attend/Participate Group Work: Budget Plan and Website
Week 6:	Reading Week	n/a	n/a
Weeks 7 to 10:	Independent Group Work towards Assessments and Event Preparation	Archival materials necessary to properly research, realize, and reflect on your event	due: Week 7 Project Proposal due: Week 10 Project Website
Week 11: (Online Tutorial)	Transferable Skills, Project Log, Review and Progress Check.	Samples: resumes, cover letters, and project logs with reflection on Blackboard	Attend/Participate Project Log Discussion and WorkSheet
As scheduled in April (Weeks 12-15)	Event-Installation: Public Presentation	Review and rehearse your own notes and scripts for the event	Event-Installation: Public Presentation
Week 16:	Individual Project Log and Reflection	Review all readings, notes, logs, and scripts	due: Individual Project Log

GOOD LUCK, AND HAVE FUN!!

Figure 1: The schedule for the course.

As outlined in the handbook for the course, the purpose and function of the module is to give students an opportunity to design, plan, and realize a “Filmic Event” for an installation at one of three vetted locations, which include the University of Leicester’s library installation space, the Attenborough Arts Centre (which is adjacent to the university), and the University Film Theatre. In the past, students were not limited to these university-sponsored venues. We made the decision to limit their choices, however, after student groups in early iterations of the course pursued and vetted a number of commercial spaces in the city only to be met with disappointment that there was no funding available for venue rental fees. This parameter, however, did not evacuate the effort and experience of vetting spaces, as student groups were still required to negotiate properly with the university-sponsored venues for scheduling, facilities, risk management, and more. By significantly diminishing the task of “shopping” for a venue, we also eased the burden and workload to what might be more appropriately expected of first-level students.

Nevertheless, even in its more streamlined form, the module requires, and helps develop, the organizational skills required for the tasks associated with a parsimonious and focused archival investigation. As such, the module is designed to specifically address the following learning outcomes, as described in the module handbook: 1) identify and research relationships between film and art and use this to plan a proposed event, 2) develop numeracy skills through budget planning, 3) demonstrate digital skills by constructing a website, 4) develop and present a project that demonstrates an understanding of the relationship between film and art, and 5) reflect on and articulate motivations for, strengths in, and experiences with developing transferable skills. It is especially through the first and fourth of these that students are encouraged to engage with film and media archives as I have defined them above.

The first assessment that students have in the course is a 1,500-word event proposal, which requires significant research. In their groups, the students write a proposal for a non-profit “Film and Art” event or installation which will be exhibited to the public at one of the available venues at the end of the spring term. By “event” or “installation,” I clarify that the exhibit should contain elements of film (like screenings of films, material related to film history, video clips, documentary fragments, or even animated PowerPoint presentations), but that it is not limited to elements of film; it may also include elements of the visual arts (like art objects of any medium). At this stage, students are informed that they will be evaluated not just on their selections of an interesting theme and appropriate content, but also on the quality of their proposal, the way they market the event on their website, and the realization of the event itself.

Students are recommended to pick a theme first and then select films or other media objects that engage with that theme in different ways. When students begin this brainstorming process, they are encouraged to consider less popular forms of cinematic production, including art-house cinema, television commercials, industrial and educational films, and short-form online video from social media platforms like YouTube, Vine, or TikTok. Herein lies some of the most salient archival research

in which students engage. Students conduct internet searches in which we work together to experiment with keywords or keyword collocations in different search engines. These are considered as relevant in relation to three major categories: journalism (databases), scholarship, and general video. Although in a search engine such as Google, these come up somewhat randomly (and filtered by commercial interests), students are explicitly instructed to consider these categories as a way of organizing and categorizing the relevance of each “hit” to their larger theme or project. These can be further specified by using Google Scholar as a particular search engine, for example, or by filtering responses through the category options afforded by Google in the menu ribbon of the search returns, the first few of which usually include “Images,” “Videos,” and “News.” Wikipedia and IMDb are also usually among the top hits, often listing sources and further resources in their citations, which students are taught to track down.

One successful theme from recent years was modern-day migration in and to Leicester, which was chosen to coincide with the projects and presentations at the Leicester Museum and the Curve Theatre in 2022–23 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Ugandan Asian exodus. (This theme was somewhat awkwardly mandated for this iteration of the module course by the university bureaucracy to honour an industry partnership in the spirit of fostering employability, but how such a partnership would be realized had not been duly considered.) This one-off departmental partnership with the Curve Theatre returned some very creative student outputs and encouraged some excellent archival research, described below. Other examples of framing ideas provided to students include “effects of the internet,” “childhood memories,” “vengeance and treason,” “marriage and romance,” “journalism and truth,” and “advertising culture” (see Figure 2). To realize a properly diligent and representative survey of any of these thematic categories, students are expected to undertake some form of archival research.

some **theme** examples:

- migration/diaspora in/to Leicester
- effects of the internet
- childhood memories (Bosma - p. 58)
- vengeance and treason (Bosma - p. 58)
- marriage and romance
- fear and/or death
- aging and/or loneliness
- coming-of-age over the years
- genre anniversary: 50 Years of ...
- evolution of gender
- journalism and truth
- time or history in cinematic media
- cinema of ‘disturbance’ / cinema of ‘comfort’ (Bosma p. 63)
- advertising culture

(Group) Event Proposal – 1500 Words (25%):
By “event/installation,” we mean an exhibit that contains elements of film (i.e. screenings of films, material related to film history, video clips, documentary fragments, even animated governpoint presentations) and that might also include elements of the visual arts (i.e. art objects of any medium).

The best way to go about this is to **pick a theme** and choose a selection of films or other media artifacts that engage with this theme in different ways. However, remember that it is not just about picking a good theme and interesting content: you are being judged on the quality of your proposal, the way you market the event on your website, and the realization of the event itself.

Examples of such event projects include:

- a special screening event: introduction / screening – clips or feature / interactive activity – Q&A
- a lecture or presentation with video/cinematic accompaniment
- a charity fundraiser event with video/cinematic accompaniment
- a screening event concerned with identity topics or the exposure of under-represented international films or television episodes
- a social event attached to a film (e.g. Halloween party or a cult-like Rocky Horror Picture Show event)
- a digital art video installation – several screens “in dialogue” with each other
- a video tour of some sort (such as the one that might be developed from the BFI slides for the Attenborough Arts Centre – attached)
- a quiz night screening event activity – e.g. compare two short films (what do they have in common?) / details you may have missed (quiz)

The proposal will include the following sections that will be submitted on the **Event Plan Template**:

- What is your event/installation? How do you imagine its realization? How will the event work? Describe it in detail.
- Why are you running this event? What is the rationale for your event? How does it engage with the theme you are proposing?
- For whom is your event? What audiences might be interested or do you intend to target? What reasons do you have for considering these audiences?
- What resources will you need for the event? Will it require you to secure some sort of funding? How will it fit in with the venue resources available? What is the ideal time and space for it?

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: TBD – EARLY MARCH

Figure 2: Slide from the first lecture with examples of themes for the event proposal.

The assigned reading includes salient sections of Peter Bosma's book that might encourage the kind of archival research that some of these types of events or installations require. In selecting films for an event like this, for instance, Bosma suggests the merit of both popular or mainstream cinema—like blockbuster fantasy films—and more obscure films or videos, which may only be available in select archives or the farthest corners of YouTube. This includes corporate, advertising, and educational films, newsreels, amateur and home movies, and unused recordings like deleted scenes and outtakes. In the reading assigned for the module, Bosma also highlights several typically neglected genres, including cult films, trash films, and underground cinema (2015, 86). Bosma further explains that “we live in a time of transition . . . Digitisation offers a lot of potential possibilities for ‘speciality’ programming, such as cinema on demand, new forms of event cinema, and integration of alternative content” (119). Bosma also notes that interesting encounters can be created between cinema and the other arts, where intermedial projects open spaces for comparison and revelation. “Abstract animation,” for instance, belongs “to a richly filled sub-category that is formed by the overlap between cinema, painting and music” (59). In his discussion of “pop-up cinema screenings,” Bosma also points to the compelling example of the gothic genre and its many historical silent classics (91–92). This specific example inspired a group from the 2023–24 iteration of the module, who loosely took it up with their cinematic survey of vampire films, discussed below. Moreover, the broad methodological suggestions prompted students to consider some of the questions they may need to reflect on in order to pull off a screening like this: How could the proposed screening make creative use of the venue or setting, and how could live elements create a unique experience for an audience that they would not get at home? It also raised some more practical and archive-oriented questions: Which films were included in the historical canon of vampire films, where could these films be accessed, and how or why had they or had they not been deemed valuable enough to be preserved or made available? These kinds of questions become important for all groups to reflect upon.

As part of the module lectures, I also discuss Bosma's more theoretical insights about the types of material that might be chosen, and the reasons motivating their selection. As Bosma explains, in selecting archival material for an event or festival screening, a curator must choose between “exhaustiveness and selection” (2015, 88), keeping in mind the historical, social, educational, entertainment, and economic value of our film heritage (92). Bosma also notes that, if a film program consists solely of newly released films, then the organizer is “not a film curator or programmer but [merely] a scheduler of screenings. A film curator thinks the other way around: he is searching out films for an audience, as many films as possible within the given setting” (51). This latter assertion emphasizes the importance of researching older, sometimes more difficult-to-access films, analyzing them, and exhibiting them to a new audience.

Taking the distinction between “programmer” and mere “scheduler” as a point of departure, the module shifts focus in the second lecture to consider film archives as more capacious than strictly videographic for the ancillary artifacts that

might be used to realize an event or installation. For the kinds of “big events” that Bosma champions, he suggests that a “fringe” program, “with exhibitions, debates, lectures, publications, educational meetings,” and other related events, could contextualize the presentation of an archive collection (2015, 91). He explains that archives also collect “film-related objects, such as posters, devices, documents,” and other supplementary materials (92), which, as I further explain to students, can also comprise part of their installation, in conjunction with or in contrast to the film or video elements the students have selected. For example, one of the two groups from the 2022–23 academic year, focused on modern-day migration, presented a screening of *Minari* (Lee Isaac Chung, 2020), a dramatic narrative film about a Korean family that struggles to settle in the U.S., around which the group framed a discussion on the diasporic émigré experience. After scouring the online archives of several local newspapers, the group decorated the screening space with printouts of newspaper articles from throughout the years that addressed similar difficulties people had experienced in their migration into or out of Leicester. This research project encouraged students to explore a wide range of archival materials that may be directly or indirectly associated with the media objects under scrutiny.

Having conceptualized the theme for the event or installation, and the archival work necessary to facilitate it, the module moves to engage students with more practical activities toward the realization of their event. Each group is required to design a website promoting their event, which should explain both the theme of their event and some of the research and film studies concepts relevant to their project. Students are encouraged to keep the latter point in mind both as they plan the event and design the website. However, most of the training offered in preparation for this assignment has to do with more pragmatic considerations. As the assessment indicates, the website should include 1) an overall description of the event and the rationale for it, 2) reasonable graphic and visual materials to present and promote the event, and 3) the relevant date, location, and ticket acquisition information. As such, the guidance and practice offered within the lectures and through the learning management system are more focused on the technical aspects of web design than the website’s content or the research required to generate it.

However, the realization of the event itself brings the importance of the cumulated archival work into sharp relief. All group members must participate in the presentation of the event to a public audience, a requirement that has perhaps been the strongest motivator for students to engage in extensive research and preparation. Since public participation may vary, students are encouraged to be prepared for both large and small audiences. In the 2023–24 academic year, both groups delivered stellar presentations. One of the two groups chose to do a retrospective of representations of vampires in cinema and television, with a focus on and screening of *Interview with the Vampire* (Neil Jordan, 1994) to mark its thirtieth anniversary. Their pre-screening presentation outlined extensive research surveying the history of cinematic vampire narratives, from their earliest appearances to their most contemporary examples. Another group chose to do a comparative retrospective surveying four decades of adaptations of *Little Women* (George Cukor, 1933; Mervyn LeRoy,

1949; Gillian Armstrong, 1994; Greta Gerwig, 2019). Their presentation examined and contextualized each adaptation within the historical conditions in which it was produced, with special attention on how the different wars in each period informed the films' narratives. By comparing a particular scene that appears in all four films, in which the four sisters reflect on how their mother tries to cope with their father's absence, having been conscripted for the Civil War, the students demonstrated how the concerns of these conflicts across four different periods informed what they framed as feminist considerations in each adaptation.

However, as much as the material realization of the event prompted student motivation to do archival research, the more practical effect of it has had significant shortcomings. While the aforementioned presentations have generally been successful, the fact that there was no time or space in the module to provide any significant training on public speaking and public engagement, for example, compounded by the fact that audience attendance was unpredictable, made the public-facing nature of both the event and website somewhat anxiety-inducing for students. Moreover, the expectation that the students would be available on campus to present their programs after the normal end of the term period in March has posed another challenge. Both these concerns have had a chilling effect on students' ambitions, and they mostly defaulted to thematically motivated single-screening and discussion events, as realized in all three of the examples provided above. This shortcoming of the program design has actually steered students away from more significant archival research projects, as the effort and anxiety inherent to public presentations discouraged students and prompted them to pursue these more conservative, less research-intensive projects.

Earlier iterations of the module, in which connections to more traditional artforms were more strongly foregrounded, had only required students to develop a hypothetical project proposal. In retrospect, I observed that the variety of proposed event or installation ideas had been much broader and more creative, and the hypothetical proposals were far richer in their gestures toward archival research contributions. Due to the excessive work required of first-year students to realize their proposed events, and the way learning about budget planning was problematized by the contradictions emerging between the hypothetical budgets they developed for the events and the lack of an actual budget to realize them, it was decided for the 2024–25 academic year to revert to a version of the module which did not require the realization of events. This may result in a lack of motivation from students to do the research required for the popular cinematic surveys exemplified in the vampire and *Little Women* examples, but it might also have a rebound effect as a more creative breadth of hypothetical events or installations may actually foster the kind of archival research required to realize an appropriate proposal, website, and final reflection.

Thus, in lieu of the requirement to realize the planned events, a new element was added to the website design project that offers students the opportunity to engage in creative media production in lieu of producing their events. Student groups are now required to produce a one- to four-minute promotional video and to embed it on their websites. Advertising is arguably the dominant cinematic mode of this

century, but it is often overlooked in film studies. Indeed, the study of video advertising was absent from the film studies program at the University of Leicester until this new assessment addressed this gap. In the previous two iterations of the module, I had introduced videographic advertising in the second lecture as the possible focus for an event or installation, encouraging students to engage in some form of culture jamming or *détournement* of video advertising (see Figure 3). Unfortunately, due to the chilling effect of having to realize the event described above, this suggestion was not taken up by any of the student groups. The new video production assignment now requires students to research, review, and understand the long history of advertising, whether viewing these commercials strictly as models for making their own promotional video or as media objects that could shape their own proposed event projects.

Peter Bosma – *Film Programming* (2015): “Curating Film Theatres,” pp. 51-67.

“Some options for choosing an artistic criterion as basis for curating a thematic film programme” (p. 56) – **EVENT IDEAS**

• **Advertising Culture – THEME?**



Figure 3: Slide from the second lecture with examples of visual advertising.

The final assessment for the module has historically been labelled a “project log,” but the instructions for it clearly emphasize it as more of a reflection assignment. Each student is required to submit an individual 1,500-word summary of their experiences throughout the process of conceiving, preparing, designing, and working collaboratively on their event, along with a reflection on its realization. This reflection should include summaries of the event, including its conceptualization, planning, and presentation, an explanation of the rationale of the project and its theme, and reflection on what went well and what went poorly, whether the objectives of the event were achieved, what challenges the students faced and what solutions they implemented, and what they learned from the course. As prescribed in the motivations of the module to foster employability, the assessment has primarily

been concerned with what students learned from the process of collaboration and what professional skills they acquired by developing their projects, rather than with how research and access aided their projects. This latter element was articulated more clearly in the 2024–25 requirements for the final submission, a mandate that should better encourage archival research and engagement throughout the module and into the future.

While this module has encouraged students to engage with media archives as part of their research, they have tended not to accept this encouragement. Even the tacit requirement to engage with archives has produced only a minimal effect on their project choices to date; the proposals, while thoughtful in other ways, have been less than fulsome in their exploration and explanation of the connections between history, art, culture, and the cinematic artifacts the students have selected. These shortcomings would be mitigated and the considerations of these aspects of the project better addressed with a stronger emphasis and impetus toward archival materials and research. That is to say that *indirectly* addressing the archives through the tacit necessity of engaging with them does not return the depth of archival engagement that would better inform the scholarly integrity of the events or installations, even if these events are only hypothetical. Especially for first-year students it is necessary to be more explicit and specific about the role of archival research as central to the assessments and intended learning outcomes as well as the specific training necessary to conduct such research.

Thus, for the next iteration of the module, I intend to reformulate and further foreground the presentation of archive suggestions into more explicit directives. In addition, the material for the third week of the module (which is concerned with copyright issues) will be reformulated to prompt students to seek out and evaluate historical and publicly available materials, which are, by nature, less likely to be subject to defensive, commercially motivated copyright prohibitions. From this added emphasis on archives and the training necessary to navigate them, the formerly indirect approach to encouraging archive research will become a more explicit aspect of the project expectations and a direct learning outcome objective of the module. The creative promise of the projects realized to date, and the professional skills associated with them for the purposes of employability with which the module is concerned, will be further fostered by the archival research that both informs the merit and interest of each project and adds another clear professional skillset to those that the module proffers.

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Guerrilla Television Out of the Box: Exploring the Raindance Foundation Video Archive at ZKM | Karlsruhe with Students of Art History

Barbara Filser and Felix Mittelberger

Introduction

Students of art history profit immensely from hands-on cooperation with local cultural institutions. In addition to furthering their knowledge of the history of art and the methods of securing historical data, working with museums, collections, and archives helps to foster an understanding of the professional field and its scope outside academia. While art history departments at many German universities number museum professionals among their teaching staff, the Department of Architecture's art history program at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) in Karlsruhe, Germany, has firmly incorporated practice-oriented teaching in its curriculum. Several faculty members' emphasis on the use of new media and technology in art in both their research and teaching accords with the public research university's focus on technological subjects and engineering. This is aided by the cultural environment of the city, which includes several publicly funded museums of national and international repute.

For a couple of years now, the art history program at KIT has been cooperating closely with ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, one of the leading specialist institutions for exhibiting, producing, and preserving media arts. This practice-oriented teaching has primarily centred on ZKM's archival department, and especially its extensive holdings of videos. In this article, we introduce and discuss a particular set of seminars, held in the 2020 summer semester, the 2020–21 winter semester, and the 2022 summer semester, respectively. These seminars took audiovisual material from the pioneering American video collective Raindance Foundation as their subject. Their work seemed particularly relatable to today's students, since their ideas for a participatory electronic information system, in effect, conceptually

foreshadowed online video sharing platforms (Coffman 2012, 65).

Following a brief overview of ZKM and its archival section, we introduce the Raindance Foundation with a focus on the collective's history and their ideas for revolutionizing an informational environment dominated by broadcast television to highlight the group's seminal role in the early video scene and the development of video art. A brief description of the scope of the Raindance Foundation video holdings at ZKM and a first survey exhibition presented there prefaces our presentation of the three seminars on the collective's tape archives, which involved participants in cataloguing. Our discussion first addresses the shift from a more curatorially oriented proposition to a predominantly archival focus, necessitated by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. We then introduce the archival database and the type of description the students undertook, followed by an overview of the central themes of each of the three seminars, which provide further insight into the scope of the Raindance Foundation's activities, as well as the concerns of the early video scene in general. In our conclusion, we summarize what was learned, both by the students and ourselves, by teaching this media archive.



Figure 1: Archives at ZKM | Karlsruhe. © ZKM | Karlsruhe, photo: Thomas Mayer, Ostkreuz.

Archiving Media Art at ZKM

Founded in 1989, ZKM—Zentrum für Kunst und Medien in German—has evolved into a world-renowned institution dedicated to the exploration and presentation of art that engages with media and technology. This encompasses a wide range of genres, including digital and computer-based art, electronic music, video art, and interactive installations. Part of the department Wissen – Collection, Archives & Research, the ZKM archive comprises two areas: The Institutional Archive and the Archives of Artists and Theorists (see Figure 1). Both archives, with their focus on media art, video art, computer art, generative and kinetic art, and art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, contain a variety of objects and formats, requiring com-

petencies in all areas of archival practice. ZKM not only collects and exhibits art, but also runs an extensive program of events as well as the Hertz Laboratory, where artists explore the possibilities of new technologies and produce works of art. Thus, artifacts of all formats worthy of archiving—from hand drawings and letters to sound recordings and software—are created and enter the Archives of Artists and Theorists as well as the Institutional Archive. The preservation, archival description, and accessibility of all these objects are primary tasks of the ZKM archival section and its staff.

The ZKM archives are responsible for preserving the cultural heritage represented by media art and materials related to this heritage. This involves implementing conservation and storage practices to ensure the long-term survival of archival materials like magnetic tapes, videodiscs, or digital storage media. The archives document the history and development of media art through the collection of primary source materials. This includes acquiring artworks, manuscripts, artist statements, exhibition catalogues, and other documents that provide insights into the creation and reception of media art. The Wissen department supports research by providing access to its collections to scholars, curators, artists, and students interested in media art and digital culture, and the archives facilitate research inquiries, organize exhibitions, and contribute to publications that explore various aspects of media art.



Figures 2 and 3: Laboratory for Antiquated Video Systems. © ZKM | Karlsruhe, photo: Felix Grünschloss.

The Laboratory for Antiquated Video Systems, which is also part of Wissen, plays an important part in these efforts. With this experimental media-archaeological workshop—founded in 2004 by Peter Weibel and run by Dorcas Müller—ZKM has created a globally unique place to restore, digitize, and preserve video art recordings in all their formats since the 1960s (see Figures 2 and 3). The laboratory is the combined effort of a team comprising a video technician, a video artist and media theorist, a programmer, and a broadcast technician. With their experience and expertise, it was possible, as early as 2004, to establish a workflow of cleaning and digitizing the tapes, as well as storing the digital files in an uncompressed format on a long-term LTO storage system. Even today, the practical work of preserving videotapes is often done by technicians and not by trained conservators, as there are only a few specialized programs which teach the technical aspects of media conservation. An essential part of the laboratory's work is the restoration and maintenance of obsolete

video equipment and technologies, particularly those used for the production and reproduction of video in the early years of video art (see Figures 4 and 5), including cathode ray tube (CRT) display devices. Furthermore, expertise in handling the old, often sticky, or damaged tape material had to be acquired through numerous trials.¹ The digital restoration and preservation of analogue video has only gained momentum since 2000, when data storage of the size required for video became affordable. ZKM's work in this field was a pioneering effort, and since its founding, the laboratory has digitized about 20,000 tapes. Their digital copies are made accessible to researchers and the interested public through the ZKM archive and numerous exhibitions at ZKM and worldwide.



Figures 4 and 5: Collection of technical equipment at Laboratory for Antiquated Video Systems. © ZKM | Karlsruhe, photo: Felix Grünschloss.

The ZKM archives also contribute to educational initiatives by offering programs, workshops, and seminars that promote the understanding and appreciation of media art. These educational activities aim to engage audiences of all ages and backgrounds in the exploration of art and technology. The cooperation between the ZKM archives and the art history program at KIT also provides students of art history and related disciplines at KIT—and other academic partner institutions in the region—with more targeted educational opportunities. Since 2020, multiple seminars based on the ZKM archives have been organized in a collaboration that is set to continue.²

Raindance Foundation: From Guerrilla Television to Video Art

At the centre of three of these cooperations have been ZKM's holdings of audiovisual material from the video collective Raindance Foundation. The group was founded as Raindance Corporation in 1969 in New York City, following the encounter of two of its major participants during the first video art exhibition in the U.S., *TV as a Creative Medium* at the Howard Wise Gallery in New York, May 17 to June 14, 1969 (see Figure 6). While the collective often referred to itself only as "Raindance," its full name was changed to Raindance Foundation sometime between fall 1971 and winter 1972, when it became a tax-exempt non-profit cultural organization.

A self-styled vanguard, Raindance set out to fight against "that system of

perceptual imperialism called broadcast television that puts a terminal in your home and thereby controls your access to information” (Ryan 1971, 1). During the 1950s, television had managed to conquer the hearths—and according to its critics, also the minds—of a large number of American households, and by the 1960s, it was recognized as the dominant mass medium in the United States. To counter its all-pervasive onslaught, people would need to engage in “cybernetic guerrilla warfare” (1). This expression was coined by Paul Ryan, an early associate in many ways instrumental in the founding of Raindance. It was picked up, in essence, in *Guerrilla Television*, written by Raindance member Michael Shamberg (see Figure 7). Published in late 1971, the book contained practical advice on how to use video while doubling as the collective’s manifesto. Their weapons of choice were the relatively small and light-weight video cameras and recorders that were first marketed in the U.S. in the late 1960s by Sony, whose “portapak” unit became the epitome for affordable portable video systems.

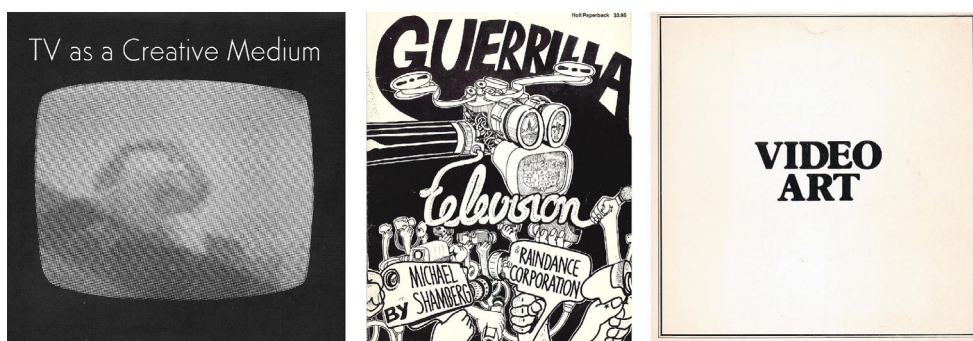


Figure 6: *TV as a Creative Medium*, Howard Wise Gallery, New York, 1969.

Figure 7: Michael Shamberg and Raindance Corporation, *Guerrilla Television*, New York, 1971. **Figure 8:** Beryl Korot and Ira Schneider, *Video Art*, New York, 1976. These catalogues and books counted among the important source materials for the seminars.

Part of a vibrant, interconnected, yet fractious scene of early portapak adopters, Raindance played an important role in developing an understanding of video as a medium in its own right, related to, but distinct from, television. This was in large part due to the intense publishing activities the collective pursued, despite their conviction that the media revolution heralded by the advent of television had rendered print media obsolete (Shamberg and Raindance Corporation 1971a, 1).³ Besides the already mentioned *Guerrilla Television*, Raindance also published *Radical Software*, which was initiated as a newsletter by Phyllis Gershuny (later Segura) and Beryl Korot, but evolved into a magazine which ran for eleven issues in total (see Figure 9).⁴ Appearing from 1970 to 1974, *Radical Software* served as “the video underground’s bible, gossip sheet, and chief networking tool” (Boyle 1985, 205). It published writings on theoretical and practical issues of video use by individuals or members of various groups working with the medium. Also featured were contribu-

tions from the likes of visionary architect Richard Buckminster Fuller or anthropologist, social scientist, and cyberneticist Gregory Bateson. No less important, however, were the technical tutorials, equipment information, brief notes on video activities, or listings of video initiatives across the U.S. and abroad, as well as lists of tapes available to buy, exchange, or rent, which regularly appeared in the publication. Today, the magazine and book are invaluable sources for researching and teaching an early use of portable video that has frequently been characterized as activist (Robé 2017, 72)—an assessment for which the self-chosen descriptors “radical” and “guerrilla” played no small part.



Figure 9: *Radical Software*, Volume 1, Numbers 1–5 and Volume 2, Number 1, contain information invaluable for the archival description of the Raindance holdings. © Raindance Foundation.

The early issues of *Radical Software* also make clear that, at the time of Raindance’s inception, there was no strict separation between activist video and what quite quickly became classified as video art. The very first issue of *Radical Software*, for example, featured contributions from—among others—Nam June Paik and Aldo Tambellini, and information about the gallery show *TV as a Creative Medium*, as well as the first video exhibition at a museum in the U.S., *Vision & Television* at Brandeis University’s Rose Art Museum in Waltham, Massachusetts, January 21 to February 22, 1970, which included works by members of Raindance (Connor 1970). The title of another key print publication for the early video scene, however, was the 1976 anthology *Video Art*, compiled by Korot and fellow Raindance member Ira Schneider (see Figure 8). This quite clearly signals a growing separation between “art” and what were then considered “documentary” uses of video. A proposed companion title on the latter was never produced (Gigliotti 2003).

Video Art also marked an end of sorts, since it was the last of the publications issued under the Raindance label. By that time, most of the people prominently involved during its inception had left the collective. Frank Gillette and Ryan, for example, had already withdrawn by early 1972 to pursue their own artistic endeavours, while former journalist Shamberg had started to devote his attention to what was to become Top Value Television (TVTV), a kind of supergroup, made up of members from other collectives (University of California Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archives 2020). Even though new people had joined, the already loose group drifted further apart, relinquishing a shared studio and office space around that time (Raindance: The Realistic Hope Foundation 1972, 5). According to Davidson Gigliotti, after 1976, the Raindance Foundation continued to operate mainly as an umbrella

organization for artists' grant applications and the production of *Night Light TV*, a program featuring video art, which aired on New York cable between 1980 and 1992. The foundation was dissolved in 1993 when Schneider, who had served as its president from 1972 onward, moved to Berlin (Gigliotti 2003).

Conceptualizing a Counter-Television

For a long time, Raindance has mostly been remembered for their books and *Radical Software*, even though they had regarded videotape as the prime medium of communication in the electric age.⁵ The manifesto-style “Meta-Manual”—part of *Guerrilla Television* spells out Raindance’s vision for an electronic information system. This vision is underpinned by the conviction that the new media, epitomized by television, had a profound impact not only on society but even on perception and cognition—a perspective clearly inspired by Marshall McLuhan’s media theory as laid out in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964).⁶ *Guerrilla Television* seems to argue that it had thus become necessary to fundamentally rethink what shape knowledge can take and how it can be imparted when print-based strategies and forms were deemed no longer adequate “for survival in the information environment” (Shamberg and Raindance Corporation 1971a, 37). In the eyes of Raindance, conventional broadcast television had proven itself not up to this task. Corporately controlled and thoroughly profit-oriented, it had developed into a risk-averse enterprise churning out highly standardized, uniform product modelled on older media and distributed in a one-way fashion. Broadcast television, according to *Guerrilla Television*, basically functioned as “radio-with-a-screen,” making only scant use of the revolutionary possibilities that electronic image technologies afforded (33). What Raindance envisioned instead was a more diverse, less polished, and decidedly participatory use of video demanding “the decentralization of the means of production as well as those of distribution” (32).



Figures 10 and 11: Victor Gioscia, Albert E. Scheffen, and Michael Shamberg discuss news anchors in Michael Shamberg, *A Media Primer*, 1970. Raindance Video Collection, ZKM | Karlsruhe. © Raindance Foundation.

On the surface, this vision aligns with what can be gleaned from statements, programs, and activities of other contemporary video collectives like the Videofreex

and People's Video Theater: to use video to create some kind of counter-television that subverts the informational hegemony of broadcast television, to democratize communication media by enabling civic participation on a broad scale, and as a tool for education as well as mediation between communities (Robé 2017, 67–120). The aims so far stated correspond to Laura Stein's definition of "radical media" as "media that pose challenges to existing power structures, empower diverse communities and classes, and enable communities of interest to speak to each other" (Downing 2001, 300). These characteristics are consistent with descriptions of non-mainstream media practices surveyed in 2002 by Chris Atton, who prefers their designation as "alternative" because this term encompasses a wider range of phenomena—fanzines, for example, or small presses for literary works—than the "social change publishing" he associates with the term "radical" (2002, 9–10). Consequently, Atton also highlights processes of production that markedly differ from those of mainstream media as defining aspects of alternative media—collective authoring, audience members becoming contributors, or one person taking on multiple roles which represent separate professions in the production of print or audiovisual media—which were all practiced by early video groups as well (14, 18, 37).

The obvious influence of McLuhan's thinking on Raindance's vision of a guerrilla television as outlined in the "Meta-Manual," however, is already an indicator that their ambition went beyond the alternative media practices—or "alternate," as the group preferred to use in their publications—outlined above. What they were calling for appears to be a radical re-conceptualization not only of the dissemination of knowledge, but of what constituted knowledge itself, in order to meet the demands of the new media age. Video was accorded the central role in the overhaul of the very foundations of education and knowledge production that was envisioned and repeatedly urged for in *Guerrilla Television* (Shamberg and Raindance Corporation 1971a, 21–22).



Figures 12 to 14: *Media Primer*, November 1970, ZKM-01-0085-rf344. Raindance Video Collection, ZKM | Karlsruhe. © ZKM | Karlsruhe.

To be able to counter the deleterious effects of broadcast television—especially when viewed from the kind of media-ecological perspective adopted by Raindance—and to fulfil the role video had been accorded, the capabilities of the new medium first had to be explored and communicated to prospective users. In keeping

with the collective's own demands, this would ideally be achieved by using video itself in the process, thus creating what could be termed video knowledge—knowledge about video produced in the medium of video. That such a type of self-reflexivity was an aim at least in the collective's early phase is substantiated by the group's self-description as “a think tank that would use videotape instead of print” (Shamberg and Raindance Corporation 1971b, 11). Moreover, there are, for example, repeated appeals in the book to foreground “process.” In the case of the printed press—the most concrete illustration of this concept to be found in *Guerrilla Television*—a “true process journalism” would mean a type of reporting “which informs not just about events or even the process of covering events, but also the process of the publication itself, and how readers can follow through” (Shamberg and Raindance Corporation 1971a, 25). Another indicator is a category like “media primer” (see Figures 10 to 14), which had been assigned to, among others, an edited tape with the title *Tender is the Tape II*, described as “a basic exercise [sic] in the grammar of video” (“Cultural Data Bank” 1971).

As we have found by approaching the Raindance archives through this lens, attempts to create such a video knowledge can be detected in the material that has been preserved (see Figures 10 and 11). This presupposes that what remains of the collective's video activities is, at least in part, indicative of their interests and aims. Direct references to particular recordings in *Guerrilla Television*—such as that of a video surveillance system in a California supermarket taped by Shamberg and commented upon quite forcefully on camera by Ryan (Shamberg and Raindance Corporation 1971b, 65)—support this assumption, at least for the video material dating from the group's inception until 1971.



Figure 15: Tapes of the Raindance Video Collection at ZKM | Karlsruhe. © ZKM | Karlsruhe, photo: Felix Mittelberger.

Raindance Video Archives at ZKM

The Raindance archive holdings at ZKM are made up of several individual members' archives (see Figure 15). The core is formed by the collective's more than 500 tapes, which were handed over to ZKM by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 2009. Between the years 2000 and 2022, Schneider also repeatedly gifted bundles to the archive, totalling an additional 220 tapes. Around 1,100 tapes by Ryan followed in 2016, and approximately 450 tapes by Gillette arrived in 2018 as the last Raindance contingent to date. Together, the holdings comprise more than 2,300 tapes in a wide variety of formats, many of them open reel. They include, among others,

recordings of the collective's own activities, interviews with academics and people on the street (see Figure 29), taped talks by contemporary intellectuals, meetings of video makers (see Figures 22 to 24), countercultural events (see Figures 27 and 28), current affairs programs and addresses by politicians recorded from TV broadcasts, as well as experiments with video aesthetics and material taped for use in media art installations. All these tapes have been indexed in the database and photo-documented at ZKM, and around 650 selected tapes and bundles were painstakingly restored and digitized to enable viewing for scholarly assessment.

Based on these archiving and preservation efforts, ZKM presented a solo exhibition on the history and impact of Raindance from July 1, 2017 to January 28, 2018 (see Figures 16 and 17). *Radical Software: The Raindance Foundation, Media Ecology and Video Art*, curated by George Barker, Judith Bihr, and Margit Rosen, was the group's first retrospective.⁷ Lost video installations by Schneider and Gillette were reconstructed for the exhibition at ZKM, among them *Wipe Cycle* from 1969, their seminal closed-circuit, multi-monitor piece first shown at *TV as a Creative Medium* (see Figures 18 to 20). Other works, like Korot's *Dachau* from 1974, were presented alongside a selection of videos showcasing the collective's activities from its beginnings until the Raindance Foundation's formal dissolution. In preparation for the exhibition, select tapes were catalogued and annotated, but the majority of the collection was not further described. Due to a lack of resources and the complex and time-consuming process involved, time-based media in the ZKM archives are often only fully described on the occasion of an exhibition or research project. However, educational cooperations, such as the one we discuss here, present an opportunity to contribute to and support indexing and description in various ways, as we detail in the following section.

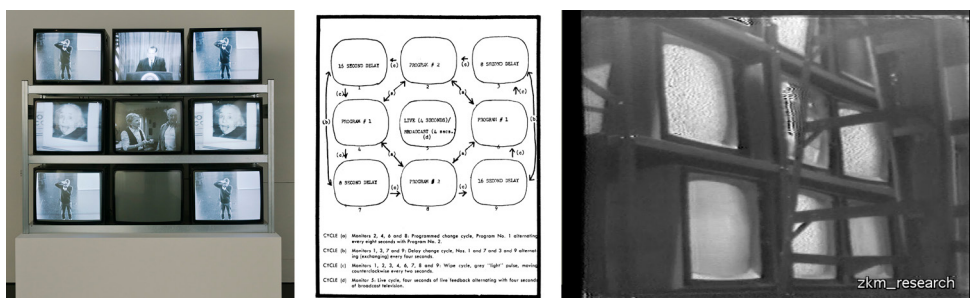


Figure 16: Members of Raindance and *Radical Software*, 1973. © Raindance Foundation. **Figure 17:** Davidson Gigliotti, Ira Schneider, Beryl Korot, and Frank Gillette at the exhibition opening at ZKM | Karlsruhe, 2017. © ZKM | Karlsruhe, photo: ONUK.

Teaching the Raindance Foundation Archive: From Curating to Archival Description

What was originally planned as a single, one-off seminar working with a section of ZKM's videotape collection evolved into a series of three seminars, which were fo-

cused on the Raindance holdings and proceeded along similar lines.⁸ The first one, “Video Knowledge: Artistic Media Research in Early Video Art,” took place in the summer term 2020. It was supported by the KIT Department of Architecture’s federally funded program aimed at developing research-led as well as research-oriented teaching skills and courses.⁹ As such, the seminar was based on Barbara’s research interests in the field of early video art and geared toward introducing students to working with extensive archival collections. The original aim of the seminar had been to seek out examples of the type of medium-reflexivity outlined above—videos that produced knowledge about the medium itself—across several videotape archives, and to describe and present them to a university or museum audience. Then the COVID-19 pandemic struck, and the measures implemented by the German federal and state governments to decrease the spread of the virus severely impacted this plan. Hampered already by the sudden closures of our institutions—including even archival and library services—not only to the public but also to students and staff, we had to quickly come up with a workaround that would be suitable for online teaching and adaptable to the limited availability of resources. Events like public or semi-public screenings—in fact, gatherings of any sort—were also no longer an option, and would continue not to be for an extended period of time. In the preparatory stage, it was not even clear if the tools that were just being made available for online teaching would allow watching videos together in a virtual classroom meeting, let alone organizing a screening for a wider audience.



Figures 18 and 19: Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider, *Wipe Cycle*, 1969/2017, video installation. ZKM | Karlsruhe. © Frank Gillette, Ira Schneider. **Figure 20:** *Wipe Cycle* at *TV as a Creative Medium*, 1969, ZKM-01-0024-ir011. Ira Schneider Archive, ZKM | Karlsruhe. © Ira Schneider.

In light of this, we decided to concentrate on a small number of pre-selected videos from only the Raindance Foundation archive and related holdings that had already been digitized, and organize the class around the process of archival description. Since the original materials on formats like open reel, U-matic, and Betamax are too fragile to be played back or even handled by untrained persons (see Figures 12 to 14), the students would have had to work with digital viewing copies either way. Due to the changed circumstances, these were provided to seminar participants via ZKM’s self-hosted cloud. We were able to organize a virtual tour of the facili-

ties where tapes are digitized and archival materials stored for the second seminar, but only the third seminar group was able to conduct an on-site visit and get a feel for magnetic tape formats—reels and cartridges—and the equipment for recording, playback, and restoration (see Figures 2 to 5). The relevant sections of the ZKM archive database were made accessible for seminar participants via browser, so students were able to perform searches and enter data from home.

With the shift in focus from the curatorial to the archival, the students did not only have to work with objects of art historical research unfamiliar to them—time-based media typically do not play a big part in art history curricula. They also had to learn the basics of archival practice through cataloguing and describing already indexed materials. To this end, seminar participants were introduced to the ZKM archive database and shown how to use it. In order to familiarize the students with what for them represented a new instrument of academic work, Felix apprised them of the basic benefits, structure, and functionality of a relational database. Over the course of the seminar, participants—mostly undergraduate students—repeatedly practiced entering data directly into this database, which, for this purpose, had been amended with explanatory boxes that informed the students about what data to enter into the respective input fields, and what format to use for entries like dates and time spans.

In the ZKM archival database, videos are regarded as data carriers and thus collections of objects (see Figure 21), as one single tape can contain several objects or units of meaning—for instance, a recording of a televised speech by the father of one of the victims of the Kent State shootings as well as news coverage of the activities marking the very first Earth Day across the U.S. in 1970. The archival description of the Raindance holdings thus involves determining if there are different recordings on a tape and, where this applies, how to divide them into individual objects. These segmented objects are then linked to other entities via the database, since the ZKM archive database is structured as a network of entities of different types: “persons/organizations/groups,” “keywords,” “works,” and “events.” A video recording of people bathing in the nude (see Figure 28), for example, thus can be linked to Raindance as a creator—names of individual authors were not often indicated on the tapes from the Raindance Foundation archive researched in the seminar—the Alternative Media Conference of 1970 as the event at which this happened, Goddard College as the institution which hosted the conference, and Plainfield, Vermont, USA, as the location of the campus. Cross-references can also be established between these entities, for instance between person and event or between person and work. An entry for John Riley and Rudi Stern’s video environment *Innertube*, caught on a tape documenting the *Vision and Television* exhibition, can thus be linked to both their names and Global Village—the group they formed—as creators, *Innertube* as the work, the exhibition as the event, the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University as the institution, and Waltham, Massachusetts, USA, as the location where the work was shown and the tape was recorded.

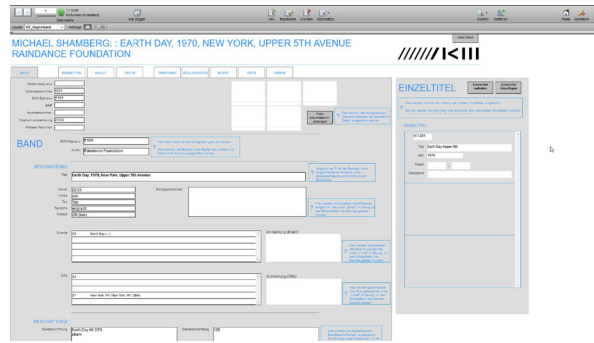


Figure 21: Screenshot of the archives database for the entity “object.” © ZKM | Karlsruhe.

Seminar participants were tasked with identifying people, places, events, institutions, and other entities, creating the respective entries, and linking these or already existing ones—whether in the ZKM biographical database or created by other seminar participants—to the entries for the video recordings. The amount of research that had to be done to identify the events, places, people, and more was already considerable, since often the only information available was the typically scant and sometimes hard to decipher information on the labels of the tapes and boxes themselves (see Figures 12 to 14). Transcriptions of this data had already been entered into the database at the time of indexing, but the photographic documentation of cases, reels, and cassettes was added to allow the students to verify the transcriptions, especially for handwritten labels. Research strategies and progress were reported on in our weekly online classes. In these meetings we also discussed problems that arose during the research process, like what kind of information warranted inclusion in the database entries, or how to determine a date of creation when none was given. Over the course of the seminar, useful resources—texts, visual materials, links to websites and online image repositories—were collected in our course space on KIT’s web-based learning management platform so all participants could access them. To enable scholars using the database to recognize the people we identified, the database was also amended to include still images of them (see Figures 22 to 24).

In addition, students wrote short textual descriptions of the contents of individual tapes, but also of events, institutions, works, places, or people recorded for entries that were deemed of particular relevance for the Raindance archives or the archive database of an institution collecting media art and related artifacts. The biographical notes written by seminar participants included one on U.S. satirist and countercultural figure Paul Krassner, who attended the Alternative Media Conference, and one on the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA), a funding body instrumental in furthering the development of early video, which was at the centre of a taped debate about the allocation of funds, discussed below. These texts had to offer factual descriptions containing relevant keywords, rather than art historical interpretations, as the primary concern in archival practice is linking entities with the respective archival items for the purpose of access and discovery. The seminar groups

developed sample texts in collective online writing and editing sessions, which video-conferencing tools were particularly suited for. These texts served as models for subsequent writing assignments in the seminar context.



Figures 22 to 24: Michael Shamberg (left), Ken Marsh (middle), and Don Harper (right) at the New York State Council on the Arts meetings, ZKM-01-0085-rf253, ZKM-01-0085-rf488. Raindance Video Collection, ZKM | Karlsruhe. © Raindance Foundation.

Video Knowledge, Alternative Media, and Video Art Shows

Some of the original concept of curating self-reflexive works was preserved in the video samples Barbara selected from the archive. Choosing tapes recorded at one event or otherwise forming a thematic group allowed students to work together, pool their research efforts, and share their findings. Incidentally, working in groups also helped alleviate the social isolation some students felt due to the pandemic restrictions. The thematic correspondences between selected tapes also made it possible for each seminar to have its own clear thematic focus, thus allowing for the selection of thematically relevant reading material.

Working on the archival descriptions was preceded by preparatory sessions in which seminar participants were introduced to the Raindance Foundation in the context of contemporary developments in U.S. society, media, and the arts. Assigned readings included overviews of U.S. history of the 1960s and 1970s and the early video scene, introductions to the art of the time, and the development of an art historical approach to video. In the first seminar, we also discussed excerpts from *Guerilla Television* and McLuhan's *Understanding Media*. The so-called "media primers," edited tapes between 16 and 23 minutes in length created by individual Raindance members in 1970/71, also served as introductions to the collective's aims in the first two seminars (see Figures 10 to 14). Since their classificatory title alone already signals a reflection on media with an educational aim, they were of particular importance for the first seminar, which retained the conceptual perspective outlined above, which was the point of departure for the original plan.

Material chosen for "Video Knowledge: Artistic Media Research in Early Video Art" included a group of black-and-white tapes recorded at several meetings between members of New York video collectives and representatives of NYSCA in

the fall of 1970 (see Figures 22 to 24). These gatherings were devoted to discussing how the generous funds NYSCA had promised for working with video could be applied in a way that would benefit the whole emerging video community. Raindance had submitted a proposal for a Center for Decentralized Television, which was rejected by other video makers, who had come up with their own plans on how to provide access to video equipment and training to interested parties as well as distribute tapes. These heated debates, which resulted in NYSCA's decision to split the allocated sum among the funding applicants, is documented in six videos of varying length, which provide valuable insight into the different collectives' ideas about what uses the medium could be put to.



Figures 25 and 26: Earth Day, New York 1970, ZKM-01-0085-rf002. Raindance Video Collection, ZKM | Karlsruhe. © Raindance Foundation.

Another group of black-and-white videos chosen for the first seminar recorded events organized in New York City to mark the first Earth Day on April 22, 1970 (see Figures 25, 26, 29, and 30). Besides the topicality of environmentalism, the selection of these videos was determined by the fact that they represented street tapes—a genre peculiar to video that consisted of “people standing on the street with a Porta-Pak [sic] and picking-up on what’s going down” (Shamberg and Raindance Corporation 1971b, 52). Among the things that went down that day, Raindance portapaks picked up the throng of people sauntering down Fifth Avenue—which had been closed to motorized traffic for two hours—under the watchful eye of an NBC news team’s cumbersome electronic camera; a giant inflatable provided by the Earth People’s Park as a clean air bubble in Union Square (see Figure 26); and a young boy suggesting to reuse paper bags and cups to reduce environmental pollution.

These two sets of videos were prioritized because, for each, helpful resources were available from trustworthy websites: for the NYSCA funding debate, NYSCA’s annual report for 1970–71 (New York State Council on the Arts 1972) and interviews with some of the artists and administrators involved available through Davidson Gigliotti’s *The Early Video Project* (Gigliotti 2000); for Earth Day, besides the New York Public Library’s website on its origins (Mann 2017), the fact that 2020 marked its 50th anniversary made reliable historical information on the events of April 22, 1970 easy to unearth.

Further videos had been pre-selected and provided to give an impression of the Raindance Foundation archive's scope, among them experiments with instant replay, tape delay, and other new imaging possibilities afforded by video technology. The small group of seminar participants, however, were already working to capacity to complete the database entries for the NYSCA and Earth Day videos.

The second research-oriented seminar on the Raindance Foundation video archive—taking place in the winter semester 2020–21 under the same pandemic restrictions as the first one—was “Hippies, Yippies and Portapaks: Counterculture in Early Video Art.”¹⁰ This time, the main objects of research were nine black-and-white tapes of the Alternative Media Conference, which took place June 17 to 22, 1970, at Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont, USA (see Figures 27 and 28). Organized by Larry Yurdin as a class project, the conference drew a crowd of people involved in FM radio, the alternative press, the underground comic scene, music production, and video collectives like Raindance, the Videofreex, and Ant Farm. An important outcome of the gathering was that it connected makers of alternative media from across the country. In a brief text published in *Radical Software*, an attendant portrayed the 1970 Goddard conference as the breeding ground for the idea of the video collectives pooling their efforts to establish a tape exchange program as well as a “Collective Video Bank,” a sort of networked video library as an alternative information hub (Silver 1970, 18). These concepts, in fact, were not only central to Raindance's proposal discussed at the NYSCA funding meetings, but were at the heart of the very idea of guerrilla television, manifesting themselves most clearly in the lists of available tapes published in the early issues of *Radical Software*.¹¹

Besides establishing contacts within and across their respective fields, conference participants attended workshops (see Figure 27) and debates and listened to speeches on current issues in media production, U.S. society, and politics. The event's countercultural inspiration was epitomized by spiritual teacher Baba Ram Dass—featured quite prominently on the tapes from the Raindance video archive—who lectured on how to reduce stress and resolve conflicts. The program also included musical performances, and the festival-like atmosphere was rounded off by attendees taking a dip in a pond on the campus grounds (see Figure 28). The Videofreex brought an inflatable structure in the shape of a giant cathode ray tube which, seen in the process of being set up in some of the footage, served as a projection screen for tapes brought or recorded at the event by visitors. Members of the architecture and video collective Ant Farm, who were to do the graphic design for *Guerrilla Television*, also brought their inflatable *Turbo Dome*, which can be seen on tape used as a meeting space. The Alternative Media Conference, which deserves a lot more scholarly attention than it has so far been accorded (Faber and Hochheimer 2016, 200), is not only important for bringing together video collectives from across the U.S.—it also situates them in the context of a vibrant wider scene of alternative media production, a context that has yet to be more thoroughly explored in connection with the Raindance Foundation.¹²



Figures 27 and 28: Alternative Media Conference at Goddard College, ZKM-01-0085-rf013, ZKM-01-0085-rf356. Raindance Video Collection, ZKM | Karlsruhe.
© Raindance Foundation.

The third seminar centred on researching Raindance material was titled “Early Video Art on Video: Record(ing)s of Ways to Present and Disseminate Video Works.” Held online in the summer semester 2022, it focused on how video work managed to find an audience. Since broadcast television was not an option for early users of portable video equipment—the purported substandard technical quality of recordings on half-inch tape is frequently named as the prime reason why producers shunned their material—one of the ways that Raindance organized the distribution of tapes to a limited number of people was through *Radical Software*. Another platform was provided by exhibitions, which showcased experimental uses of the medium. Since these are of particular interest to art historians, material showing video pieces presented at art events formed a major part of the tapes selected.

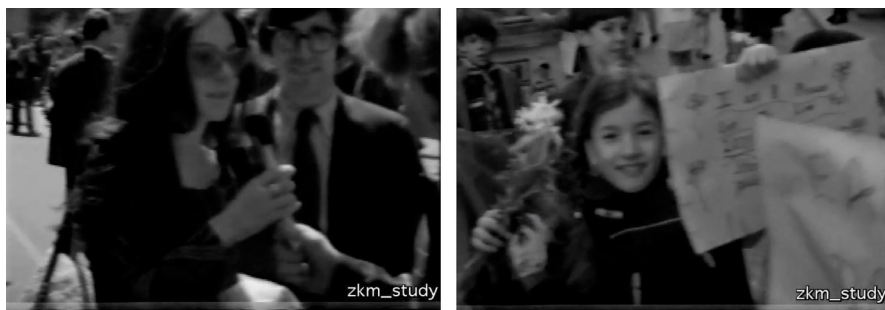
Recordings of *TV as a Creative Medium* were included on two tapes from Schneider’s archive, which were probably used in *Wipe Cycle*, exhibited at the same show (see Figure 20). Gillette and Schneider’s multi-monitor installation—reconstructed for the 2017 retrospective at ZKM—was also shown in a major German survey of video installations, *Videoskulptur: retrospektiv und aktuell, 1963–1989* (*Video Sculpture: In Retrospect and Today, 1963–1989*), at Kölnerischer Kunstverein in Cologne, March 18 to April 23, 1989. Therefore, three videos—in colour this time—which included recordings of works shown in this exhibition, were added to the selections for the seminar. *Vision and Television* at the Rose Art Museum was documented more thoroughly on three black-and-white tapes, also from the Schneider holdings at ZKM. The Raindance Foundation archive also yielded recordings of video pieces at the New York Museum of Modern Art’s *Information* show, July 2 to September 20, 1970, which surveyed international developments in conceptual art and is regarded as a landmark event in the history of contemporary art. Besides giving an impression of exhibitions that figure prominently in the history of video and video art, this selection documented that art also played a part in Raindance’s work.

Learning from the Raindance Foundation Archive

The series of Raindance archive seminars presented here has concluded for the time

being. This, however, is not because of a lack of archival objects still awaiting description, but because we are both currently involved in other projects. Writing this article has provided us with the opportunity to retrospectively take stock of the outcomes both for the students and for the academic and archivist.

Learning outcomes for the students encompassed both knowledge in a particular field of the history of contemporary art as well as transferable skills related to basic research techniques and the documentation of findings in an archival database. Seminar participants gained advanced knowledge of early uses of video in the U.S., as well as about the technical development of video equipment. They were also introduced to seminal cultural, social, and political events and debates of the 1960s and 1970s in the U.S.: the Vietnam War and its repercussions, the civil rights movement, women's liberation, a growing awareness of environmental destruction, and the first walk on the moon, aired live on television. Knowledge of these is essential not only for understanding the early video scene, but also for developments in American art of the period in general. Key moments and issues reflected in the Raindance video material prompted a more in-depth engagement with selected events, like the Kent State shootings and Earth Day (see Figures 29 and 30). In some cases, even specialist histories came into play, for instance the cultural history of U.S. television when it came to assessing the importance of news anchors like Walter Cronkite or David Brinkley for the records created.



Figures 29 and 30: Interviews on Fifth Avenue on Earth Day 1970, ZKM-01-0085-rf506. Raindance Video Collection, ZKM | Karlsruhe.

© Raindance Foundation.

On the level of practical skills, seminar participants gained hands-on experience with the kind of standard groundwork that underpins any art historical evaluation, analysis, and interpretation of works. Developing the ability to determine what images represent is a central part of art historical training. Faced with visual material that does not conform to established iconographies, or even representational conventions, however—and with a very limited informational base—this can become quite challenging. The seminars furthered an appreciation of how much work and expertise go into securing and verifying historical data and the kind of basic description that is at the heart of archive and collection databases, as well as the art historical staple genre of the catalogue raisonné. For some of our material, this required a certain

amount of tenacity and problem-solving skills as well as resourcefulness in order to find relevant sources. Sometimes, however, none of the research efforts were able to yield results, like in the case of the tapes of the NYSCA meetings, for which—with the exception of one of the Council’s representatives (see Figure 24)—none of the people of colour attending could be identified, due to what seems to be a dearth of research on their involvement in the emerging video scene. Experiences like these highlighted the fact that—even on the level of content—the richness of an archive like that of the Raindance Foundation’s videos cannot be contained in written histories, but also not in the database—there is no category for information that could not be supplied. Even more important, however, is that the inability to find information in the particular case mentioned demonstrates quite clearly the selective and biased nature of historical accounts, even of quite recent periods.

When confronted with information of uncertain provenance, especially when searching online, seminar participants were also alerted to the importance of ascertaining the validity of sources and of re- or cross-checking given data as well as their own findings. Identifying people, in particular, became a collaborative act, as the students collected information together and shared it with each other. In the process, they also realized that their collaboration via the database extends to its future users as well, who might profit from, but also correct, amend, or add to their findings. As part of acquiring the competence for describing objects according to archival or museum standards, seminar participants also honed their writing skills by—sometimes also collectively—producing brief descriptive texts and biographical notes, which constitute subject-specific genres in professional art historical practices outside of the university.

Teaching the Raindance Foundation video archive demanded considerable input from both of us. Preparing for and following up on class discussions and in-class work for Barbara included watching the videos selected—some repeatedly—to verify students’ findings or offer assistance, checking sources, contributing to the students’ research and researching tapes herself, as well as redacting and correcting textual entries. Besides preparing the introduction to the database and explanatory information, Felix had to arrange access to digital viewing copies and database and research material, provide administrative support, field questions regarding database entries, and intervene in case of occasional mishaps, accidental deletions, and input errors.¹³ Our experience was that specialist knowledge—not necessarily of the individual materials themselves, but about the respective holdings and their historical context—is indispensable in order to be able to supervise students’ archival research. No less important, however, is the ability and readiness to monitor their data input to ensure that this conforms to the required standards. With the change in plans necessitated by pandemic measures—moving from using the database for searching out relations to establishing them ourselves—we unexpectedly came up with a format that proved ideally suited to online teaching, not least because it enabled us to jointly create entries to the database and collectively write and edit text during online meetings. Moreover, our seminar discussions of research processes and how to document them have resulted in some tweaks to the design of the database.

What has remained rather implicit in our work on the Raindance Foundation video archive are the epistemological concerns that also seem to be at the heart of the collective's conceptualization of video—how knowledge is produced, how media are implicated in this process, and what shape this knowledge might take.¹⁴ In our teaching practice, these questions pertained to the use of the database as a medium of archival description, but were also at play when students were introduced to the materiality of the objects being described and the means of their production.

Photographs of tapes and their cases managed to convey a sense of the materiality of the archival objects, which could only be accessed as digital copies. Moreover, the handling of portable video equipment and display devices, and even special properties of the medium, like the ability to replay what the camera captures on the spot, are frequently shown in the group's tapes (see Figures 10 and 11). Recording cameras recording—sometimes even themselves—is in keeping with Raindance's supposed aim to generate knowledge about video using video, and thus moments like these figured prominently in the selections made for the seminars. Getting to see—and, in the case of the third seminar's on-site visit to the Laboratory for Antiquated Video Systems, to actually feel—tape reels and cassettes, the equipment used to record and play back tapes, and a range of historic display devices at ZKM (see Figures 2 to 5), we hoped, would enable students to better imagine the conditions of making video in the late 1960s and early 1970s: the weight of the portable recorder, the design and placement of its controls, and the size of the tape reels all had an impact on the uses video could be put to and what the output looked like. This type of sensory, experiential knowledge is at the heart of experimental media archaeology, which aims to work hands-on with historic technology (Fickers and van den Oever 2022). Even without adopting this particular focus, published accounts of such experiments (van der Heijden and Kolkowski 2023) could provide a useful methodological framework for making students aware of how the largely tacit knowledge they gain by examining the technical procedures of video making and video preservation complements their understanding and appreciation of the material.

While the seminar did not systematically explore how databases and digitally distributed moving image collections impact the formation and shape of knowledge, aspects of working with them inadvertently came up in our class discussions—especially those that were perceived as problematic or not conforming to established conventions in art historical practice. One of the issues raised was the non-hierarchical organization of information in the relational database—edited tapes and raw footage, street-tapes and recordings of television programs, as well as material used in video installations, for example, were all treated as equivalent entities regardless of their classification. Another was how the design of digital art museum databases often embodies a limited and conventional notion of art, privileging the single creator and traditional genres, and thus reinforces corresponding models of art historiography. Debating what kinds of information to enter in which category and which links to establish between them fostered an understanding of the networks of relations each entity is embedded in, as did the coordination of workflows for entering collaboratively gathered information into the relational, distributed structure.

The issue of authorship and its significance for both art history and art historical practice was particularly illustrative, since it impacted the seminar participants directly. Archival description and the basic information gathering that precedes description is largely unattributed work. Even though we collectively decided to name those responsible for the descriptive texts in the database, we did this with the understanding that the recognition of their authorship may well be only temporary because the texts could later be added to or changed. Writing about online catalogues raisonnés—another example of the implementation of digital databases in art history—Ulrich Pfisterer notes that collective authorship entails sharing the responsibilities of authorship, but also dispersing the power it bestows (2023, 32). This dispersal of authorial power—the power to organize, to structure, to weigh, to exclude or include information—highlights that the digital database represents an informational infrastructure different from the textual narrative, which is still the most visible form of academic art historical practice. The use of databases as a way of doing art history—which is a longstanding practice in dealing with collections, archives, or large repositories of data—would thus merit a more focused reflection in the context of teaching the Raindance archive, but also art history in general.¹⁵

Even with our focus on the practice of archival description, our work with the students yielded descriptions only for a very small number of tapes. However, over the course of three seminars, this endeavour has provided new insights regarding Raindance's attempts at artistic media research in the medium of video. In tackling material like the Earth Day tapes or the recordings from the Alternative Media Conference, the seminar participants contributed to a better understanding of the scope and nature of the Raindance Foundation video archive and provided information—even brought to light research gaps—that further scholarly engagement with the material can build upon. In light of this, we hope to find further opportunities to teach this video archive, which conceptually maps out a pre-history of the video-sharing tools that, nowadays, united in one device, almost all of us carry around in our pockets.

Notes

¹ As a topic, video preservation did not play a big part in the seminars, but students were alerted to problems of material deterioration, obsolescence of playback devices, digitization, and long-term storage of digital files. Caring for and preserving videotape collections in the arts already became an issue in the mid-1980s, especially for video artists themselves. Tony Conrad was one of the first to suggest procedures for dealing with deteriorating open reel tape in a text that was first circulated among practitioners and collectors. The experimental nature of the approach is made clear by his warning to practice the suggested solutions by using “a scratch tape before you risk a valuable original” (1987, 12). In a publication documenting a 1991 symposium on video preservation organized by non-profit media arts organization Media Alliance and the New York State Council on the Arts at the Museum of Modern Art, Deirdre Boyle points out that there was a divide between those calling for an institutionally backed standardization of preservation and cataloguing processes and

those adhering to “video’s roots in the anti-establishment Sixties,” who preferred “decentralized, low-cost, low-tech, how-to alternatives” (1993, 13). The field has expanded considerably since then and during the 2000s media art conservation has become institutionalized in specialized conservation departments as well as more recently in study programs for time-based media conservation. The particular challenges of media art preservation, both on a practical and methodological level, have been addressed in recent publications such as *Conservation of Time-Based Media Art* (Engel and Phillips 2023) and *Preserving and Exhibiting Media Art* (Noordegraaf et al. 2013).

² Besides the three seminars on the Raindance Foundation video archive, the seminar “Art Space Ship,” using material from the video archive of Austrian media artist and curator Armin Medosch, was also taught in the summer semester 2020 by Inge Hinterwaldner and Felix at KIT. In the winter semester 2022–23—with in-person instruction resumed—we collaborated on the seminar “The Art of Cameraless Photography,” which centred on an archive of reproductions that were used by Floris Neusüss and Renate Heyne to prepare their seminal 1990 publication on the photogram and its use in twentieth century art. The photogram archive remained the subject of two practical courses taught by Felix at KIT, “Photography Upside Down: Photograms and Archival Practice,” on the history of the photogram, and “From the Archive to the Darkroom, Practice(s) of Cameraless Photography: The History of the Photogram and its Artistic Usage,” on the artistic practice of photograms, taught together with Eisenhart Keimeyer at the photo lab of the Karlsruhe University of Art and Design. In the summer semester 2024, Felix cooperated with Erec Gellautz of KIT on a seminar using the art publication *rot* [red] by Max Bense and Elisabeth Walther-Bense to combine archival and curatorial practice.

³ Besides the “Meta-Manual,” which lays out the media-theoretical underpinnings of the group’s endeavour (Shamberg and Raindance Corporation 1971a), the book also contains the “Official Manual” offering practical advice (Shamberg and Raindance Corporation 1971b). The design, style, and rhetoric of both the book and the texts contained in it would merit closer attention than they can be accorded here. The cartoon-like cover alone—created by art and architecture collective Ant Farm, which were also responsible for the overall graphic design of the publication—with its nods to the aesthetics of the underground press, zines, and DIY manuals of the American counterculture, posits *Guerrilla Television* squarely in the alternative media scene of the time (see Figure 7).

⁴ The full run of *Radical Software*’s issues—with the exception of *Guerrilla Television*, which was advertised as issue 6 of volume 1, but sold separately—was made available online by Davidson Gigliotti and Ira Schneider with the support of the Montreal-based Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science, and Technology in 2003. See <https://www.radicalsoftware.org/e/index.html>. Free online dissemination is in keeping with what is highlighted in the early issues’ colophon as “a Xerox mark, the antithesis of copyright which means *DO* copy,” replacing the copyright symbol’s C with an X (*Radical Software* 1970). According to Joshua Atkinson, encouraging copying is one of the strategies of producers, particularly of zines, to ensure circula-

tion of their material (2010, 18). With the decidedly hand-made quality of the page layouts and design, the early issues of *Radical Software* display an additional hallmark of alternative print publishing (see the remarks on the aesthetics of zines in Atton 2002, 23–24).

⁵ “Electric age” is Marshall McLuhan’s term denoting the time period beginning with the arrival of electricity and profoundly shaped by electronic media.

⁶ McLuhan was widely known even outside academic circles at the time, and his ideas permeated the early North American video scene. Ryan had worked as McLuhan’s assistant during his tenure as a visiting professor at Fordham University in New York in 1967–68 (Ryan 1988, 40), and Gillette had taught a course on his media theory at the Fourteenth Street Free School (Ryan 1988, 41).

⁷ For the exhibition opening in Karlsruhe, many former members or associates travelled to the event (see Figure 17). Interviews with Schneider, Korot, Gillette, and Gigliotti were recorded at that time. Documenting significant first-hand accounts, these recordings represent an invaluable addition to the Raindance video holdings. See <https://zkm.de/en/event/2017/07/radical-software-the-raindance-foundation-media-ecology-and-video-art/interviews>.

⁸ A seminar in the art history program at KIT is taught in two weekly lesson periods of 45 minutes each—a standard format in the Humanities at German universities—for the duration of the semester, usually counting 14 to 15 weeks. Thus, in-class time totals about 21 to 22.5 hours. In awarding 2 ECTS credit points for the completion of the seminar, which amount to 60 hours of work including the weekly contact hours, students are expected to put in some work on their own.

⁹ A report detailing the schedule of this first seminar, the research stages, and the outcomes was published in German in 2020 (Filser 2020).

¹⁰ Counterculture, throughout this article, is used in the sense that it had already acquired in the late 1960s—an opposition to values and norms of the parental generation strongly associated with the hippie movement (Bennett 2012, 1–3). That this did not preclude an engagement with new technologies has been spelled out by Fred Turner, using Stewart Brand and the *Whole Earth Catalog*, which Brand founded, as pivotal examples for the convergence of the military industrial research culture of the Cold War era and U.S. counterculture as epitomized by hippie communes (Turner 2008).

¹¹ Referred to as “archives” in the first issue of *Radical Software* (*Radical Software* 1970, 15), the lists of available tapes by a range of video makers appeared in the second and third issues under the header “Cultural Data Bank” (“Cultural Data Bank” 1970; “Cultural Data Bank” 1971). Explaining what the concept of the data bank entailed for Raindance, Shamberg writes, “At Raindance, we have no notion of ownership of videotape footage. When people make tape we file it together in what we call a ‘data bank.’ Everyone is free to take from the data bank without asking, for his or her own edits” (Shamberg and Raindance Corporation 1971b, 29). Assigned to the care of a cultural institution, the tapes have since become archival objects that need historical contextualization for viewers to properly assess their significance. Seminar participants’ archival descriptions and the research that went into them con-

tribute to establishing their place within this context.

¹² The group and other early U.S. video collectives are barely—if at all—mentioned in the studies of alternative or radical media by media and communications scholars that have been cited above. The position of Raindance's concept of guerrilla television in the context of alternative, radical, and grassroots media is addressed to some extent by Boyle (1997), in her history of the early U.S. video scene, and Michael Goddard, who posits activist film collective Newsreel as a historical reference, but also highlights Raindance's own characterization of their "radicality" as "post-political" and the distancing of their project from approaches pursued by the left and the new left in *Guerrilla Television* (2018, 304–09, 312). The video material in the Raindance Foundation archive might contribute to a reassessment of the critique voiced by Boyle and reiterated by Goddard that Raindance members' actual practice fell short of their own concept. Relying heavily on Boyle's account, Goddard cites TVTV's productions and the interest they were met with by television networks as proof that proponents of guerrilla television had not been able to meet the goals they had set themselves, assuming a continuity and identity of aims that rests primarily on the prominent involvement of Michael Shamberg in both *Guerrilla Television* and TVTV (314–15).

¹³ Felix was aided in some of the tasks by ZKM colleagues Margit Rosen, Dorcas Müller, Hartmut Jörg, and the staff of the ZKM library.

¹⁴ We would like to thank the editors of this issue, Hugo Ljungbäck and Christian Balistreri, as well as the anonymous reviewers, for their insightful and inspiring comments, which are of relevance to our engagement with Raindance's archival materials both in research and in teaching beyond the present text.

¹⁵ A media-theoretical assessment like Marcus Burkhardt's (2015) study on digital databases would provide a good starting point for that.

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Les archives télévisuelles, génératrices d'histoire(s) de l'art

Marie-Odile Demay

Dans le rapport du colloque « L'avenir du documentaire artistique » qui s'est tenu le 28 novembre 1990 sous l'égide de l'UNESCO, André Parinaud, alors président de la Fédération internationale du film sur l'art (FIFA), s'insurge de la disparition systématique des productions sur l'art après leur diffusion. Il écrit : « Comment admettre qu'un film d'art ou un film culturel, après une diffusion télévisée ou une projection muséographique, puisse être enterré dans un stock dont il ne sortira plus que de façon exceptionnelle ? » (Cazeneuve 1991). Effectivement, comment accepter que des images d'artistes et d'œuvres d'art, soigneusement récoltées et assemblées pour des reportages de quelques minutes (entre 1 et 5 minutes) depuis l'avènement du journal télévisé dans les années 1950, ainsi que des moyens et longs métrages documentaires, soient presque systématiquement oubliés dans ce que Parinaud qualifie de « véritable cimetière du génie » ? Or, construite sur le mode du direct et du flux de programmation, c'est dans la nature de la télévision linéaire de produire des images et des contenus qui *passent* sans être retenus. Les journaux télévisés en particulier, qui rendent compte de l'histoire quotidienne des nations, en sont la programmation par excellence. À côté des nouvelles politiques et sportives, de la météo et des faits divers, les événements culturels, tels que les expositions en galerie ou dans des musées, y ont toujours eu une place de choix. L'inclusion d'événements culturels dans ces émissions, envisagée dans le long terme depuis l'avènement de la télévision, constitue une source d'archives inégalée pour les historien-ne-s de l'art.

Dans le cadre de recherches portant sur la représentation de l'art à la télévision des premiers temps, plus spécifiquement entre 1940 et 1970, j'ai consulté divers fonds audiovisuels aux États-Unis et en France, d'une part parce que ces pays furent parmi les premiers à adopter le média et d'autre part, parce qu'ils ont su insuffler à

la télévision sa particularité médiatique tout en gardant leur singularité culturelle nationale à l'écran¹⁰. J'ai alors pris la mesure de la difficulté à accéder à des segments ou à l'entièreté de journaux télévisés pour visionnement et de l'absence d'une norme de classification et d'archivage de ces documents télévisuels lorsqu'ils avaient été préservés. Dans bien des cas, nous le verrons plus bas, des segments identifiables dans des grilles de programmation ou des références imprimées, étaient soit inexistants, soit incomplets et mal identifiés dans les fonds audiovisuels consultés, rendant leur vérification par visionnage ardue, voire impossible.

Cette expérience nourrit la réflexion de cet article, qui a pour ambition d'évaluer le potentiel historiographique des archives télévisuelles à partir de l'étude de chroniques d'actualité artistique diffusées dans les journaux télévisés. En effet, une analyse historique des émissions télévisées consacrées à l'art, de ce qui a été préservé de celles-ci et de leur condition de préservation, permet de « voir » l'histoire de l'art survenir sur plus d'un siècle, presque en temps réel puisque la télévision, et les journaux télévisés en particulier, rapportent surtout les événements du quotidien. Envisagée dans ce continuum historique, la télévision a donc le potentiel de révéler les relations qu'une société entretient avec l'art, ses institutions artistiques et son héritage culturel.

En m'appuyant sur l'étude de fonds choisis d'archives audiovisuelles en France et aux États-Unis, où l'on a tenté de sauvegarder et d'indexer de textes télévisuels sur l'art, ainsi que sur ma propre expérience de recherche, je vais tenter de définir la nature de l'archive télévisuelle en discutant des conditions et des modes d'archivage des données audiovisuelles et, par conséquent, de leur potentiel historiographique. J'aborde la question de la curation des données télévisuelles et des visées éducatives de certains programmes d'archivage, pour conclure sur les possibilités dialogiques de l'archive télévisuelle avec d'autres types de textes, dans le contexte muséal et puis public. Je considère les archives télévisuelles comme des « génératrices d'histoire », un concept développé par l'historien et théoricien des médias William Uricchio, qui permet d'articuler le potentiel historiographique des archives télévisuelles, dans le domaine de l'art notamment (Uricchio 2012, 36).

La valeur archivistique des émissions télévisuelles

Dans les années 1950 et 1960, alors que la télévision s'institutionnalise dans les pays occidentaux, des gestionnaires de patrimoine, en France notamment, s'interrogent sur la valeur archivistique des chroniques télévisuelles. Comme le nouveau média offre au monde un contact immédiat et inégalé avec les arts et les artistes, ces gestionnaires évaluent l'intérêt de conservation de différentes émissions ou parties d'émissions télévisuelles et identifient des segments de chroniques à préserver afin d'offrir à de futures générations de chercheur-e-s et de conservateurs et conservatrices des images, souvent prises sur le vif, d'artistes œuvrant dans leurs ateliers, et d'accrochages d'exposition. C'est le cas des chroniques culturelles du *Journal télévisé régional de Paris-Île de France*, diffusé dans les années 1960 sur les ondes de la chaîne de télévision publique régionale France 3 (FR3), qui consacrait un segment de trois minutes chaque mois à une œuvre d'art, à un-e artiste vivant-e, ou à une salle du Musée national d'art moderne, situé à Paris (au Centre Georges-Pompidou). Dans une lettre adressée au directeur de

l'Office de radiodiffusion et télévision française (ORTF) datée du 6 février 1967, Jean Châtelain, directeur des Musées de France, déclare « attacher beaucoup de prix » aux « documents » que représentent les entrevues de ce journal télévisé. Il cite notamment celles avec le sculpteur cubiste Ossip Zadkine et avec la peintre Sonia Delauney (Châtelain 1967). Châtelain souhaite « vivement » que de telles entrevues d'artistes encore vivants soient, d'une part, diffusées sur la chaîne nationale, et d'autre part, il espère « que des copies soient conservées » dans les archives du Musée national d'art moderne et dans celles de l'Association des conservateurs des collections publiques de France. Quoique des conservateurs et conservatrices d'art moderne se questionnent sur la brièveté des clips, ils et elles s'intéressent aussi aux chroniques et reportages sur l'activité artistique française diffusés lors des journaux télévisés. La conservatrice du musée de Rennes, Marie Berhaut, demande par exemple à l'ORTF de sauvegarder les images de l'exposition tenue dans son institution, *Cent chefs-d'œuvre d'imagerie populaire*, captées pour l'émission régionale en janvier 1967 (« Dossier Musées et ORTF », Musées nationaux 1970–1971 1967). Un tel intérêt pour les images télévisuelles semble de courte durée et se manifeste surtout pendant les années 1950 et 1960. Effectivement, en 1970, dans une lettre adressée au ministre d'État chargé des Affaires culturelles, André Malraux, le correspondant du Comité régional des Affaires culturelles du Loiret juge que ces chroniques « ne peuvent être destinées qu'à faire connaître [...] et non à les exposer de façon didactique » (« Programmation, ORTF », Ministère des Affaires culturelles régionales, 1969–1977 1970).

Ces correspondances, ce qui laisse entendre un manque d'intérêt pour leur valeur d'exposition et d'archive, témoignent d'une certaine reconnaissance institutionnelle de la valeur archivistique des émissions télévisuelles pour renseigner l'histoire de l'art et les conservateurs dans les musées, sans qu'il n'y ait de réel effort à la définition des paramètres de préservation et d'indexation. On ignore si l'ORTF et l'Association des conservateurs des collections publiques de France ont donné suite à ces demandes. D'autant plus que, comme cet article le démontre, les recherches dans les archives télévisuelles pour retrouver ce genre de document présentent plusieurs difficultés, la principale étant leur préservation. Car les textes télévisuels ne sont pas pérennes par essence. Ils sont évanescents dans le flux de programmation en continu de la télévision, ce qui, par conséquent, complexifie grandement leur archivage et leur consultation (Bratslavsky et Peterson 2025).

Un média inadapté à la préservation

Jusqu'à l'avènement du magnétoscope dans les studios de télévision, à la fin des années 1950, les images captées en direct et retransmises par des ondes se perdaient avec leur transmission. Et même lorsqu'elles étaient enregistrées sur pellicule ou sur bande magnétique, la plupart de ces émissions (le flux de la télétransmission favorisait la disparition de la plupart de ces émissions) disparaissaient après leur diffusion. Il y a plusieurs raisons à cela.

Après la désinstitutionnalisation et la privatisation de plusieurs chaînes publiques à la fin des années 1960, la production, qui était auparavant centralisée chez les télédiffuseurs, fut privatisée et devint le fait d'une multitude de producteurs indé-

pendants. Dans bien des cas, et encore aujourd'hui, ces sociétés de production, créées pour produire une ou deux émissions, disparaissaient après leur réalisation, entraînant des problèmes liés à la chaîne de droits, ainsi que de disparition des bandes.

Plus fondamentalement, les images télévisuelles ont pour nature de passer et puis de disparaître, ce qui rend difficile de *retenir* les images dans le flot incessant de textes télévisuels qui doivent combler la grille de programmation télévisuelle. Média de contact et d'immédiateté, ce flux généré en direct propose, en série, des textes apparemment banals et clichés, puisqu'ils s'intéressent surtout aux choses du quotidien (Jost 2002, 42). S'ils montrent des images d'art, c'est pour les actualiser dans la vie du public. Média de proximité, la télévision présente, entre le bulletin météorologique et la revue des sports, des images du vernissage de la prochaine exposition dans tel musée ou de tel artiste dans son atelier, idéalement situé dans la région. La télévision, dont la fonction principale est d'entrer en contact avec son public, doit donc utiliser des images qui entraînent chez lui un effet d'identification (Esquenazi 2004). L'apparente banalité de ces textes peut donc empêcher l'historien de l'art d'y voir des archives susceptibles d'instruire sa discipline, qui relève plutôt du domaine de l'inspiration, du temps long et du canonique.

Ainsi, «l'impureté fondamentale de la télévision» empêcherait d'envisager ses productions sérieusement (Morrissey et Thouvenel 2019, 17). Cette question d'illégitimité du média télévisuel trouve son origine dans l'entre-deux-guerres, alors que les tenants de la théorie critique associent les médias de masse—la photographie et la presse, le cinéma, la radio et puis la télévision—à la production en série, caractéristique de la révolution industrielle. La télévision est d'autant plus suspecte qu'elle a des origines *broadcast*, qu'elle s'adresse à un public de masse et que son pouvoir de communication est tel qu'il rappelle les excès des mouvements nationalistes de la Seconde Guerre mondiale à peine passée. Et puis, les débordements commerciaux constatés aux États-Unis dans les années 1960 inquiètent les défenseurs d'une télévision publique à visée culturelle. Selon les arrêtés de l'époque, qui teintent encore notre perception du média, la télévision engendre la perte de temps, la distraction, la fragmentation sociale et communautaire et l'incapacité à la pensée critique et à l'acte créatif. Ainsi, ses archives sont *de facto* considérées comme des contenus de second ordre car elles proviennent d'un *vast wasteland* de programmations à visées, soit commerciales, soit de contrôle des masses (Uricchio 2009, 68).¹¹ L'évanescence de la programmation télévisuelle et son illégitimité culturelle sont donc des caractéristiques fondamentales du média qui affectent directement la sauvegarde de ses textes.

On pourrait finalement avancer que la télévision, dont la technologie repose sur l'impulsion électrique, se situe, dans le spectre des médias de la reproductibilité de l'image en mouvement, à l'opposé du film cinématographique, dont l'impression durable de l'image sur la pellicule le rend tangible et accessible. Alors que l'image télévisuelle est le résultat d'un signal électrique, l'image filmique est imprimée sur pellicule (et ainsi matérielle). La pellicule est donc, par essence, une sauvegarde alors que la télévision, onde de passage, tend à transmettre dans l'immédiat. Par conséquent, le film et sa pellicule possèdent une légitimité archivistique et muséale, comme nous le verrons plus loin, qui est niée à la télévision, même lorsqu'elle est tournée en 16 mm.

La télévision fonctionne dans un flux constant de répétitions et d'itérations de textes télévisuels, qui semblent être joués en direct, et dont les effets et les significations diffèrent d'un contexte et d'un moment à l'autre. Ce *flow*, tel que défini par Raymond Williams dans son livre *Television : Technology and Cultural Form*, consiste en une succession incessante d'unités audiovisuelles qui alimentent et soutiennent la téléspectatrice et le téléspectateur d'un programme à l'autre, d'une publicité à l'autre, et même d'une chaîne à l'autre (Williams 1975). Il reconstruit et réarrange en continu et dans le temps un agrégat de données, d'artéfacts, de textes et de paratextes qui construisent l'identité, la continuité et le métatexte télévisuels. Autrement dit, paradoxalement, la télévision crée, réutilise et réactualise constamment ses propres archives télévisuelles jusqu'à ce qu'elles deviennent obsolètes dans ce flux programmatique et disparaissent des ondes.

William Uricchio (2012) suggère que ce métatexte, qui alimente le flux télévisuel, est un générateur d'histoire. Il explique que, par nécessité, la télévision recombine constamment cet agrégat de données et d'artéfacts dans le temps, selon une logique de séquence, d'interpénétration et de répétition. Ces dimensions hétérochroniques ont, selon lui, suivi sans fléchir les nombreuses mutations technologiques—de la transmission par la voie des ondes, à la transmission par câble ou satellite, de l'arrivée de la télécommande et du magnétoscope, du passage de l'analogique au numérique—sans qu'elles n'aient affecté son essence de représentation en direct, soit son immédiateté, sa continuité, sa proximité et la coexistence de ses contenus télévisuels avec d'autres médias. La télévision a donc cette qualité, qui lui nuit aussi, de produire rapidement et quotidiennement quantité de textes, dans un esprit d'immédiateté. Or, dès lors qu'elle est envisagée dans sa continuité historique comme « un véhicule de l'histoire publique » (Uricchio 2012, 36), l'illégitimité congénitale de l'archive télévisuelle peut être surmontée pour être rassemblée et cataloguée adéquatement pour que, dorénavant, ces textes soient utilisés comme des éléments d'archives valables pour renseigner les chercheurs et le public.

L'ambition de cataloguer les productions audiovisuelles sur l'art

À plusieurs reprises dans l'histoire de l'audiovisuel, des institutions ayant identifié le potentiel pédagogique du film ont tenté de recenser, d'archiver et de cataloguer des titres de films, et dans une moindre mesure d'émissions télévisuelles sur l'art, afin de les distribuer à l'international à des fins pédagogiques. Les premières initiatives remontent à l'entre-deux-guerres, et sont le fait de l'Institut International du cinématographe éducatif (IICE), créé en 1928 sous l'égide de la Société des Nations (SDN). Dans ses documents constitutifs, l'institut affirme vouloir « favoriser la production, la diffusion et l'échange entre les divers pays des films éducatifs concernant l'instruction, l'art, l'industrie, l'agriculture, le commerce, l'hygiène, l'éducation sociale, etc. » (Société des Nations 1928, 8). L'IICE travaillait à l'élaboration d'un catalogue—qui ne se concrétisera pas—à l'unification, à la classification, au catalogage et à la distribution internationale des films éducatifs ainsi qu'à la standardisation des pratiques et des technologies de production. Vingt ans plus tard, ces visées sont reprises par l'UNESCO, avec la Fédération internationale du film sur l'art (FIFA) notamment,

qui voit aussi dans le film sur l'art, puis dans la télévision, un vecteur de circulation des savoirs sur l'art (Read 1962 ; Drot 1963). La FIFA consacre des efforts considérables au recensement et au catalogage de films sur l'art, et produit, entre 1949 et 1953, trois catalogues de courts métrages éducatifs sur l'art qui sont autant d'instantanés d'une période où la production audiovisuelle sur l'art s'intensifie, surtout en Europe. Le premier catalogue, *Les films sur l'art: Études critiques, répertoire international* date de 1949 et recense 148 films provenant de treize pays ; *Le film sur l'art: Bilan 1950, Études critiques, répertoire international II*, publié en 1950, recense 325 films de vingt-et-un pays ; et en 1953, *Le film sur l'art : Panorama 1953* propose un total de 629 titres sélectionnés dans trente pays. À partir de 1960, l'UNESCO entreprend ensuite la publication d'une dizaine de catalogues sélectifs de films concernant les divers aspects de l'activité artistique. À l'instar de l'IICE, les films sont identifiés et sélectionnés par des comités spécialisés dans les différents domaines du film et de l'art. D'ampleur très variable, la plupart de ces catalogues incluent une part d'analyse critique, ainsi que des recommandations concernant les moyens nécessaires pour maximiser le potentiel éducatif du film sur l'art. Cette initiative institutionnelle a pour bénéfice de rassembler, d'attribuer et de rendre visible de manière cohérente un grand nombre de documents audiovisuels d'un corpus autrement dispersé et inaccessible auprès d'un vaste public grâce à un système organisé d'archivage et de distribution internationale des bandes. Le rythme de publication de ces catalogues s'espace progressivement et l'UNESCO cesse définitivement de les financer et de les publier au milieu des années 1970.

Aux États-Unis, le Metropolitan Museum of Art de New York initie, en 1984, un important programme de production, de recensement, de catalogage et de diffusion de films sur l'art, le *Program for Art on Film*, en partenariat avec la Paul J. Getty Foundation et la Columbia University School of the Arts. Ce programme, totalement indépendant de l'UNESCO, a pour ambition d'améliorer la qualité et de valoriser la production de films, de vidéos, de CDROMs et d'autres réalisations interactives consacrés aux beaux-arts, à l'architecture, à la photographie, aux arts décoratifs et à d'autres sujets connexes (« Art on screen database », s. d.). Novatrice dans l'adoption des technologies de l'information, le *Program* rend cette base de données disponible par les moyens naissants du web. On peut lire dans un document de présentation : « Le principal projet du programme est la base de données *Art on Film*, un index informatique international de plus de 25 000 films, vidéos et vidéodisques sur les arts visuels (Covert 1994). » On entend ici des documents audiovisuels apparemment aussi disparates que le court métrage *Van Gogh* d'Alain Resnais de 1948 et une série télévisée de la BBC, datant de 1972, *Ways of Seeing*.

Une série de panels d'évaluateurs composés d'historiens de l'art, d'éducateurs en art, d'experts et de programmeurs de chaînes de télévision a établi un catalogue critique de 709 documents. Le *Art on Screen : A directory of films and videos about the visual arts* recommande ainsi des films et des vidéos « remarquables par la qualité de leur production ou par l'importance ou le caractère unique de leur contenu » (Covert et al. 1992). Si l'introduction du catalogue, fidèle à la tradition, propose une première partie portant sur les « Early Films on Art », composée de

courts films classiques sur l'art de cinéastes français, italiens et belges surtout, elle brise cette convention dans la seconde partie intitulée « The Television Era », en soulignant l'importance des documents télévisuels sur l'art et le rôle central qu'a pris la télévision dans l'éducation à l'art. Les recherches sur le sujet tendent à démontrer que les Nord-Américains n'entretiennent pas de présupposés d'illégitimité à l'égard du média (Demay 2024). En 1994, 600 institutions à travers le monde sont inscrites à la base de données, dont 200 musées. Le *Program for Art on Film* représente un travail titanesque de recensement, d'archivage, de curation et de mise en ligne. Le programme prend fin en 1997, sans doute faute de reconduction des fonds. Il s'agit là de l'initiative institutionnelle, venant d'un musée privé de surcroît, la plus ambitieuse en matière de création et de partage des savoirs sur les arts à partir de documents audiovisuels.

Ces deux initiatives, remarquables par leur envergure, montrent bien l'incroyable potentiel pédagogique d'une curation éclairée d'archives audiovisuelles, tant pour les musées que pour l'ensemble des acteurs de la société, ayant à cœur le rayonnement, la compréhension et l'écriture d'une histoire de l'art audiovisuelle. Mais le fait qu'une institution comme l'UNESCO et une collaboration aussi prestigieuse et bien dotée que celle de la Getty Foundation et du MET ne reconduisent pas ces activités dans lesquelles ils ont investi considérablement, témoigne d'un problème fondamental directement lié à la curation des archives audiovisuelles. L'importance des ressources, tant financières qu'humaines et technologiques, nécessaires à la sélection critique, à la curation, à la production d'un catalogue et à la mise à jour des données rend toute initiative non viable à long terme. Des deux exemples, l'initiative américaine semble la plus aboutie pour répondre à des besoins tant éducatifs que de préservation, en particulier grâce à l'importance accordée à la curation informée des documents. Cependant, il semble difficile, pour des raisons pratiques surtout, de maintenir un niveau satisfaisant de curation des archives, en sus de leur sauvegarde. Qu'en est-il alors de la *simple* préservation de documents audiovisuels dans des fonds dédiés?

Le site américain *Internet Archive* et le fonds de l'Institut national de l'audiovisuel de France (INA) se distinguent des initiatives de la SDN, de l'UNESCO et du MET par leur vocation première d'archivage des artefacts audiovisuels, notamment ceux de la télévision et plus précisément, des journaux télévisés. Lancée en 1996, la bibliothèque numérique à but non lucratif *Internet Archive* a pour mission de fournir un accès universel aux connaissances culturelles au sens large. Ce site identifie, préserve et rend accessibles à tous, sur Internet, en format numérique unifié, des milliards de pages web, des millions de livres, d'images, d'enregistrements audio, de vidéos ainsi qu'une sélection d'éléments de journaux d'actualité télévisés américains dans le fonds d'archives *TV News*. La sauvegarde systématique de ces contenus produits, itérés et remplacés quotidiennement représente une source historique inestimable pour la communauté de chercheurs, mais aussi pour les citoyen-ne-s intéressé-e-s par l'histoire américaine et mondiale. En créant ce fonds, *Internet Archive* fait de la télévision une source citable, valable et partageable, au même titre que les autres textes normalement valorisés pour la recherche, comme les imprimés à usage

de source. Si le fonds propose plusieurs pistes de recherche, soit par média, institution ou thématique, la quantité considérable d'artefacts représentés rend la recherche et la découverte ardues.

L'Institut national de l'audiovisuel (INA) de France propose quant à lui deux niveaux de recherche dans ses fonds d'archives télévisuelles, radiophoniques et web le site *Inathèque* qui permet d'explorer les métadonnées de l'INA et la plateforme qui offre aux chercheurs *INA mediapro* et aux professionnels des médias la possibilité de consulter les documents en ligne, et ce, avec une option d'achat de contenu. Le dépôt légal, institué en 1537 par François 1^{er} et qui oblige tout ayant droit à déposer « tout document diffusé en nombre à un public s'étendant au-delà du cercle de famille », est à l'origine de la création de l'INA (BNF). Par obligation législative, l'institut doit conserver dans ses voûtes *tous* les textes télévisuels français mais il ne procède pas à la curation de ses contenus. Cette médiathèque se présente donc comme une fenêtre ouverte sur l'ensemble de la production télévisuelle depuis les débuts de la télédiffusion en France.

Grâce au processus institutionnalisé de sélection, les documents audiovisuels sur l'art catalogués par la FIFA et le MET sont devenus des canons de la production audiovisuelle sur l'art. Autrement dit, c'est une curation basée sur des critères de qualité, désignés par des professionnels des médias, des journalistes, des critiques, des historiens et des conservateurs de l'art, qui a légitimé certains artefacts plutôt que d'autres en soulevant leur valeur pédagogique, créative et historique. Ces catalogues critiques avaient l'avantage d'offrir une référence sûre et un guide pédagogique aux institutions qui y avaient recours à des fins surtout éducatives. Les bases de données *d'Internet Archive* et de l'INA, quant à elles, ont pour seule mission la sauvegarde des données brutes disparates, potentiellement jugées impropres à la rediffusion. Ici, seul l'utilisateur est en mesure d'extraire du sens des données stockées et de valoriser ces textes de manière critique ou créative. Une chercheuse pourra ainsi les utiliser à des fins de recherche académique et de partage des connaissances, tandis qu'un réalisateur y trouvera des images pour informer un documentaire. Une appropriation et une actualisation de textes originaux peuvent alors avoir lieu, ce qui engendre des relectures critiques et historiques de ces mêmes archives, d'autant plus à l'ère du numérique, où ces « relectures » sont potentiellement, et dans la pratique, recyclées et commentées à l'infini.

De la difficulté de sauvegarder les archives télévisuelles

Avant d'en arriver au recyclage du texte télévisuel sous la forme de nouveaux documents, il convient de revenir à sa nature originelle. Puisque les textes télévisuels, comme l'explique bien William Uricchio, sont constamment répétés, itérés et recombinaisonnés pendant leur temps de vie à la télévision, ils ont déjà acquis valeur d'archive dès leur première diffusion, au moment où ils s'effacent pour céder leur place à d'autres dans le flux de télédiffusion. Autrement dit, la nouvelle de première heure diffusée dans un journal télévisé est un événement de première diffusion du document télévisuel en question. Ses rediffusions ultérieures dans les journaux télévisés suivants consistent en une répétition, une citation et un recyclage dans de nouveaux contextes

médiatiques, aux côtés d'autres types de segments télévisuels (nouvelles, chroniques et publicités, par exemple), jusqu'à ce qu'elle disparaisse des ondes. Considérant la valeur changeante d'un tel texte télévisuel, on peut se demander s'il est possible, comme l'espérait le directeur des Musées nationaux de France, Jean Châtelain, de retrouver, dans l'écrasante masse des chroniques d'actualité culturelle, l'exact segment de trois minutes consacrées, par exemple, au sculpteur Ossip Zadkine, télédiffusé entre 1965 et 1967 au *Journal télévisé de Paris Île-de-France*.

Une recherche de ce segment dans la base de données *Inathèque* donne un résultat de dix-sept notices citant l'artiste durant cette période. Celle à laquelle Châtelain fait sans doute référence dans sa lettre pourrait être le *Journal de Paris : émission du 25 juillet 1967*, avec un segment de quatre minutes trente dédié à Zadkine, diffusé à 19 h 45 (« Émission du 25 juillet 1967 » 1967), et non de trois minutes tel qu'indiqué par le directeur. Dans cette chronique, peut-on lire dans la notice, l'artiste parle de sa période cubiste et la journaliste Monique Garnier-Lançon l'interroge sur sa façon particulière de représenter le cubisme par rapport aux écoles dominantes. Il s'agit vraisemblablement d'informations d'intérêt historiographique.¹² Malgré toutes mes tentatives pour visionner l'extrait en question sur la base de données *INA Mediapro*, je n'y suis pas parvenue ; aucune notice ne correspondait au descriptif. L'archive n'existe sans doute pas pour visionnement. Par ailleurs, il n'est nulle part fait mention de ce « document d'une durée de 14 minutes » auquel Châtelain fait référence dans sa lettre et dont est tiré le segment de trois minutes en question. Il y a plusieurs autres mentions de Zadkine, à la même époque, dans plusieurs journaux d'actualité, la plus étoffée étant cette nécrologie télévisée au *Journal Les Actualité Françaises : émission du 28 novembre 1967* (« Avec Zadkine disparaît un des grands sculpteurs de l'École de Paris » 1967). Cette rétrospective de l'artiste, qui s'étend de 1957 à 1961, est un montage de plusieurs segments d'images d'origines diverses, peut-être y compris l'entrevue citée par Châtelain. La notice de la base de données *Inathèque* décrit le document de la manière suivante : « artiste devant sa statue de Van Gogh », « artiste dans son atelier », « artiste surveillant le transport de la statue », « extraits d'entrevue », « vue de ses œuvres ». Cette revue d'une minute trente exactement est ainsi composée d'images préexistantes, apparemment captées sur pellicule et de provenances diverses, et qui, sans certitude, auraient été destinées à la diffusion télévisuelle. Si cette courte archive a une certaine importance pour l'histoire de l'art, il serait d'autant plus intéressant et satisfaisant d'accéder aux éléments bruts d'où sont tirés les segments du montage diffusé le 28 novembre 1967, comme ce tournage de 14 minutes.

Cet exemple entourant les archives télévisuelles de l'artiste Ossip Zadkine montre bien la difficulté d'identifier, de sauvegarder et de valoriser *tous* les types de documents télévisuels. L'image télévisuelle remplit donc deux fonctions : l'une directe et quasi informationnelle lors de sa première diffusion dans le cadre d'un journal télévisé (par exemple, l'annonce d'une exposition), et l'autre, qui suit immédiatement, l'actualisation en archive, à la télévision et, éventuellement, dans de nouveaux textes télévisuels, selon les circonstances (par exemple, dans un documentaire ou lors de la mention d'un événement marquant comme un décès). La chronique télévisuelle,

composée de matériel original et/ou de plusieurs textes audiovisuels recyclés, devient donc, dès sa seconde télédiffusion, une nouvelle archive d'un passé récent qui peut être recontextualisée dans une histoire plus longue lorsqu'elle est conservée, en entier ou en partie.

Légitimer l'archive télévisuelle

Où se situent les archives télévisuelles par rapport à d'autres textes médiatiques déjà légitimés, comme ceux conservés dans des collections de musées? Comment peuvent-elles renseigner l'histoire de l'art?

Le 1^{er} janvier 1949, la Radiodiffusion-télévision française (RTF) diffuse pour la première fois un magazine d'actualité culturelle, *Reflets de Paris* (1949-1950), qui se présente comme l'une « des premières émissions conçues et réalisées uniquement en vue de sa projection sur les écrans de la télévision » et qui a pour vocation de présenter « les ressources inépuisables de Paris » (*Reflets de Paris* 1949a). La jeune télévision française puise d'abord ses contenus dans les catalogues destinés aux salles de cinéma, notamment les journaux d'actualité produits par les studios de cinéma. Puis, *Reflets de Paris* va rapidement produire et introduire des segments d'actualité culturelle parisienne, filmés strictement par et pour la télévision.

La base de données *Inathèque* décrit l'émission de *Reflets de Paris* comme une série de chroniques de deux à quinze minutes, tournées en extérieur sur pellicule 16 mm, abordant des sujets aussi divers que le sport, le vedettariat, la mode, la culture et la vie parisienne en général. Concernant les beaux-arts, les reportages s'intéressent surtout « à l'artisanat et à différents métiers manuels », comme la fabrication de la faïence « de la matière brute à l'objet fini », ou celle des épaulettes de costumes militaires, ainsi qu'à des expositions (*Reflets de Paris* 1949a). Le 22 avril 1949, par exemple, *Reflets de Paris* dédie un segment de reportage de quatre minutes de la Soixantième exposition de la Société des artistes indépendants du Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris. La notice affichée dans la base de données décrit le segment comme suit : « [G]ros plan d'abord de l'affiche de l'exposition, public entrant dans l'exposition et admirant des œuvres, œuvres exposées » (« Soixantième exposition de la Société des Artistes Indépendants » 1949b). Le 15 mai 1949, ce même magazine propose une séquence montrant le peintre Georges Braque dans son atelier, entouré de l'équipe de tournage (*Reflets de Paris* 1949c).

INA Mediapro permet de visionner une quarantaine d'éléments d'archives portant la notice « *Reflets de Paris* ». Premier constat : les archives citées dans l'*Inathèque* identifiées plus haut ne sont pas accessibles pour visionnement en intégralité et plusieurs segments sont introuvables, notamment celui portant sur l'exposition des artistes indépendants. Ensuite, les images conservées filmées sur pellicule 16 mm, en extérieur, à Paris et dans des ateliers d'artistes, sont muettes. Enfin, le montage, assez brut, avec des plans longs sur des cartons, des plans qui se répètent, des coupures brusques, laisse penser qu'il s'agit de rushes mis bout à bout, plutôt que de la chronique elle-même.

Tout élément en direct lié à la télédiffusion en est absent, notamment la présentation parlée du réalisateur et animateur Aimé Chabrierie. On peut supposer

que la médiation audio, avec une voix off, a été réalisée lors de la diffusion en direct à la télévision. De plus, les interviews ne sont pas audibles non plus, pas plus que la conversation entre George Braque et Chabrier que l'on voit à l'écran. Ainsi, *voir* Braque dans son atelier, entouré de l'équipe de tournage qui s'active, est une chose, l'entendre aurait probablement éclairé son art. Ainsi, si les archives filmées sur pellicule, disponibles pour le visionnement de *Reflets de Paris*, peuvent renseigner sur le Paris de 1949, elles sont néanmoins incomplètes en ce qui concerne leur potentiel de mémoire télévisuelle, puisqu'elles ne rendent pas compte de la réalité de la télédiffusion de cette année-là.

Autrement dit, voici une autre difficulté liée aux archives télévisées. Alors que la médiathèque prétend donner à voir des archives des premiers temps, il y a confusion quant à leur nature : sont-ce des archives télévisuelles ou des images audiovisuelles archivées? D'une part, les émissions ne sont pas toutes conservées dans leur intégralité, soit parce que le son et la narration ont été omis, soit parce que seuls des segments de l'émission complète ont été conservés. D'autre part, une incertitude persiste quant à la nature même de ces segments. On peut par exemple douter que les images montrant l'équipe de tournage dans l'atelier de Braque aient fait partie de la chronique télédiffusée. Il est donc difficile dès lors de bien comprendre et de rapporter la réalité télévisuelle de l'époque ainsi que le discours porté alors à la télévision sur la vie artistique. Il reste que de tels documents ont une valeur d'archive, puisqu'ils donnent à voir—ne serait-ce que cela—le travail des artisans, les visages et les ateliers d'artistes, les accrochages d'expositions, les tendances et la médiatisation de l'art de l'époque.

Étudier l'archive audiovisuelle dans ces conditions requiert une expertise et un savoir-faire pour en tirer du sens. C'est d'ailleurs en plongeant dans ces fonds que l'on peut réfléchir au potentiel historiographique des archives audiovisuelles. Il est également utile de faire des recoupements historiques et formels avec d'autres types de textes d'archives (écrits, filmiques, photographiques) déjà collectionnés, et de procéder à des associations libres au fil des découvertes, dans le sens psychanalytique du terme, entre les médias et entre les archives elles-mêmes. Il existe, par exemple, une réelle communauté formelle entre ces chroniques culturelles de la télévision des premiers temps et les journaux d'actualité projetés en salle au début du siècle qu'il convient de mettre en lumière ici.

En 1931, le conseil d'administration de l'IICE adopte une proposition de l'historien de l'art Henri Focillon, membre du comité constitutif de l'Institut, visant à créer une collection de films éducatifs montés à partir de journaux d'actualité filmés ou même de « films spectaculaires » (films de fiction), pour autant qu'ils se rattachent soit à « l'histoire de la technique, soit à un fait précis de l'histoire générale » (Société des Nations 1931, 159). Les journaux d'actualité auxquels Focillon fait référence sont ces hebdomadaires destinés aux salles de cinéma, comme les *Pathé Journal* et *Gaumont Actualités* du début du siècle. Preuve de leur importance archivistique et de leur reconnaissance historique, ces *newsreels*, réalisés entre 1907 et 1931, ont fait l'objet d'une revue critique et d'une programmation de projection de films de non-fiction et de documentaires au MoMA en 1945 (Barry 1945). La conserva-

trice, Iris Barry, place ces *newsreels* aux côtés des films de Dziga Vertov et de Sergueï Eisenstein, du Documentary Film Movement (Mouvement du documentaire britannique) des années 1930, et des documentaires de l'Office national du film du Canada. Parmi les bandes d'actualité de *Pathé Journal* et de *Gaumont Actualités*, on retrouve des prises de vue d'expositions restituant des accrochages et immortalisant des vernissages (Robert 2013, 47). Ces *newsreels*, muets, tournés et montés très simplement, ont rapidement trouvé leur place dans les collections des musées. Or, les reportages d'actualité télévisuelle des années 1940, qui ont repris cette forme, offraient un regard encore plus rapproché sur les événements historiques. Bien plus que les actualités cinématographiques, la télévision a toujours eu pour fonction et ambition de rapporter les réalités quotidiennes et régionales, afin de créer un contact immédiat avec son public et grâce à sa technologie de diffusion en direct. Dans ces conditions, elle a rapporté, en flux, depuis son avènement, un grand nombre d'expositions et de vernissages, capté le geste artistique, enregistré les savoir-faire des artisans et immortalisé les grands artistes. Elle offre ainsi une quantité incroyable d'informations de première main aux historiens de l'art et aux conservateurs. Véritable fenêtre sur les arts régionaux, nationaux et mondiaux, la télévision joue le rôle de mémoire et de génératrice d'histoires de l'art et des cultures. Cependant, ces documents télévisuels sont encore trop rarement invités dans les musées.

Lorsque les musées (et le public) s'emparent de la mémoire télévisuelle

En 2003, la télévision publique belge (RTBF), a fêté ses 50 ans d'existence. Dans le cadre des activités célébrant cet anniversaire, les archives télévisuelles étaient naturellement à l'honneur. À l'occasion de l'exposition «RTBF 50 ans» qui se tenait du 27 mars au 27 septembre 2004, le Musée royal de Mariemont a proposé une exposition intitulée *L'extraordinaire jardin de la mémoire* qui invitait à «plonger dans l'immense réservoir de mémoire que constituent les images télévisées au travers du dialogue entre les collections et les images» (Hanot 2005, 28). Il allait de soi—même si cela ne va pas de soi, nous l'avons vu—que cinquante ans de documents télévisuels représentaient une source exceptionnelle pour raconter l'histoire du pays et de la télévision publique belge. La plongée dans la mémoire commençait par une histoire du télédiffuseur, suivie des événements forts qu'il a couverts. L'exposition se terminait par un troisième volet qui confrontait des objets choisis, tirés des réserves du musée, avec des archives de la RTBF. Ce dernier volet, qui provoquait des rencontres inusitées, a ouvert des pistes herméneutiques inattendues et très fécondes (Mairesse 2006).

Dans un article consacré à l'exposition, Muriel Hanot, professeure de journalisme à l'Université catholique de Louvain, évoque les difficultés liées au traitement des archives télévisuelles : problèmes d'indexation, fonds inexplorés, perte de documents, quantité de documents sans notice, qualité très inégale—voire détérioration—des images. Pour pallier quelques-uns de ces manques, les conservateurs ont eu l'idée de faire appel à la mémoire des Belges, qu'il s'agisse des artisans de la télévision ou des téléspectateurs. Grâce à leur expérience du média, ils ont pu indiquer des émissions et des moments télévisuels qui seraient restés dans l'oubli autrement, et

ainsi guider les conservateurs.

Temps forts de l'histoire et temps retrouvés du quotidien sont d'abord apparus aux conservateurs de manière aléatoire, à travers ce processus de sélection et de curation collectif résolument subjectif. L'association d'images télévisuelles a d'abord permis de faire remonter à la surface des éléments des fonds d'archives, restituant ainsi une vaste mémoire publique alimentée par cinquante ans de télévision. Puis, la rencontre entre les images télévisées et les éléments des réserves du musée a pris soudainement la forme d'un cabinet de curiosités, où l'un et l'autre pouvaient enfin s'équivaloir au sein de l'institution muséale. Hanot admet qu'il s'agit d'un savoir et d'une mémoire télévisuelle que « l'on pressentait sans la mesurer vraiment » avant de conclure qu'une telle mise en lumière des archives télévisuelles en dialogue avec le patrimoine muséal, constitue « un vibrant plaidoyer pour la sauvegarde et la consultation des archives [télévisuelles] » (Hanot 2005, 31). Les documents télévisuels, ainsi identifiés, assemblés, et puis commentés par d'autres médias et archives, représentent une véritable source de compréhension du monde et de son histoire. Autrement dit, une fois devenu image du passé, le texte télévisuel propose une toile historique constituée de trous—disparitions, effacements, classements douteux et disparates—qui ne peuvent être appréhendés et complétés que par les mémoires et les histoires des individus ayant participé à sa réalisation et à sa réception. La télévision présente ici sa particularité marquante: appartenant à tous, elle renvoie au collectif.

À l'ère du numérique et de la relocalisation de la télévision sur des plateformes Internet comme YouTube, les archives télévisuelles réapparaissent, tirées des fonds d'archives publics comme *Internet Archive* mais aussi de la mémoire des téléspectateurs. La réappropriation de ces textes télévisuels par de nouveaux publics, qui ne sont ni des spécialistes, ni des chercheurs, mais des connaisseurs de l'image télévisuelle, comme ces publics dits de masse, suggère, selon Uricchio, « les signes d'un engagement critique » individuel qui peut conduire à la production de nouveaux signifiants historiques (Uricchio 2012, 38). Comme nous l'avons vu dans le cas de l'exposition de la RTBF, les artisans de la télévision et les téléspectateurs, véritables spécialistes du média, sont devenus des agents actifs dans la curation des données. Ces nouveaux « commissaires » de leurs propres collections doivent néanmoins pouvoir accéder à ces archives pour les sortir de l'oubli, les mettre en valeur et les actualiser dans l'histoire. Dans un processus caractéristique des médias numériques, ces images, révélées de nouveau, sont dès lors destinées à entrer dans un processus de « pratiques de lecture recombinaire » (Uricchio 2012, 38) qui incluent et mêlent toutes sortes de sources et de médias, comme ce fut le cas au début de la télévision. Si cette perspective de circulation et de monstration des archives télévisuelles peut séduire, elle ne règle toutefois pas les enjeux de sauvegarde et de curation de la quantité quasi infinie de données enfouies souvent pêle-mêle, une réalité qui concerne actuellement la grande majorité des artefacts télévisuels. Par conséquent, il semble pratiquement impossible d'en tirer un sens de manière systématique, même si, théoriquement, leur potentiel pédagogique, historiographique et même créatif, ne fait aucun doute.

Notes

¹ Parmi les fonds d'archives consultés : les Archives nationales de France, l'Institut national de l'audiovisuel (INA), l'UNESCO, le Metropolitan Museum of Art de New York, le Museum of Modern Art de New York, la BBC, le British Film Institute, Internet Archive. Pour diverses raisons (légales, institutionnelles, économiques, etc), plusieurs de ces institutions cherchaient à comprendre le nouveau média et ont produit des analyses, des revues, des catalogues et des sauvegardes de documents audiovisuels. Il existe d'autres fonds qui n'ont malheureusement pas été consultés faute de temps, comme la Library of Congress à Washington DC.

² Dans un discours adressé aux membres de la National Association of Broadcasters le 9 mai 1961 aux États-Unis, le président de la Federation Communication Commission (FCC), Newton Minow qualifie ainsi la programmation télévisuelle commerciale américaine : « When television is good, nothing — not the theater, not the magazines or newspapers — nothing is better. But when television is bad, nothing is worse. I invite each of you to sit down in front of your own television set (...). Keep your eyes glued to that set until the station signs off. I can assure you that what you will observe is a vast wasteland » (Minow 1961).

³ La base de données ne fait pas mention du « Journal télévisé de Paris Île-de-France », mais plutôt du « Journal de Paris ». Il faudrait donc s'assurer de leur équivalence avant toute chose.

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Creating an Educational Common: Activating Vulnerable Media Archives in the Classroom

Chloë Brushwood Rose and Axelle Demus

What are the challenges of mobilizing marginalized and vulnerable audiovisual archival materials for classroom teaching? In this article, we reflect on this question and our own work as educational leads for the pan-Canadian project “Archive/Counter-Archive: Activating Canada’s Moving Image Heritage” (A/CA).¹ Launched in 2018, A/CA seeks to activate and remediate audiovisual heritage that is “most vulnerable to disappearance and inaccessibility,” with a focus on “counter-archives”—defined as archives that are “political, ingenious, resistant, and community-based” and which “counter the hegemony of traditional . . . institutions” (Archive/Counter-Archive n.d.). The project achieved this through eight case studies which involved original research with often overlooked, historically neglected, or vulnerable media—works by Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, Inuit), Black and People of Colour, women, LGBTQ+, and immigrant communities—held by Canadian, community-based, and independent archives and distributors. A central goal of the project was to leverage these organizations and their collections to increase public engagement through creative forms of knowledge mobilization that “activate” archival materials and foreground the pressing need to rethink what archives can and might do in the twenty-first century. While providing access to archival materials at risk of disappearing is an essential part of the project, activating archives is a highly interactive and participatory process, and a dynamic way of generating new knowledge and conversations about the (hi)stories these archives contain or, sometimes, silence. As Alexandra Juhasz and Theodore Kerr note, the archival impulse must be to “save and care, but also animate and share: to do with and from the things” (2022, 113).

To this end, we have been developing a series of multi-disciplinary educational guides related to our eight case studies in order to mobilize these collections

in secondary and post-secondary institutions. This work is an integral part of the A/CA project's larger exploration of the pedagogical value of film and video, especially archives of such material, produced by communities whose voices are generally excluded from the mainstream curriculum. We began our work on these guides by meeting with the partner organizations and their case study leads to think about how the case studies themselves might offer rich pedagogical material not already widely available in the secondary or university curriculum. Case study leads aimed to understand the archival materials they selected through an exploration of their historical conditions of production, their ties to and meanings for community, and their production and presentation details. Our discussions with case study partners considered not only the "vulnerable media" selected for the case studies, but also the range of critical works, historical records, narratives, and artist responses that had been assembled in relation to these materials through the case study. The educational guides are informed by the fullness of each case study, but focus on the materials and resources we identified, in collaboration with case study partners, as most generative for classroom instruction given its constraints.

We envision these educational guides as mobilizing a kind of "counter-curriculum" in high school and university classes, one which is meant to augment, challenge, or even subvert the academic canon—in the same way that A/CA is interested in "the disruptive, resistant and enriching potential of counter-archives" (Archive/Counter-Archive n.d.). At the same time, however, like counter-archives in relation to official archives, a counter-curriculum is not only oppositional but has its own complex relationship to the dominant curriculum. Not all of the audiovisual archives created by people whose work has been marginalized, for instance, can be considered counter to the perspectives offered in the dominant curriculum. In fact, some of this material—and especially the older material, such as little-known government-funded tourism films made by a female director from the Maritimes—seemed to reference, and in some cases actively promote, the canon and its persistent absences. Counter-archives do not exist in a binary opposition to official archives but rather exist as forms of activation and remediation, sometimes borrowing and remixing dominant content and forms, to create new relationships and meanings (Lievrouw 2011, 219).

Instead of thinking of the educational guides as simply subverting or opposing the dominant curriculum, we started to conceptualize the counter-curriculum of the guides as creating an "educational common," as they work toward creating pedagogical spaces that understand audiovisual media archives as heterogeneous, affective, and relational. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri suggest that the common is what allows the multitude, heterogeneous and formed out of singularities, to "communicate and act together" (2004, xv) in ways that do not efface difference; the common must be produced rather than discovered, continually recreated via "communication, collaboration, and cooperation" (xv). As a place for "deliberation and engagement that are organized apart from market interests" (Low, Brushwood Rose, and Salvio 2016, 116), the educational common can emerge within and despite the institutional demands of schooling. Bronwen Low, Chloë Brushwood Rose, and Paula Salvio suggest that "storytelling and listening are integral to the struggle

to be a subject living in the common, to exist as the member of a community and to sustain one's singular character while at the same time fulfilling one's obligations in the public realm" (2016, 123). The guides themselves draw on this understanding to offer a framework for attending to difference and the relations that living with difference necessitates. In other words, we conceive the pedagogy of the counter-archive as a mode of community building as well as a way of cultivating the intimate relations that sustain the archive itself.

This article focuses on the process of creating A/CA educational guides for two different case studies (Brushwood Rose and Demus 2022; 2023a; 2023b; 2023c; 2023d; 2023e).² First, we discuss A/CA's AIDS Activist Media Case Study, which, in partnership with the Toronto-based artist-run centre Vtape and queer studies scholar Ryan Conrad, restored *Toronto Living with AIDS (TLWA)*, a 1990–91 cable access television program about HIV/AIDS produced by Canadian video artists Michael Balser and John Greyson in collaboration with numerous artists and community organizations. Second, we reflect on our efforts to create educational guides about the archives of Margaret Perry, one of Canada's most important, most prolific, yet least-known woman filmmakers and early film bureaucrats who produced and directed about fifty government films from 1945 to 1969 dedicated to promoting tourism in the province of Nova Scotia. As part of the A/CA case study, which was led by Canadian media scholar Jennifer VanderBurgh, these films were digitized and made available by the Nova Scotia Archives. As may be clear, these two case studies, while both representing audiovisual archives left vulnerable due to marginalization, have, at first glance, very little in common in terms of the cultural and pedagogical challenges they pose. However, both case studies led us to ask similar questions, which we explore in this article: How do we mobilize such material to encourage community building in the classroom? How can we bring media archives into the classroom that are potentially culturally and politically out of touch with contemporary perceptions and attitudes? How and why should we invite students to care about media archives that do not directly speak to their lived experiences, and that may even negate them? In other words, how do we hold on to the histories they contain while problematizing their legacies? In this essay, we articulate various reflections on what it means to teach marginalized audiovisual archives to create an "educational common."

Critical Pedagogies of Film, Video, and Archives

An approach to teaching with film and video archives that seeks to cultivate a common asks us to think about how pedagogical experience might be a foundational condition of social engagement and public life. Instead of thinking about education in institutional terms, Irit Rogoff asks, can we think of education as relation? Rogoff advocates for what she calls "weak education," an approach she contrasts with "strong, redemptive, missionary education." "Weak education," she writes, is "a discourse on education that is non-reactive" and instead posits education as "in and of the world—not a response to crisis, but part of its ongoing complexity, not reacting to realities, but producing them" (2008, 5–6) or, for our purposes, not reacting to the archive but producing it. Here, the significance of education is not understood

in terms of the institution's significance, or what the institution can teach us, but instead through the "weaker" question (to use Rogoff's language) of *what possibilities for engaging ideas differently it might offer*. Through the media archive, then, education "becomes the site of a coming-together of the odd and unexpected—shared curiosities, shared subjectivities, shared sufferings, and shared passions congregate around the promise of a subject, an insight, a creative possibility" (5–6).

In the pedagogical literature on film and video, this desire to engage ideas differently is often articulated through the discourses of critical pedagogy, understood as a force to achieve "liberation," "empowerment," and "agency" in students (Apple 2011; Freire 1970; Giroux 2011; Greene 1986; McLaren and Kincheloe 2007). Critical pedagogy draws on concepts from cultural studies and promotes the study of media texts in the classroom (Kellner 1995). As such, the study of film and video in the classroom has been influenced by critical pedagogy's desire to analyze the power relations between content, representation, and dominant ideologies, as well as the institutional controls over the production of meaning. In this model, audiovisual media offers "a critical framework for understanding . . . systems of power, domination, and oppression" (Simpson and Yun 2011, 366), a tool for engaging students "in critical examination and self-reflection regarding how individual, institutional, and structural factors account for the social and personal circumstances in which we find ourselves" (James, Marin, and Kassam 2011, 354). There is an assertion here that film and video can offer students "new, innovative, and analytical ways of seeing and relating to the world around us and offer different pedagogical possibilities than other educational resources, such as textbooks, provide" (354). Thinking specifically about media archives, Kate Fortmueller and Laura Isabel Serna highlight that they have "the capacity to animate discussions of film and media history in compelling, substantive ways" in the classroom (2017, n.p.).

Critical pedagogy also emphasizes the necessity of a classroom community and environment that cultivates open dialogue, regardless of the medium of instruction. Not unlike Rogoff's (2008) critique of a "strong" education in favour of a "weak" one, the dialogic approach in critical pedagogy is tied to Paulo Freire's seminal critique of what he called the "banking" model of education, a model that constructs education as a technical practice of transmitting knowledge from the teacher and prevents the humanizing activities of dialogue, inquiry, and critique, and instead "alienates people from their own decision making . . . changing them into objects" (1970, 85). We might say that the banking model severs ties between knowledge and students' own capacities to make meaning from their experiences of the world. Instead, Freire proposed a "problem-posing" model of education in which students and educators work together to engage everyday situations, not as a "static reality" but "as a problem," to reflect on the meaning and impact of these situations on the lives of people, and to generate solutions that can affect social change (85). In the problem-posing model, both educators and students are complex emotional and political subjects who are always "in the process of becoming" (80). When the classroom environment cultivates community and dialogue, just as viewers are no longer considered passive receptors of the film or video's messaging, the teacher does not

assume the role of a top-down messenger in engaging with the film or video; instead, they pose problems that emerge out of the media object(s).

Megha Anwer and Matt Varner describe this approach to education as “a Socratic method in which knowledge is produced in the dialogic interaction between the film and its viewer and the teacher and the students,” and stress the importance of not treating films simply “as another method/tool of teaching” but rather “as a site and source for pedagogical transactions” (2019, 142). In this approach, they suggest, the cinematic is understood as “innately pedagogical” (142) rather than as a method to deliver content. While film and video are narrative texts that can deliver information in order to address a particular issue, a historical occurrence, or to help explain different theoretical concepts (Pollard 2005; Aravopoulou, Stone, and Weinzierl 2017; Valeriano 2013; Andrist et al. 2014), media technologies are not neutral tools capturing objective realities (Buckingham 2003) but complex texts requiring interpretation.

Educational uses of film and video must consider not only content but also form and, in particular, the value of aesthetic forms in pedagogical spaces. As Michael J. Shapiro suggests, “in order to appreciate the way cinema provides a critical perspective on the world that exceeds what mere perception can achieve, it’s necessary to see a film’s characters as aesthetic rather than merely psychological subjects” (2009, 6). Samina Mishra notes that the visual encourages “a different kind of subjectivity, a subjectivity that is free of the boundaries set by words and vocabulary. While film language does have its own vocabulary, meaning in a film can be understood emotionally as well as intellectually” (2018, 114). Registering the aesthetic and affective aspects of film and video in our dialogue with students “can be an opportunity to interrogate affective response and to show the relationship between seemingly private opinions and broader cultural positioning” (Jankovic 2011, 91).

While we draw from and extend these reflections on the pedagogical value of film and video to the use of media archives in the classroom, this article is also firmly situated within a growing body of work which focuses specifically on the pedagogical functions of audiovisual archives. In addition to highlighting the participatory and empowering aspects of teaching and learning with archives (Carman 2017; Groening 2017; Lovejoy 2019b) as well as the potential of audiovisual archives to offer “an intelligent response to the push to instrumentalize . . . education” in the age of neoliberal schooling (Lovejoy 2019a, xii), this literature emphasizes the additional challenges that using archival materials bring to the classroom. For instance, Fortmueller and Serna argue that “The proximity to and distance from media archives present practical obstacles to creating and executing projects using primary, archival sources” (2017, n.p.). Philip Hallman and Matthew Solomon, on the other hand, discuss the unexpected benefits which they found in existing archival limitations; to them, limits can not only foster collaboration but “create new knowledge” (2019, 109). Adding to these rich conversations, we offer our own reflections on the challenges that arise when using audiovisual archives in the classroom. At the same time, we would be remiss not to underline that this literature tends to primarily focus on more “traditional” media archives—such as Hollywood films and movie culture (Johnson 2017;

Longo 2019), classic early cinema (Williamson 2019), or mainstream radio history (Ehrick 2017). And, when local or underrepresented media histories are discussed, they are often situated within American contexts of media production, circulation, preservation, and classroom activation at the expense of other locales (Groening 2017).

Our approach to the A/CA educational guides draws on these theoretical observations about the importance of film, video, and their archives. We see media archives and counter-archives as resources for a critical pedagogy that invite shared curiosities and questions, and which explore complex emotional and political problems. We consider film and video as aesthetically and affectively rich forms, and hope to invite teachers and students into a relationship with these vulnerable media in a way that might contribute to the development of an educational common made up of evolving relations to the materials that sustain, remediate, and activate these counter-archives while highlighting their situatedness within local, Canadian contexts.

The *Toronto Living with AIDS* Cable Access Video Series (1990–91)

Created by video makers John Greyson and Michael Balser for public access television in response to the devastation of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, *TLWA* was the product of fruitful collaborations between Toronto-based artists and community organizations. In fact, *TLWA* was (and remains) the “largest and most organized community-based effort to create audiovisual work about the AIDS crisis in Canada” (Conrad 2021, 1). The *TLWA* archive thus offers a direct view into AIDS activist discourse of the early 1990s and can be used to explore issues of sexuality, race, activism, health politics, LGBTQ+ history, and media in a variety of educational contexts.

In engaging with the challenges that this case study posed for us, it became clear that the *TLWA* archive could be used in the post-secondary classroom to transmit a shared sense of responsibility through relationality (Azzarello 2021, 167). In other words, we wanted the educational guide about the series to be an invitation to form affective bonds with the people on the tapes by foregrounding critical connections between the series’ original context of creation and the contemporary context in which students are now living. This section outlines the main reflections that emerged out of the collaborative conceptualization of this guide, which translate into larger reflections on how to teach HIV/AIDS media histories in the Canadian context today and how counter-archives—in this case audiovisual archives that are both marginalized and speak to marginalized subjects—can be mobilized in the classroom.

This case study is firmly situated within a period of renewed scholarly and artistic engagement with the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, which cultural theorists Alexandra Juhasz and Theodore Kerr have termed “AIDS Revisitation.” This recent surge of interest in HIV/AIDS, however, has tended to focus on works revolving around American, white, middle class, gay men—thus transmitting a U.S.-centric, whitewashed, patrimonial version of AIDS history (2022, 172). As Ryan Conrad insists:

We live at a moment of great interest and reinvestment in the history of AIDS activism . . . These histories are undergoing a storytelling process through which certain accounts begin to take canonical form. While this process of canonization makes AIDS activist histories more available to those who did not experience them firsthand, this process also leads to the occlusion of complex, lesser known, and marginalized aspects of the histories at stake. (2021, 1)

Rather than addressing a single, coherent epidemic, then, we wished for the guides to foreground how the series both constituted and amplified a constellation of locally situated responses related to HIV/AIDS during the epidemic's crisis years (in Canada, 1982–96). Therefore, the educational guides mark an important step in making sure that these “complex, lesser known” aspects of the crisis are put forward when thinking about histories of HIV/AIDS.

The tapes, in addressing numerous aspects of HIV/AIDS, are also an early example of how independent Canadian media of the 1990s attempted to take up the question of intersectionality. The series, indeed, is divided into twelve 30-minute episodes which deal with HIV/AIDS through a variety of lenses, tones, and formats, with each episode speaking to a particular audience, one that is often marginalized or may be affected by HIV, in order to share culturally sensitive information about the virus: women, gay men, racialized folks, Indigenous peoples, drug users, and so on. Yet, the series does not treat these populations as separate entities; rather, it addresses, in innovative and sometimes clumsy ways, how HIV/AIDS magnified systemic issues such as heterosexism, racism, ableism, and their intersections. The series thus emphasizes the complex relationships between sexuality, race, gender, ability, and, to a lesser extent, class, which was groundbreaking for the times. The tapes and their reception also show how fragile and vulnerable such representations were in the 1990s: two of the episodes, which we included in the guide, were effectively reprimanded by the (white, cis, heterosexual) cable station manager in charge of the series for the ways in which they depicted the sexuality of queer people of colour—eventually leading to the cancellation of *Toronto Living with AIDS* altogether.³ The *TLWA* archive can thus be mobilized to teach students about the difficult beginnings of visibility politics and intersectionality in North America. For media and sexuality studies students specifically, it also provides excellent examples of how to create intersectional and radical representations in the age of neoliberal “diversity and inclusion.” It is also important, however, to point to shortcomings of the *TLWA* tapes—in their attempt to create intersectional media, they, indeed, remain imperfect and their limitations must be put into perspective through interactive discussions regarding the complex sociopolitical and historical context of the time.

At the same time we wished for students to critically engage with the intersectionality of these HIV/AIDS tapes and of HIV/AIDS itself, we also wanted to make sure that students would understand that HIV/AIDS is not located solely in the past but has continuing impacts in the present—thus we needed to frame the *TLWA* archive not simply as a testament of a devastating time period, but as a vital

document which may contain blueprints to respond to HIV/AIDS today, in addition to engaging with intersecting and ongoing crises. Conrad further explains: “The importance of revisiting and maintaining this archive . . . is not merely to preserve the past for the sake of history, but to attend to the stories that emerge from AIDS activist cultural archives and their revelatory potential for historical consciousness in the present” (2021, 1). And, indeed, the guides were also created in a specific context, during which multiple crises were (and continue to be) unfolding in the Canadian landscape: the COVID-19 pandemic, the rise in anti-Black racism and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, the #MeToo movement, the backlash against trans and queer rights, and the continued impacts of settler-colonialism on Indigenous communities. We thus asked ourselves: How can the guides help students understand not only the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, but also help them consider, as Jennifer Ansley notes, “how to take better care of [themselves] and each other in the context of multiple intersecting . . . challenges?” (2019, n.p.). After all, although the immediacy that the *TLWA* tapes were built upon may not readily translate to a contemporary classroom and the meanings of the tapes may have shifted—both in terms of context and content—the tapes are first and foremost a testament to “the power of collaboration, community, solidarity, and collective struggle” (Conrad 2021, 4). Thus, in engaging with these tapes, the students are invited to think about their own relationship to community and the world that they are situated in both within and outside the classroom.

When devising the guides, we also kept in mind the counter-archive’s definition as archives that are “vulnerable.” The *TLWA* series can be qualified as “vulnerable” in more ways than one: on a purely material level, the medium on which it was recorded, videotape, is undoubtedly precarious as it deteriorates over time (Wagner 2018). Additionally, the series itself has overall been understudied and marginalized, especially as historical accounts of HIV/AIDS tend to privilege American-centric narratives of AIDS activism, thus making it susceptible to historical forgetting. Finally, the *TLWA* archives are also vulnerable archives in that they are full of affect. The series, indeed, is an emotional record of personal and collective experiences of HIV/AIDS, as it depicts close-knit networks in action as well as endearing moments of intimacy. At the same time, the series is also a devastating record of loss, in that it portrays often ill people, many of whom passed away shortly after the series was aired. Conrad notes:

The *TLWA* tapes are filled with members of Toronto’s vibrant queer, feminist, and anti-racist activist scene and cultural milieu . . . but watching the video from today’s vantage point can also be particularly painful for many who were closely connected with people from this milieu who are no longer with us . . . These absences haunt meters upon meters of recovered magnetic tape and time continues to alter the meaning made of these moving images from the recent past. (2021, 4)

The activation process thus necessitated us to reflect on how to balance the desire to

share this material—to make it *visible*—within the classroom with the desire to be respectful of the people who lived through the often-painful realities of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. And, while the participants did agree to be on cable television in the 1990s, it is less certain that they would have wanted to share this material with undergraduate or graduate students thirty years later (Groeneveld 2018; Mattson 2017). Careful collaborative discussions helped us navigate these concerns and anxieties, as we held these difficult conversations with each other, as well as the A/CA case study leads. We eventually decided that these concerns should very much remain at the core of the educational guide itself; ultimately, we wanted the students to think, hopefully collaboratively, along similar lines and ask: What does it mean to carefully and responsibly view and respond to this material today? How do we, as viewers, affectively respond to this material and how does this affective response inform the archive itself?

In selecting videos for classroom showing, we narrowed down our program to five episodes from the series which we felt would address these questions and resonate with students and their experiences the most. Together, these five tapes addressed the following themes for critical discussion: activist media and queer media production; portrayals of people with AIDS; sexuality and race; women and HIV; and Indigeneity and HIV/AIDS. The tapes each straddle several of these themes and provide rich fodder for classroom conversations. For instance, one of the tapes, entitled *Nibo'Apinewin* (1990) and created by Ted Myerscough, produced by Anishnawbe Health Toronto, situates HIV/AIDS within the cultural and historic context of settler-colonialism and genocide in Canada. As Conrad notes, “In light of today’s continuing HIV/AIDS crisis within Indigenous communities in Canada, particularly in the prairies where HIV is spread most commonly through shared needles and heterosexual sex, the message of this tape unfortunately continues to be devastatingly relevant” (2021, 4). The video is especially instructive in its incorporation of traditional healing practices and its demands for Indigenous people to be cared for within community. Thus, the tape is tremendously useful for students to make connections between colonialism and health crises in Canada, as well as to think through how care can be provided with an awareness of these links for various communities.

The guide also includes *Bolo Bolo!* (1991) by Kaspar Saxena and Ian Rashid, a video aimed at South Asian communities, and whose interracial kissing scene led the decidedly homophobic cable station manager to terminate the *TLWA* series on the grounds that it violated television standards of “public taste” (Conrad 2021, 1–4). The tape features members of the Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention (ASAAP) discussing “the challenges of immigration, racism, xenophobia, and inherited cultural taboos about sex, sexuality, and the family” (4). On the one hand, a contemporary classroom audience would be quick to notice the video’s problematic emphasis on South Asian communities as being more homophobic and less open to talking about sexuality than white ones; such emphasis inadvertently creates generalizations about South Asian communities while centring Western European discourses and experiences about sexuality and sex. On the other hand, the explicit depiction and foregrounding of South Asian gay sexuality at a time when

these experiences were largely invisible, and its subsequent censorship, demonstrate how homophobia and racism and ongoing resistance to them are central to HIV/AIDS histories and to histories of marginalized media in the country.

Another video included in the guide, *The World is Sick (sic)* (1989) by John Greyson, this time encourages students to further think through the connections between cultural participation and civic engagement. An activist video about a protest which took place during the 1989 Montreal International AIDS Conference, the tape simultaneously documents the action and comments on the inadequate response of the Canadian federal government to HIV/AIDS while poking fun at mainstream media's role in perpetuating the status quo. As curator and writer Jon Davies notes, "As a video activist, Greyson's task is to disrupt the mainstream media's misguided treatment of AIDS . . . just as his compatriots in the convention centre disrupt the oppressive, business-as-usual approach to the disease" (2024, 285). Therefore, the tape could also be mobilized in media production classrooms to "allow students to explore their affective and subjective investments in the media, in a way which is much more difficult to achieve through critical analysis" (Buckingham 2003, 137).

The five selected videos were all framed by Conrad's critical essay and by a series of discussion questions meant to guide educators and draw attention to the larger context(s) of the case study. For instance, the guide asks students to reflect on how *Bolo Bolo!* might simultaneously challenge dominant assumptions about sexual identities and family relationships in South Asian-Canadian contexts while also reinforcing problematic discourse about South Asian cultures. Furthermore, as part of the case study, contemporary artists and scholars were also asked to reflect on the videos of the series, and excerpts from these reflections were included in the guide to emphasize that dialogue is needed when activating media archives and to encourage dialogue on these intergenerational tensions to continue in the classroom.

The *TLWA* case study and the challenges that arose from its archive thus illustrate how vulnerable media archives and counter-archives can create a space for curiosity and engagement about one's own experience and the experiences of others, and the differences and similarities between them, allowing for the creation of what might be considered an educational common—a collaborative space in which there is a shared investment in the value of meaning-making and understanding. Yet, the *TLWA* archive, as highlighted earlier, was made by and for marginalized peoples; what happens to the educational common when the vulnerable counter-archive is one that supports and affirms problematic, dominant structures?

Margaret Perry's Nova Scotia Film Bureau Archive (1945–69)

The archive of films made for the Nova Scotia Film Bureau by Margaret Perry represents this kind of dilemma: they represent the work of a prolific yet little-known female filmmaker who centred the experiences of women and other working class and rural people, and also convey the dominant beliefs of their time about the inevitability of white settler-colonialism and land development—as seen through the effective absence of Indigenous and other racialized Nova Scotians in Perry's films, despite the rich histories of these communities in the province. Perry's archive of work can be

characterized as both *marginalized* itself and *marginalizing* of others, and in this way poses a particularly unique pedagogical challenge. Perry's films, as we write in the guides, "are complex artefacts which merit careful reflection" (Brushwood Rose and Demus 2023a; 2023b; 2023c; 2023d; 2023e).

As works originally commissioned by the Nova Scotia Information Service and the province's Film Bureau, Perry's films are not what one would typically think of as a marginalized or resistant counter-archive, but as we began to spend more time with the materials of this archive we became interested in how they offered a rich context in which teachers and students might explore the subjective nature of the historical record and the ways even historical materials made by those who were marginalized in their own time can have a very limited and even problematic view of the world. What if students were able to use this archival material to consider the possibilities and limits of history itself and, in particular, the records, documents, and images we rely on to construct our historical narratives? Similar to our approach to the *TLWA* case study, we hoped to frame Perry's films in a way that would invite students to make complex and critical connections between the original context of her work, her choices as a filmmaker, and the students' contemporary context and experiences. For this reason, and because the thematic content of Perry's work links so closely to many of the themes that are central to the Nova Scotia curriculum, we focused on activating Perry's work, in dialogue with the current provincial curriculum documents for secondary education—specifically those in social studies (geography and history) and in technological education—by highlighting the counter-archival yet canonical qualities of the work (Brushwood Rose and Demus 2023a; 2023b; 2023c; 2023d).

As the case study led by Jennifer VanderBurgh reveals, Perry herself is an important yet understudied historical figure for the province, as acting director of the Nova Scotia Film Bureau from 1945 to 1969, and director and producer of over 50 promotional films for the provincial government. Film scholar Marsha Gordon argues that many women filmmakers were able to thrive and have careers in non-theatrical film—partly because nontheatrical media itself is "a marginalized category" (2018, 130). Because nontheatrical film is often positioned as being less important than theatrical film, these women filmmakers and their work unfortunately tend to be dismissed and forgotten. Perry's films, however, are endowed with a distinct gaze and reflect her unique social position and perspective as a white woman filmmaker in 1950s and 1960s Nova Scotia. They boldly depict Perry's own vision of Nova Scotia and her artistic voice—thus inflecting her films with a certain feminist (or at least proto-feminist) vision. In many of Perry's films, the work of (white) women takes centre stage. From the fisherwomen of her film *Battling "Blue-Fins"* (1947), which depicts Nova Scotia's booming fishing industry, to the librarians portrayed in *Roads to Reading* (1958), a documentary about the province's bookmobile services, and the numerous craftswomen depicted in the ironically titled *Craftsmen at Work* (1945), it is clear that Perry made a conscious choice to foreground rural women with whom she likely felt a kind of kinship.

As Darrell Varga (2010, n.p.) states, Perry's films are also "time capsules of

social attitudes and everyday life at the time of their creation—clothing, cars, buildings, and the ever-changing landscape, together producing an ‘idea’ of Nova Scotia that reflects the time of their production and reveals as much by what is left out of the picture as by what is inside the frame.” Watching Perry’s films, the viewer is given no indication of the history of enslaved peoples, of Black loyalists and Jamaican immigrants, or of Black settlements such as Africville that were and are equally central to the culture and history of Nova Scotia. Indigenous peoples, too, are largely absent from Perry’s films—although, as Varga notes, they are sometimes evoked in “sinister ways.” For example, in *Craftsmen at Work*, the history of residential schooling and genocide by the Canadian state is glossed over, as the narrator observes that children from the local “Indian school” in Shubenacadie have been digging out fresh clay for local crafts makers and workers. In Perry’s most critically acclaimed film, *Glooscap Country* (1961), a lyrical, picturesque, and undeniably beautiful re-telling of the Mi’kmaq creation story, Indigenous peoples are nowhere to be seen; nor is the story of Glooscap told by a Mi’kmaw narrator. In this way, Perry’s work reflects a settler-colonial worldview in which Indigenous peoples are not even entitled to their own history—vanished from the history of the province.

To frame Perry’s work as an opportunity for students and teachers to consider the limits and possibilities of the counter-archive, and to engage in dialogue and the sharing of curiosities and ideas, we had to grapple with our own discomforts with Perry’s work, as well as our real admiration for her talents. We made our own educational common and spent numerous meetings sharing our ambivalences about Perry’s work—trying to express, as Rogoff (2008) suggests, our “shared curiosities” about the pleasure and discomfort Perry’s work evoked for us. How, we wondered, would students and teachers be able to contend with these tensions and absences? What kind of dialogue about historical silence is actually possible in the public-school classroom? How do teachers need to be supported in order to facilitate these conversations with their students? Early on, we decided not to include Perry’s most acclaimed film, *Glooscap Country*, as recommended viewing in the educational guide. Despite its aesthetic strengths and its cinematic significance, we decided that to screen this kind of film in the classroom would be to re-assert a settler-colonial paradigm that would discourage dialogue and reinforce racist beliefs. It felt important to acknowledge that Perry’s other films were better pedagogical choices in that they would be more generative for exploring the conflicts of colonial legacies.

We were again guided by A/CA’s commitment to creating access to marginalized and vulnerable audiovisual archives as well as framing and contextualizing them in ways that acknowledge their historical contingency: we wanted to find ways to invite contemporary readings of Perry’s work in the context of women’s labour and cinema, regional records, and artworks, as well as the progressive and contentious discourses they contain. In order to do so, we felt it was imperative that teachers be encouraged to screen Perry’s work in conjunction with works that offer Black and Indigenous perspectives. To facilitate this, the guide includes a list of recommended films and readings that will be helpful in supplementing and rectifying the gaps present in Perry’s work. Of particular interest are the works of two other women film-

makers from Nova Scotia, Sylvia D. Hamilton and Catherine Anne Martin, whose groundbreaking cinematic works provide critical historical perspectives on the Atlantic Region. We were also able to link Perry's work to other historical records held by the case study's partner institution, the Nova Scotia Archives, including the wealth of digital resources they have curated that enable students to learn more about the history of Nova Scotia from a diversity of perspectives. In this way, we ask teachers and students to consider Perry's work as one node in a network of archival material that taken together offers a rich and varied story about Nova Scotia and its people.

We also addressed issues of racism with teachers directly by including a warning and a section entitled "How to Use this Guide." We suggest strategies for preparing for the kinds of pedagogical experiences Perry's work may evoke—pre-screening the work, offering students a warning about the mention of residential schools in her work, and naming both the significance and partiality of her work. For both students and educators, we followed the model begun in the *TLWA* guide and included critical reflections in the contextual essay of each guide. Finally, in the discussion questions section, which links directly to the relevant curriculum documents, we invite further critique of the work, but also the kind of problem-posing education Freire (1970) describes, which makes room for teachers and students to inhabit their own complex political and emotional selves, negotiating their own becoming in a social world. In addition to asking how Perry's subjectivity might inform her work, we invite teachers and students to consider how Perry's films have changed their own perspectives on Nova Scotian society, whose perspectives are missing, and why it is important to be curious about these absences. We also invite students to investigate their aesthetic response to the work and to explore their moments of "surprise" as opportunities for generative critique and curiosity, as well as their ideas about the value of film and video for historical inquiry and understanding.

Overall, the Margaret Perry case study allowed us to consider the complex pedagogical value of grappling with vulnerable archives that are at risk of marginalizing the even more vulnerable stories and lives of others. While we initially wondered if our discomfort with Perry's work signalled its lack of pedagogical value—would we simply be reinforcing a marginalizing worldview by encouraging the screening of such material?—we came instead to wonder about the pedagogical value of our own discomfort. Like the intergenerational tensions in the *TLWA* case study, the evidence of colonial erasure in the Margaret Perry case study is an uncomfortable and necessary reminder that diversifying the stories we bring into classrooms is not inherently a liberatory or subversive act. Creating a common that allows the multitude to communicate and act together (Hardt and Negri 2004) requires work—the common is produced through engagement and collaboration. The educational guides we created reflect this understanding. Rather than asking students to comply with a set of curricular demands, the guides invite a dialogue around these historical and social tensions, foregrounding the heterogeneity of the social and inciting the potential for an educational common.

Conclusion

The two Archive/Counter-Archive case studies examined in this article pose similar problems while creating different pedagogical challenges. Understanding the media archive as medium and as relational practice, we locate new solidarities in these diverse approaches to history, archives, and their activation. Such approaches transform media archives, in particular film and video archives, from past individual artifacts to affective modes of community building in the present. Further, the reflection and dialogue encouraged by the guides underscores the idea that the archive is a contested, complex, and multidimensional site and that counter-archives are not simply oppositional but affective and relational sites of critique and care. Finally, a pedagogy of discomfort, one that invites “educators and students to engage in critical inquiry regarding values and cherished beliefs, and to examine constructed self-images in relation to how one has learned to perceive others” (Boler 1999, 177), is uniquely afforded by encounters with audiovisual counter-archives, which themselves already exist in tension with the dominant historical archives and thus pose the grounds for generative discomfort and debate in the classroom.

The *TLWA* and Margaret Perry case studies discussed here resisted both inclusion in and opposition to the existing curricular canon. They demanded a more complex approach that invites students and instructors to attune to the stories of others and to the implications of those stories for their own perceptions and experiences of historical and social life. In this way, the case studies invite the creation of an educational common within the structures of the high school or university classroom, a space to engage and deliberate simultaneously apart from and in proximity to the demands of the formal curriculum. Put another way, these educational guides foster a counter-curricular sphere, a space in which students can formulate and explore new and resistant interpretations of their identities, histories, and interests. Like the counter-archive which exists in a complex relationship to the archive, these case studies also revealed to us that the counter-curricular exists as a response to and remediation of the dominant curriculum. And yet, the counter-archival and counter-curricular can offer a potential space for the creation of something new, something that is not beholden to the traditional demands of schooling, an educational common, “not romantic, homogenous or without struggles for power” (Low, Brushwood Rose, and Salvio 2016, 117), but precisely heterogenous, affective, relational, and made anew together. The counter-archival case studies and materials, which represent histories and stories that have been structurally excluded from the dominant archive and curriculum, are a rich site for the collaborative and care-full engagement that might preserve the difference and diversity that make the common possible—a potential we have tried to harness in the educational guides.

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Notes

¹ For more on Archive/Counter-Archive, visit <http://www.counterarchive.ca>.

² For access to the A/CA educational guides, visit <https://counterarchive.ca/educational-guides>

³ Ryan Conrad explains that the communal shower scene in Richard Fung's video produced for the series, *Fighting Chance* (1990), "first raised the possibility of censorship from Rogers Cable" (2021, 1). Later on, Kaspar Saxena and Ian Rashid's educational video, *Bolo! Bolo!* (1991), which was directed at the South Asian community of Toronto "angered Ed Nasello, the Rogers Cable station manager at the time" (1). In a letter, Nasello claimed that Michael Balser, who coordinated the series, had made an "error in judging the public's taste' by including a video with 'men French kissing and the caressing of thighs'" (1).

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BEYOND THE ARCHIVE AND CLASSROOM

The Pedagogic Paradox: Addressing Audiovisual Archiving Education in India

Madhavi Reddy, Aparna Subramanian, and Shruti Hussain

Introduction

At The Cinema Resource Centre (TCRC), a privately owned film archive in Chennai, V. V. Prasad—the institution’s sole archivist—is engrossed in the mundane routine of scanning, cataloguing, and digitizing vintage film magazines, along with lobby cards, song books, posters, and other film ephemera of the past century. Founded by filmmaker and collector Sruti Harihara Subramanian, TCRC is a nonprofit that enables research on the audiovisual cultural artifacts of Indian film history—especially the history of films in the regional languages of south India—and seeks to promote film culture from a historical, educational, and artistic perspective (The Cinema Resource Center [TCRC] n.d.). The archive grew out of Harihara Subramanian’s curiosity about films and her efforts to salvage film materials, which now populate her collection and keep Prasad busy. Originally an electronics and telecommunications engineer, Prasad has made the shift from a secure engineering job as the head of research and development to a somewhat more precarious role archiving material artifacts of Indian cinema. By his own admission, he was interested in the technical aspects of filmmaking—especially how sound works in cinema—but was unable to pursue film production as a career due to financial constraints (Prasad, interview with authors). Taking up archiving as a profession in a society that is largely indifferent to archival practices required a leap of faith—and now that he is part of the esoteric tribe of audiovisual archivists, he understands why materials that may seem unimportant to a layman still need to be meticulously preserved.

Audiovisual materials are becoming increasingly important as objects of cultural memory. As Ravi Vasudevan (2023) points out, traces of cinema can be found in a wide range of media, from literary and leisure magazines, song books, advertisements, posters, and banners to radio broadcasts, gramophone records, audio cassettes

and discs, and television programs. Yet, film archiving is not a mainstream profession in India. Prasad's appointment at TCRC was a matter of chance: like most audiovisual archivists in India, he had no plans for a career in archives, and he only learned about the job through the grapevine rather than through a formal job posting. Like most audiovisual archivists in India, Prasad also lacks formal training as an archivist—apart from attending one film preservation and restoration workshop, which we discuss below—having entered the field driven by genuine passion and gained his skills through hands-on, on-the-job training.

This article sets out to examine the marginalized state of audiovisual archiving education in India, and why audiovisual archiving has not yet been recognized as a legitimate profession in the country. As part of our analysis, we have studied the workings and challenges of TCRC as a microcosm of other regional Indian film archives in order to comprehend the current state of film preservation training and propose a new educational framework. The not-for-profit, resourceful nature of TCRC is contrasted with the cutthroat business model of Annapurna Studios, a prominent regional film studio in Hyderabad, another metropolis in south India. As the company's chief technology officer bluntly explains, archiving content drains rather than creates profits (C. V. Rao, interview with authors), further eroding the perceived necessity of film archiving. As this analysis will show, a lack of awareness, institutional support, and professional structures have prevented the development of audiovisual archiving education in the country. With these shortcomings in mind, and Harihara Subramanian's lament that there is no ecosystem or network to support film archives and education in India (Harihara Subramanian, interview with authors), we suggest developing an "ecosystem" to give shape to audiovisual archiving education in India and provide a more nuanced awareness of the need for this profession. Responding to his own doubts raised in 1995, film preservationist Ray Edmondson (2018) concluded twenty years later that audiovisual archiving has undoubtedly become a profession—but while the film archiving profession has received recognition in the west, the state of the same needs to be examined in a global south framework, as our archival mission is the preservation of our shared cinematic heritage.

The Culture of Film Preservation in India

Today, India is the seventh largest international box office market, excluding the United States and Canada (Motion Picture Association 2022). With 1,500 to 2,000 films being produced every year in more than twenty languages, the Indian film industry is the largest in the world in terms of output (Jain, Soneja, and Ahluwalia 2016). The Hindi language film industry, popularly known as Bollywood, is headquartered in Mumbai in western India, and has been mistaken as being representative of Indian cinema at large. However, several major cities in the south—Chennai, Hyderabad, Kochi, Trivandrum, and Bangalore—and Kolkata in the east, are home to robust regional language film industries in their own right. As Rashmi Devi Sawhney has argued, this "has posed a great challenge in trying to establish what is India's 'national cinema,' which can only be seen as a combination of multiple 'regional cinemas'

coexisting with a relatively more pan-Indian Bombay cinema” (2023, 217). Despite the impressive legacy of Indian filmmaking, filmmakers themselves are generally unaware of the need to preserve their own films, audio recordings, and other materials; rather than safeguarding their work, the film studios have turned their backs to the preservation and guardianship of their archives in favour of the immediate financial gain of new productions. As a result, it is estimated that about 70 percent of Indian film titles produced before 1980 have either deteriorated beyond repair or may be considered permanently lost (Nair 2015).

The first Prime Minister of independent India, Jawaharlal Nehru, keenly produced government-funded films that aided in the education of the largely subaltern masses, but preserving these films only became a concern for the Indian government much later. Several institutions for the administration of film, media, and broadcasting were established in post-colonial India: Films Division of India (FDI), Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), National Film Archive of India (NFAI), Children’s Film Society of India (CFSI), Central Board of Film Censors (CBFC), All India Radio (AIR), and Doordarshan (DD). While each of these bodies served a distinct purpose in disseminating information and entertainment, we briefly look at two pairs of institutions—FTII and NFAI, and AIR and DD—connected due to the workings of their audiovisual archives.

FTII was established in 1960 as a training institute for film and television production under the Information and Broadcasting Ministry in Pune, a city close to Mumbai, and it has since grown to offer eleven full-time and a host of short-term courses (Film and Television Institute of India n.d.). NFAI was established in 1964 as the national custodian of India’s film heritage, dealing with acquisition, preservation, restoration, and dissemination of both film and non-film content, including celluloid films, still photographs, song books, posters, lobby cards, documentaries, and magnetic media (National Film Archive of India n.d., “Objectives”). The institute’s founding director, Paramesh Krishnan Nair, was a key figure throughout the organization’s history, and his tenure, which ended in 1991, prioritized acquisition and exhibition over preservation and restoration (Subramanian 2021, 76). NFAI was initially housed on FTII’s campus, and its film collection partially stored at FTII until about 1991, when NFAI finally got its own specialized vaults (Government of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting 1992). As preservation was deprioritized and the archive lacked space and specialized facilities, NFAI developed weak archival strategies, further hampered by a shortage of staff (Subramanian 2021, 84).

Lack of funds, at times, has also led to the negligence of audiovisual material. A massive fire at the FTII storage space in 2003 destroyed 1,700 nitrate prints from the silent era, including the original print of *Raja Harishchandra* (Dadasaheb Phalke, 1913), which is considered India’s first film (*Frontline* 2003). Missing film reels (Rashid 2017) and faulty air-conditioning leading to film decomposition (Rashid 2018) are among some of the other unfortunate incidents at India’s central film archive, where higher standards of preservation and care should be expected. This prompted the Indian government to act in support of NFAI, which had long been ignored as the keeper of India’s national cinema heritage. Launched in 2014,

with work officially starting in 2017, the National Film Heritage Mission (NFHM) initiative was intended to fast-track the preservation, digitization, and restoration of the country's cinematic heritage, with the goal of digitizing over 132,000 film reels and other film materials (Ahluwalia 2017). In 2024, the project was halfway to its target, as 64,000 reels had undergone conservation, with the preservation of about 65,000 film reels in progress. More than 5,600 films have been digitized, and the digital films are screened for local audiences as well as at international film festivals (Sultan 2024b).

In 2020, the government announced the merger of four distinct, publicly-funded film units—NFAI, FDI, CFSI, and the Directorate of Film Festivals (DFF)—into the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), citing synergy and better and more efficient utilization of infrastructure and labour (Joseph 2023). The change came into effect in 2022, and news of the merger was received with great skepticism and dismay among prominent members of the film community, who questioned the future of these institutes, the fate of the archives and their stakeholders, and whether they would eventually risk coming into private hands, restricting their access from the public. While some speculated whether the merger was required given the changing nature of the film business, the government justified its move by explaining that joining these bodies under one umbrella would help them work better for the welfare and development of the Indian film industry (Rawal 2023). The newly formed NFDC-NFAI recently announced a project to conserve various film artifacts, including scripts, disc records, movie posters, lobby cards, costumes, newspaper clippings, film magazines, and equipment. The project may also restore materials currently held by private individuals or institutions, such as prosthetics, costumes, and set models (Sultan 2024a). Slated to begin upon the conclusion of the ongoing NFHM in 2025, this new initiative of safeguarding cinema materials other than film reels is a welcome move.

All India Radio, India's national radio, was founded in 1936, and Doordarshan, India's national television, began production of television programs on an experimental basis in the early 1960s, before becoming a national broadcaster in 1982 and eventually evolving into a structured TV network. Prasar Bharati (PB), formed in 1997, is an autonomous statutory body established by an act of parliament, serving as India's public broadcaster (Prasar Bharati n.d.). AIR and DD now operate under the aegis of PB, covering domestic and international news along with other programming on entertainment, social subjects, education, agriculture, rural development, and science and technology. Kamalini Nagarajan Dutt, the founding director of the Doordarshan National Archive in 2004, was another key personality in the audiovisual archiving arena in India. With her motto, "Your trash is our treasure," Dutt took charge of the archives, which held tens of thousands of recordings of music, dance, drama, and literature legends of India on archival reel-to-reel and cassette tapes from the 1970s. She laboured relentlessly to retrieve, restore, digitize, and catalogue around 2,000 of them until she retired in 2010 (Nair 2022), and continued working on audiovisual archiving education after retirement by conducting workshops on media archiving strategies.

In 2007, DD was given the green light to begin digitizing over 150,000 hours of video footage for access to the general public. Prasar Bharati sought to monetize their media archives, arguing that speeches and music held by DD and AIR were a national resource that should either be made freely available or monetized (*The Economic Times* 2015). Both DD and AIR released DVDs and CDs of their archival material and turned a profit on their sale (Subramanian 2021, 124), and tech giant Google became PB's long-term partner in digitizing over two decades worth of content across twelve Indian languages (*MoneyControl* 2019). Though initially separate, the archival units of AIR and DD were combined into the Prasar Bharati Archives in 2018. While NFAI cares for films, Prasar Bharati maintains an archive of cultural recordings of national television and radio. These archives have also seen bad times, including tapes in extremely bad condition, broken equipment, and a lack of preservation policies.

In 2014, the Ministry of Culture sanctioned the National Cultural Audio-visual Archives (NCAA) project at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) in New Delhi, with the aim to digitize unpublished non-commercial audio and video recordings like dance and music performances to create a repository of India's cultural heritage by partnering with cultural bodies. Planned to last until 2019, the project's pilot phase was extended to 2021, and the project made 25,000 hours of recordings available in the public domain. The project was awarded ISO 16363:2012 certification in 2017 for three years and claimed to be the world's first Trustworthy Digital Repository (Government of India, Ministry of Culture n.d.).

Though these are encouraging developments of audiovisual archiving within India's national institutes, their histories have been marked by challenges, inconsistencies, and the significant loss of audiovisual material that, in some cases, cannot be recovered. Even new projects like NFHM had to be temporarily halted due to the "shortage of material" required for the work (Rashid 2017). In the process of looking for old celluloid films under NFHM, NFAI stumbled upon hundreds of unreleased films, directors' scripts, and footage dating back to World War II and the Indian freedom struggle (Subramanian 2018, 55). Their surprise at discovering these materials reflects significant gaps in existing recordkeeping practices. While the PB Archives present a more positive outlook today, without the efforts of Dutt, the broadcasting archives would have faced a similarly bleak fate. And though NCAA represented a promising initiative bringing together a diverse range of cultural and technical collaborators, engagement with the broader cultural community across the country seems limited. Publicly available data regarding its impact on cultural research is unavailable, plans for its evolution into a sustainable, independent entity capable of ongoing outreach and engagement are unclear, and whether the ISO 16363:2012 certification was renewed is uncertain.

The historically troubled state of government-owned audiovisual archives in India reflects the evolving nature of the country's archiving practices and priorities. The budgetary allocation for the Ministry of Culture has been very low—less than 0.075% of the total budget in 2022—and the minister of culture defended this low allocation saying that it might not be "tenable for a developing nation like India to

allocate a considerable proportion of its public fund to the promotion of art and culture” (*The Hindu* Bureau 2023). The lack of funding for audiovisual archiving and education stems from this broader lack of awareness about the importance of preserving cultural history. Raising awareness about film archiving requires integrating archival education more prominently into mainstream academic and professional frameworks.

Audiovisual Archiving Education in India

Based on our collective experience working with archives, many developing countries’ governments do not fully understand, nor prioritize, the special challenges of preserving film and other audiovisual materials, and the expert skills and resources needed to carry out that work. Former NFAI Director Prakash Magdum expressed concern about the qualifications of people who were being recruited at the archive, as these hires needed to be made with a vision toward the kind of archive NFAI should be ten or fifteen years down the line (Subramanian 2018, 93). The qualifications of the staff determine the future of the institution—whether a well-appointed repository safeguarding cultural heritage or an unkempt storehouse of decaying material. Lack of qualified staff has often led to the mismanagement of archives, including poor recordkeeping and improper storage or treatment of audiovisual material. Some archivists who were soon due to retire worried about how they would manage the knowledge transfer process, as passing the baton required time and a rapport with the new hires. Magdum also said it was important for the archive to have a workforce that was not only properly trained, but also up to date with new technical and methodological developments in the archiving field. As such, new staff needed to understand new computer-based archiving technologies, formats, and software, and even take the initiative to regularly update their skillsets. This is a persistent issue, and technological complexity continues to be a formidable challenge for archives. Apart from basic introductory courses, we also need to establish a continuing education system that further develops management skills and technical expertise among professional archivists (Mkadmi, Shehata, and Elsayy 2024).

To understand the current state of audiovisual archiving education in India, it is worthwhile to explore the few avenues available to prospective students. Among them are the Film Preservation and Restoration Workshops conducted by the Film Heritage Foundation (FHF) in association with the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAP). FHF is a nonprofit organization founded by Shivendra Singh Dungarpur in 2014. Having completed nine editions of workshops between 2015 and 2024 across various Indian cities in a travelling school format, FHF claims to have trained 400 participants, creating a movement for film preservation in India and the subcontinent (Film Heritage Foundation n.d.). The broad streams addressed in the workshop include digital management, digitization, photochemical technology, cataloguing and access, archive management, and film-related materials. Out of the nineteen instructors for the 2024 workshop, fifteen were international experts; the remaining four included three FHF staff and one employee of NFDC-NFAI (Film Heritage Foundation n.d.). International faculty dominated previous workshops,

too, confirming that there is a dearth of audiovisual archiving expertise within India to train future generations, and that those intent on studying in this field may have to look beyond India's shores. FHF's website lists a few other programs, like the ten-day Biennial Audio-Visual Archival Summer School, again featuring international faculty; a session on projecting films on celluloid by German film projectionist Florian Höehensteiger; and activities coordinated under the France-India-Sri Lanka Cinema Heritage (FISCH) program supported by the French Embassy in India.

Other educational options include a two-credit module—largely theory-based, with no practical training involved—on “Film Archiving and Curating” as part of a post-graduate diploma offered by the media department at Savitribai Phule Pune University (SPPU), started in 2018 in collaboration with NFAI for the first five years, and a long-running “Film Appreciation” course offered by FTII and NFAI. However, the main aim of the Film Appreciation course is the theoretical study of the art and history of film and the development of cinema as an art form. NFAI also served as collaborator and host of the aforementioned FHF workshop's 2016 iteration, along with international associates FIAF, the George Eastman Museum, and L'Immagine Ritrovata. Their website states that “NFAI has envisaged a skill development program in film archiving” (National Film Archive of India n.d., “National Film Heritage Mission [NFHM]”), though there are no such actively running programs in film archiving to date at NFAI or FTII. This indicates a lack of initiative, or perhaps funds, on NFAI's part to start their own film archiving courses or workshops.

The School of Archival Studies under the National Archives of India offers certificate and diploma courses in archival education, but the focus is mainly on records management, reprography and care, and conservation of records, and not the preservation of audiovisual materials. Prominent museums like the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya in Mumbai and the National Museum Institute of History of Art, Conservation and Museology in New Delhi, and private institutions like Janapravaha in Mumbai, offer museology courses focused on the restoration and preservation of artifacts and documents. There are fewer archiving and recordkeeping courses compared to museology courses, and these courses do not cover the use of information technology, digital archiving, or digital preservation methods (Katre 2011). IGNCA offers year-long, part-time diploma courses in Cultural Informatics and Preventive Conservation, but they do not address film materials. Library and information science is an established and mainstream branch of study with a standard curriculum at universities, but they, too, generally steer clear of addressing the preservation of film and other audiovisual materials. While many university curricula touch upon archiving as a general subject as part of history or humanities courses, covering the theory of archiving and legacy of archiving institutes in a broad sense, they do not feature any hands-on instruction. And though there are several well-established, full-fledged courses in film studies, including at Jadavpur University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University Delhi, English and Foreign Languages University, and SPPU, they primarily focus on visual communication and media production.

Assessing the Challenges

The disparaging attitudes toward audiovisual archiving as a profession might be understood through Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) concept of "cultural capital." According to Bourdieu, cultural capital can be acquired—to varying degree, depending on the period, the society, and the social class—in the absence of any deliberate inculcation, and therefore quite unconsciously. When professions accumulate cultural capital, they attract institutional support and public legitimacy. In India, audiovisual archiving holds little cultural capital, being perceived as non-essential, partly due to its sidelining by the film industry itself. Bourdieu further explains that economic capital can give immediate access to some goods and services, while others can be obtained only by virtue of the social capital of relationships or obligations. As we suggest, the dual absence of social and economic capital has also rendered audiovisual archiving an unattractive pursuit. With no definite career path, low economic value, and no associated prestige, the development of archival education and professional recognition has suffered. This seems to be borne out by our analysis of Annapurna Studios.

Big film studios like Annapurna are becoming increasingly corporatized in growing economies like India, where the competition for eyeballs between television, streaming services, and the cinema is fierce, as "content" is conceived, designed, and honed like a consumer product and less like a cultural one. Faced with this competition, managers are reluctant to invest money where it cannot grow exponentially, and studios like Annapurna are only interested in preserving their own content if it serves a commercial function, like the re-release of popular films to generate new profits or the use of old photographs on social media to attract viewers' attention (C. V. Rao, interview with authors). In most film studios today, server space is reserved for projects in progress, and past works are not even afforded shelf space, as they have outlived their value. These profit-first attitudes of studios—which could have been among the primary generators of archives and jobs—further underscore the dismal state of the profession in India.

For small, private, and nonprofit entities like TCRC, safeguarding, storing, and organizing their collections has been an uphill battle. These organizations face a plethora of challenges, including limited resources and a lack of trained audiovisual archivists, yet they persist in their efforts. Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* highlights the paradoxical desire to preserve memory amidst inevitable loss. He argues that humans archive because we are afraid of losing our memory, but the very act of archiving selects some memories and excludes others, so that "every archive is also an act of forgetting" (1995, 2). Smitten from a young age with a bad case of "archive fever," Harihara Subramanian would collect film-related newspaper articles, old film magazines, and other materials that production houses or individuals were discarding. In her own words, Harihara Subramanian became a "keeper of all these invaluable cinema materials" (interview with authors), trying to counter the act of forgetting in the best way she could. Prasad's move to TCRC similarly allowed him to follow his hidden passion after working in his trained profession, which gave him the financial stability to start archiving.

Yet, Prasad prefers to state that he is an engineer by profession—a successful

one—who happens to be interested in the mechanics of film. As Edmondson writes, working in a film archive “did not automatically mean that people . . . personally *identified* as film archivists . . . Many preferred to identify with the professions in which they happened to hold formal qualifications” (2018, 14). This holds true in India, where audiovisual archiving is not a recognized profession, and the work of preservation is not properly understood, valued, or supported professionally. As we argue, these problems stem not just from practical issues, but from deeper cultural and institutional failures. This is further exacerbated by film archives’ association with the film industry. In Indian society, working in the film industry has traditionally been looked down upon due to its unregulated working conditions, unstable employment, and unreliable pay, prevalent gender inequality and objectification of female characters, the perceived low moral standards of its culture of fame, superficiality, and commercialism, and the general tendency to see creative work as risky fields within which to build a solid career. These conceptions have cast a long shadow on audiovisual archiving, too, as Harihara Subramanian refers to a “taboo” associated with the film industry and her travails running TCRC (interview with authors).

People often do not realize that they can build a career in preserving film and other media, and even if they get wind of this profession, there are few avenues to receive archival training in India. Harihara Subramanian discovered her own passion for film archiving when she took the Film Appreciation course at FTII in 2007. She was amazed to see NFAI’s valuable film collection—coming from the south of the country, far from the archive’s location, she was not even aware that such a place existed—and she wonders why FTII cannot offer audiovisual archiving courses when they have access to the country’s film archives (interview with authors). Her question is astute and should remind film schools and the industry that they have the means to be part of the solution. These institutes, whether educational or professional, are the places best equipped to teach archiving, and it seems like a missed opportunity not to do so. Harihara Subramanian observes that filmmakers themselves often fail to take care of their old films because they are busy with new projects and clueless about digital obsolescence. Making archiving a part of the production curriculum would also helpfully address these oversights. It is worthwhile to mention that Annapurna Studios itself runs the Annapurna College of Film and Media, where the curriculum focuses exclusively on filmmaking training. Ironically, they hosted the fifth iteration of the Film Preservation and Restoration Workshop organized by FHF and FIAF in 2019. Despite this, Annapurna Studios has not awoken to the importance of archiving.

In a recent turn toward re-releases of older films that have garnered interest in India, film studios have scrambled to find distributor copies of their own films, which they themselves never bothered to archive. Annapurna Studios has also entered the race to find copies of its successful old films, which are being restored and exhibited again, catering to public demand (C. V. Rao, interview with authors). However, this move is motivated only by the prospect of milking residual profits from their own content, and not for the sake of the films themselves or their artistic value. In contrast, small private collectors ardently rescue, salvage, safeguard, archive,

and restore their audiovisual collections. Working against the lack of funds, expertise, and space, as well as state disinterest, these small collectors treat these materials as artistic, cultural, and historic resources to be preserved for future generations, not just as commodities of a capitalist marketplace.

In order to do this work, Prasad stresses the importance of interdisciplinary training, as a person qualified in museology may understand chemical reactions and deteriorations of materials, while librarians know the science of cataloguing. He struggles with his own lack of professional archival training and has no clear avenue locally to learn more in order to better serve the archive (interview with authors). This lack of opportunity highlights the need for audiovisual archiving education that covers a wider range of topics. Without engaging with the archives in technical, historical, and curatorial methods, students cannot get a complete feel for the job. In the interest of developing an affinity for audiovisual archiving, it is also important that students interact directly with the material. Yet, having untrained students work with rare material poses significant risks. How to provide access without compromising archival materials, and how to let students engage with the materials fruitfully, are some of the issues that TCRC is trying to resolve.

Harihara Subramanian's long-term struggle to find the right home for her collections is also not over, as the majority of her archive is still stored at another location and has yet to be catalogued or digitized. The lack of physical space limits the scope of the archive, as visitors and researchers cannot access the unprocessed parts of the collection, which may be useful to their research. In order to organize and make the archive more user-friendly, and to carry out other activities at the archive, the archive requires resources, especially money—"and money is always in short supply" for small and niche archives like TCRC (Harihara Subramanian, interview with authors). TCRC has an office and a working archivist only because Harihara Subramanian personally funds the archive through her primary profession as a filmmaker. There is no other avenue for funding the archive. Still, they do not charge researchers for using the archives, and Harihara Subramanian funds any training or workshop that Prasad wants to attend. Applying for government grants is difficult, and it is unclear if the selection is always based on merit. There are no federal funding initiatives in India like the National Endowment for the Humanities or the Institute of Museum and Library Services in the United States. While the Endangered Archives Program of the British Library and the Media Archives Enrichment Program at the University of California, Los Angeles are global grants available for audiovisual and media archival projects, they require Indian institutions, especially nonprofits, to have Foreign Contribution Regulation Act 2010 (FCRA) clearances to apply. Writing a successful grant also typically requires a qualified, trained person, which in turn means that time and money must be invested in order just to apply. Without a clear roadmap, Harihara Subramanian prefers the "known devil" of using her own resources for digitization over the uncertainty of finding funds (interview with authors).

Building an Audiovisual Archiving Education Ecosystem

Harihara Subramanian emphatically states, “There is no ecosystem or network” to support film archives and archival education in India (interview with authors). In this section, we reflect on what this audiovisual archiving education ecosystem or network should look like. Several specific themes and concerns have surfaced through our interviews, and we believe responding to them is key to addressing these needs and developing this ecosystem. As we suggest, funding archival education and archives, creating greater awareness about the profession, balancing theory and practice while developing interdisciplinary approaches, building educational institutes within the archive, and emphasizing regional archives are some of the multiple aspects around which a stable ecosystem could form. We discuss each in turn below.

In order to develop this audiovisual archiving education ecosystem, it is pertinent to get the government to understand that archiving is a serious, capital-intensive, and time-sensitive business. The backing of state machinery in the form of funds for public archives and grants available to private archives will be necessary to run successful preservation and engagement programs. The government needs to invest in audiovisual archiving education at various levels of training across the country, working enterprisingly within the government’s culture budget and with the support of both public and private archives. A tripartite framework proposed for the National Archives of Zimbabwe, whereby the archivist, the archive, and the government work as collaborators to improve audiovisual archives management, may offer a model for this kind of collaboration (Mutsagondo and Tholanah 2022).

In order to raise awareness about the importance of archiving, film preservation needs to be incorporated into production curricula to teach filmmakers how to preserve their own films. Harihara Subramanian suggests that awareness about archiving can be fostered starting already at the primary school level, as children are already exposed to all sorts of media, and may even be making their own films and videos on mobile devices (interview with authors). This could be done through workshops, discussions, or lectures. Institutes of higher education should also offer courses and programs in film archiving to help introduce film or history students to the idea of a career in archiving, which should be seen as on par with a career in library science, which is recognized as a serious profession in India.

Directing archival education programs to meet the needs of archiving institutions could ensure successful employment for archiving graduates. The Film Culture: Archiving, Programming, Presentation master’s program offered by Goethe-Universität Frankfurt and the Deutsches Filminstitut, for instance, combines “state-of-the-art film studies with hands-on training in the field,” aiming to “train scientific personnel for film and media archives and other institutions of film culture” (Campanini, Hediger, and Bayer 2018, 80). Building on the successes of this program and the FHF workshops, curricula should be modelled with a balance of theory and practice to ensure that students receive the practical skills and training necessary for the job market while expanding “the mental horizons of the narrow specialist” (Vatsayan 1972, 31). As Kapila Malik Vatsayan argues, the cultural content of education “must permeate the studies of the humanities” and “equip the educated to see the interrelationships

and interdependence of disciplines” (1972, 31). Therefore, designing a curriculum that gives precedence to interdisciplinarity over specialization may be key to a successful program. The Frankfurt master’s program, for instance, includes training in film history and film historiography, museology, the institutional dynamics of film institutions, copyright and marketing, and the “technical, material and institutional aspects of film archiving, programming and presentation” (Campanini, Hediger, and Bayer 2018, 81). As this approach shows, a program would not have to be built from scratch, but could make use of convergence to expand upon, diversify, and consolidate course offerings within already existing programs: film studies, filmmaking, museology, library science, and history could all incorporate audiovisual archiving basics, which may eventually develop into full-fledged archival courses.

The 2020 National Education Policy (NEP) of India, enacted by the Union Cabinet of India, outlines the vision for a new education system for India and advocates for curricula that facilitate interdisciplinary learning experiences (Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development 2020). This is an encouraging development for the cause of archival education, and we recommend that all courses in audiovisual production should have a module on audiovisual archiving practices. Furthermore, the NEP encourages the establishment of interdisciplinary research centres and collaborations between educational institutions and industry partners to address societal challenges and promote innovation. Education and research in this area must be promoted together, and this crossroads of academics and archiving requires archivists to acquire a wide range of skills, emphasizing the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to teaching.

India’s premier film school, FTII, and archive, NFAI, should model a partnership based on the L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation at the George Eastman Museum in Rochester, New York, to found a school to teach audiovisual archiving within the archive. The Selznick School represents a successful collaboration for education and training in the art and science of preserving cinema. Even more remarkable is that the entire museum’s holdings of film, paper, and digital materials are at the disposal of the students (Yeager 2018). The physical proximity of FTII and NFAI in Pune, a city comfortably close to Mumbai and its film industry, would be agreeable to this partnership in every way. If the former directors of FTII and NFAI had paid more attention to film preservation, rather than their sometimes overzealous effort to just collect films, they could have already developed a strong partnership for the benefit of India’s cinematic heritage—but it is not too late to do so. As a key part of our proposed ecosystem, this collaboration would be immensely beneficial, and it would be a great loss not to take advantage of this opportunity since there are already infrastructures in place, in addition to geographic proximity.

The south of India has distinct and acclaimed film industries in all four of its languages—Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam. The fact that Harihara Subramanian and Prasad are working at the regional level and safeguarding materials representing a subset of Indian cinema with a limited audience, which may otherwise receive less interest from those bodies or institutes that focus on Indian cinema as a whole, is itself remarkable. Given the immense cultural diversity of India,

supporting multiple regional film archives is a practical idea, if implemented well. Regional archives may have greater empathy, understanding, and affinity to materials maintained within and representing their own cultures. The diversity of languages and dialects also affects archiving practices. Managing collections at a local level is advantageous, while distribution could be supported by a central, national archive. Indian regional cinema gained recognition as the song “Naatu Naatu” from the hit Telugu language film *RRR* (S. S. Rajamouli, 2022) became the first Indian song to win Best Original Song at both the Academy Awards and Golden Globe Awards in 2023. This hints at Indian, and even western sensibilities recognizing prominent regional work coming out of India, and a growing demand for this work, which in turn could translate into greater interest in regional audiovisual archives.

As films and other media are now “born digital,” digital preservation and restoration needs represent a big market for archiving jobs and opportunities, including outsourcing of restoration work from the West to India. This has allowed for the emergence of new private players in the Indian market. As early as 2007, film and media restoration companies like Prasad Corporation in Chennai, Deluxe Corporation in Bengaluru, and Prime Focus Technologies in Mumbai have been restoring Indian films as well as collaborating with Hollywood and other international audiovisual production companies and archives. As this market continues to grow, creating a vibrant employment market for audiovisual archiving professionals in India, trained professionals will be in even greater demand. Building the audiovisual archiving education ecosystem we have outlined in this article would ensure that India will be better prepared to meet it.

Conclusion

The future of audiovisual archiving education in India is promising, assuming the film industry and government make serious commitments and take the necessary initiative. In this article, we have examined some of the gaps in training and challenges to legitimizing the archival profession that stand in the way of Indian preservation efforts, and sketched a rudimentary roadmap for a robust archival education ecosystem in India. Realizing this ecosystem will require much care and love, along with heightened awareness, a clear vision and commitment, and, of course, funds to preserve our audiovisual heritage well for the future. Harihara Subramanian and Prasad imagine TCRC as a vibrant and dynamic resource centre, “almost like a museum where activities, screening, discussions happen” (Harihara Subramanian, interview with authors). Such a space, if fully realized, would be a boon for archiving education and the profession, a Mecca for regional Indian cinema resources, and probably the first of its kind in the country. But as Harihara Subramanian, the ardent collector and keeper of this ephemera, puts it, “these are big dreams. But, you know, it boils down to space, money, human resource, skills” (interview with authors). Collaborative efforts between stakeholders, including the state, educational institutions, corporate studios, and digitization and restoration companies, will be necessary to bolster the audiovisual archiving ecosystem and realize these dreams.

Disclosure

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Photochemical Pedagogy: Film Preservation Education beyond the Archive

Patricia Ledesma Villon

Over the past few decades, media archival practice has been shaped on one end by formal institutions—from museums and archives to academic programs and university collections—and on the opposite end by artists, filmmakers, and other users specializing in the creative use of moving image media formats. In more recent years, since the establishment of the Association of Moving Image Archivists and the first moving image preservation graduate programs in the 1990s and early 2000s, film laboratories, vendors, exhibitors, and creators working with the photochemical moving image have heeded a call to work with or show works in their original formats to honour artistic intent and support the ongoing preservation of the medium. While film has become overshadowed by hegemonic rhetoric about its status as a “dying format,” these communities of creators continue to invest significant time and resources into making and exhibiting work on film. In leading these efforts, artists and filmmakers have generated a wealth of knowledge about the format from their explorations, a knowledge that can be mobilized as part of preservation efforts. Yet what is defined and recognized as “preservation practice” within the institutional context remains limited to conventions sanctioned by professional publications and highly standardized academic coursework. This exclusion of the specialized knowledge, practical skills, and lived experiences of those working outside of the walls of the formal archive further closes our field down to these rich, pragmatic contributions.

In line with this special issue’s call for a discussion of the *practical realities* of pedagogy and instruction, I suggest that we look beyond the archivist’s notion of preservation as defined in terms of the longevity of physical records and their contents, and that we work to incorporate the knowledge and know-how of people operating at the peripheries of film-related practice. This includes, but is not limited to, filmmakers, projectionists, equipment and laboratory technicians, private and

non-institutional collectors, and other communities whose engagement with film can help us arrive at a more comprehensive definition of contemporary film preservation. Within this call, I discuss a specific area of profession-based applied practices within the field of photochemical film archiving and aim to bring them into contemporary discussions around the future of media archival education, particularly for film.

Archival practice has primarily been concerned with what can be described as a work's "later end," otherwise defined by its entry into its preservation period. To preserve a record, a record must be created. Archivists gather materials, examine their provenance, and with this information in hand, describe and contextualize work to users seeking to gain access to this body of preexisting records and documentation. The professionalization of the field has been solidified by its standardized principles, values, terminology, and concepts; a growing body of literature; and membership-based professional forums, all developed with its best interests in mind.¹ After all, professionalism acts as a point of reference—it sets a standard for who is qualified given the knowledge, training, and specialized skills needed to conduct specific forms of labour. It also establishes a baseline, helping us come together with others of similar aims to pave the way for broader group affinity. Homing in on the nature of "professionalism," Caroline Frick states that the media archivist's move toward professionalization has distanced trained archivists from "mere amateurs, fans or hobbyists," calling our attention to what has been lost in this transition (2018, 25). Who gets to call themselves a film archivist, and why?

General interest in "amateur" culture and outsider forms of training has historically remained pertinent for moving-image archivists, even among the most senior members of the field. While former Museum of Modern Art film archivist and curator Eileen Bowser acknowledges the importance of the professional identity that participation in formal associations such as the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) provided for her, her nod to the "amateur" period is notable:

You realize that, before my time, there were a lot of amateurs. There was nowhere you went to get an education, and most people, film fans, weren't coming to the field with much technical knowledge. They just came out of love of film. (2000, 25)

Much of this sentiment can be traced back to the lack of established professional bases for moving-image archivists in the 1990s and earlier, given much of the workforce at the time was comprised of individuals who learned both hard and soft skills on the job. Simultaneously, Ray Edmondson's ruminations on film archiving as a profession, published around the same time, outline the foundational ironies of the move toward professional education: film archivists know they can learn a great deal from just doing their jobs—skills no university-based training program or professional course could ever teach (1995, 253). Graduate programs, for example, provide emerging archivists with hard skills in film inspection, handling, and moving-image cataloguing. Soft skills are often necessary to solve problems that do not have

straightforward solutions or answers, but they are harder to develop in the classroom. For instance, collaborating with a film laboratory on colour grading, rescans, and answer printing, as well as evaluating their deliverables, requires an understanding of their professional responsibilities and expectations that is often honed over time. Yet, as Edmondson states, echoing Bowser, archival professionals also value being self-taught, much like home-grown amateur, hobbyist, and enthusiast film practitioners (252).

The film archiving field, as it stands, faces a historically rooted inner conflict between the value of a “professionalized identity” and the importance of contending with its foundations as an autodidactic enterprise. There is an inherent value in the specialization of our labour, and we should therefore pride ourselves in having attained the skills and knowledge necessary to conduct technical tasks, regardless of where or how we acquired them. However, as Edmondson (1995) predicted, a broader recognition of the importance of our work would not come until the field formalized through the establishment of training programs and professional forums and garnered the support of related fields, such as librarianship and museology. A simplified way of phrasing the questions this essay asks is: who else is working with the photochemical moving image but is not often formally recognized as an “archivist,” and who do we exclude when we frame our preservation work through formal bodies of training and “professionalization”? There is a broader range of knowledgeable stakeholders involved in the preservation of film and its related technologies than is often acknowledged by contemporary scholarship.

Media archivists’ greatest strengths have always been their technical and practical approaches to stabilizing, describing, and providing access to moving-image materials. To execute these processes effectively requires that one enters the field with a developed knowledge of various media formats and their specificities. Archivists today must possess a wide range of skills, from capturing analogue tape formats and performing digital editing to properly winding through film at a workbench. Individuals tasked with the preservation of media must also know how to use the necessary tools and, increasingly, be able to maintain legacy equipment. Portable Eiki and Kodak Pageant 16mm film projectors, which are still in popular use today, for example, were manufactured from the mid-twentieth century onward. These projectors are seeing an operational life far beyond what their manufacturers originally intended, and no new film projector manufacturers have emerged to this date, leaving those interested in maintaining this equipment searching for solutions and substitutes for missing parts, broken components, or half-functioning machines from the last century. The number of small-time film equipment businesses capable of servicing rewinds, projectors, cameras, splicers, and other tools continue to decline over the years as owners of retirement age shut their doors due to their general inability to find someone interested and able to continue to provide their services.

At the same time, preserving a piece of media’s original cultural and historical context has always been of great concern to media archivists. Discussing the role of film technologies as integral to understanding media history, film archivist Dino Everett and scholar Marsha Gordon argue for the importance of preserving the prac-

tice of projection, particularly for lesser-known, non-standard small gauge formats and their unique exhibition devices. Since film preservation is “entirely focused on saving the content” and not the “means of making or projecting” it (2021, 142), they worry that projectors being placed in storage as museal objects and archivists being too anxious to risk projecting their films will lead to a “technological amnesia” (147). As they argue, we need to be proactive about exhibiting film on its original equipment to “counteract the erasure of the very aspects of cinema history [archivists] are attempting to preserve” (141), including the practice of projection and the mechanical specificities of various projectors and formats.

Conversations between archivists and practitioners remain rare, and when they do arise, they often flourish in spaces outside of the academic and professionalized archival sphere. For instance, in May 2023, the Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto, a Canadian artist-run film and media arts organization supporting independent filmmakers, hosted “Analogue Resilience: A Film Labs Gathering,” a week-long meet-up complete with workshops, trainings, and discussions geared toward organizations and individuals running artist-run film laboratories or involved with other technical and creative endeavours related to photochemical film.² I was surprised and enthused to see that, in a space which largely gravitates toward artists and DIY lab enthusiasts working outside of formal institutional or commercially-funded contexts, former Cinémathèque française film archivist and FIAF technical commission head Céline Ruivo brought together a group of archivists, filmmakers, projectionists, lab technicians, and curators—including myself, and many of whom hold a combination of these titles—to present on a panel titled “Archival Film Labs.”

For me, the panel represented an opportunity, at long last, to build solidarity between professional film archivists and the larger community engaged with the preservation of photochemical media and its methods, tools, and artist-driven practices, a community that media archival training often fails to engage with or misunderstands. Despite our unique opportunity to better intertwine our fields, I also wondered how relevant the discussion would be for the meet-up’s audience. We touched upon topics as broad as access to prints within institutional holdings, which led to a discussion about what constitutes safe archival projection. I mentioned that archivists of my generation, emerging out of graduate programs within the last decade—particularly MLIS programs with students interested in the moving image—have an increasing lack of awareness and understanding of when, why, and how their film holdings can be safely projected in their original formats, echoing the concerns Everett and Gordon raise. These were skills that my experience within the artist-run film lab community had taught me were important, perhaps due to the often one-of-a-kind nature of artist-made film elements made outside of the inter-negative and workprint production workflow. Nicolas Rey, co-founder of Paris-based artist-run film lab L’Abominable, advocated for his project, filmprojection21.org, a charter bringing together filmmakers, artists, producers, archivists, distributors, programmers, and members of the audience who want to see a future for film projection and the resources needed to sustain the practice. Such initiatives bring the discussion of the creation, exhibition, and preservation of film full circle and point to the many

areas where archivists, filmmakers, lab technicians, and other practitioners and collaborators can learn from each other.³

With all this in mind, I want to pose some rhetorical questions for further reflection. If previous discussions in academic circles, emerging out of Edmondson's formative writing, argue that formalized training is essential and should be expanded, why are we as archivists still lacking in our understanding of film projection and exhibition, as Everett and Gordon illustrate?⁴ Media archivists need not be fully-trained theatrical projectionists—nor should they be expected to be—but they should be able to thoroughly evaluate and understand when their prints can be safely screened and to what standards, and effectively communicate this information to projectionists and venues. Are the ongoing calls for expansion of media archival curricula not broad enough, or are they too focused on areas outside of historical and more immediate technical concerns? If we are required to constantly repair equipment from previous decades—or centuries—to be able to preserve and access our media in the future, what kinds of technical training for media archival practice should be at the core of our curricula?

Areas for further collaboration, knowledge development, and problem solving for the field can still be established despite the challenges outlined. Archivists and filmmakers as users of photochemical moving-image media have managed to work around this obsolescence of equipment and technology by keeping them in working condition. They often rely on skill-sharing communities and the generation of equipment technicians from their profession's heyday who are still willing to share their advice or offer their niche services as vendors. The "amateur" nature of technological experimentation further honed by the artist-run film lab community can be of great help to film archivists, who are often also working to find solutions to the diminishing availability of resources and technology. Furthermore, understanding the point of creation of works and reconnecting media with its artistic processes provides for a wholistic picture of the archival provenance of the materials archivists steward, allowing archival practice to dive further into the conceptual origins of films and how they were made. Artists, particularly those stemming from an experimental media arts tradition, may often utilize photochemical mediums such as print stocks in unconventional manners that differ from the production standards of the commercial industry. This requires media archivists to understand the technical nature of moving-image technology to properly preserve and describe these works and catalogue them for a broader public.

Adopting a broader definition of "film preservation practice" can help archivists obtain a fuller picture of both the lifecycle of a film print and the ecosystem they themselves are part of. Actors in the field operating within our periphery contribute greater momentum to the moving-image archiving and preservation profession than is often recognized. Looking beyond the knowledge and practices associated with a film's secondary life within the archive—to the practices of film labs, screening venues, and creative communities—may help archivists better understand the material they are charged with caring for. It is only when we cultivate a more universal, integrated outlook on the contributors and stakeholders in the preservation of motion

picture film and its associated traditions that we will be able to establish improved curricula for the changing needs of media archiving.

Notes

¹ Ray Edmondson discusses this in the 2018 special issue of *Synoptique*, “Institutionalizing Moving Image Archival Training: Analyses, Histories, Theories,” to which the present issue on “Teaching Media Archives” is responding (2018, 20–21).

² Artist-run film laboratory meet-ups have occurred throughout the decades. Before Toronto, the most recent one occurred in Mexico City in 2018, at the Laboratorio Experimental de Cine (LEC).

³ I was also part of another panel at the same meeting titled “Film Festivals and the Future of Projection,” which included projectionists, archivists, programmers, and filmmakers who were part of the artist-run film lab movement.

⁴ Fortunately, occasional small gauge projection and projector maintenance workshops at the Association of Moving Image Archivists conferences and elsewhere attempt to remedy this.

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Arteleku No-GUI: Using Digital Linear Editing to Teach Archival Practices at Film Schools

Luiza Gonçalves and Lucas Larriera

Introduction

In this article, we argue for the benefits of working with digital linear editing from a pedagogical standpoint. We propose an experimental “old school” linear editing workflow using the open-source tool FFmpeg, a command line tool without a graphical user interface (GUI), with the aim of creating new audiovisual pieces from archival materials without suffering “generation loss” or compression. We developed this project as master’s students, and intend our process to be used in editing workshops where students can work with archival footage to make short films. At the end of this essay, we describe our own experience creating the short film *An Afternoon at Arteleku* (2023), revisiting every step of the process in order for teachers, archivists, and students to be able to replicate our experiment with other source footage.

Why do we consider this process experimental? First, because it is not intended as a professional editing workflow, but for instruction at film schools or in related environments so that students can more closely experience all the file transformations that occur when editing digital moving images. Second, it is not meant only to teach editing and montage, but also to introduce students to concerns related to digital archival practices. As we suggest, both these objectives make this method primarily suitable for orphan materials and other archival footage. As Paolo Cherchi Usai (1999) notes, the term “orphan” carries many emotional connotations, and there are several competing definitions of orphan materials within the audiovisual preservation community. The Orphan Film Symposium, for instance, defines an orphan film as “a motion picture abandoned by its owner or caretaker. More generally, the term refers to all manner of films outside of the commercial mainstream” (n.d., n.p.) It is important to disambiguate the term *film*, since in our case study we will be talking about digital copies of videotapes whose whereabouts are unknown. Dan

Streible points out that “the term *orphan film* may itself morph into a post-celluloid phraseology, but the conceptual understanding of cultural productions that get neglected will remain a binding concept” (2009, x). Therefore, we use the term “orphan materials” regardless of what carrier or format the media is found on.

Our digital linear editing workflow requires students or other users to make decisions about sequencing prior to the execution of an edit, the same way traditional linear editing workflows do. In order to place different materials in a sequence, it used to be common practice to develop some kind of “script” for the edit, meaning that both the *ins* and *outs* and the order of each shot to be chained together were decided and documented beforehand. This workflow was mandatory for editing film, which required individual strips of film to be physically spliced together, as well as videotape, which required one or more source tapes to be recorded onto a new tape sequentially (see Figure 1).

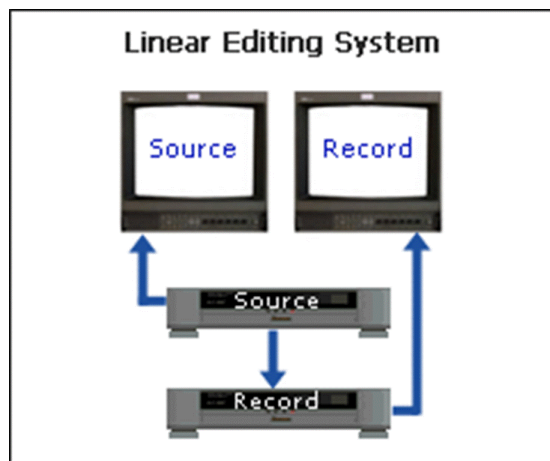


Figure 1: Simple linear (tape to tape) editing system.

<https://www.mediacollege.com/video/editing/linear/setup.html>

This method contrasts with the kind of work that an editor can do in a non-linear environment, in which random-access memory and the graphical user interface allows the editor to approach editing through a trial-and-error workflow without planning what they are going to do in advance. As educators and former students in the field of audiovisual studies, we recognize that the educational system cannot always keep up with rapid technological changes in professional filmmaking or preservation practices. As film students learn professional workflows, they also find personal ways to assimilate them. In this case, we can apply Donna Haraway’s (1997) analysis of the three formative modes of scientific knowledge—material technology, literary technology, and social technology—proposed by Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer (1985) to better understand the relationship between the different items that compose our project: the investigation featured on our website, the step-by-step linear editing process, and the short film we created using our proposed method.¹ From the beginning, we knew that FFmpeg as a tool was not very accessible, even for

those studying archival practices, and that, since its creation in 2000, there have been many modifications to its modes of use, its compatibilities, and its recipes. With such a niche material technology, we knew that to change the fabric of its social technology, we needed to create other technologies to complement it—not only a literary technology (the step-by-step and investigative processes) but also a new material technology that can both operate on its own and represent the intense process of editing in a digital linear workflow. In this sense, we believe that pedagogical guidance can develop new, unintuitive ways of working with software.

Because of the nature of magnetic videotape, the process of information transfer, commonly called dubbing, causes “generation loss” (see Figure 2). Similar effects are caused by digital compression in most file formats. This was the main reason we developed our digital linear editing method. Because the footage we were working with was compressed digital copies of analogue videotapes that have since been lost, we wanted to ensure that there was no further generation loss or compression when we edited the material. As Agathe Jarczyk, Reto Kromer, and David Pfluger (2019, 23) note, different file formats are typically used for shooting, post-production or processing, access, and archiving of digital video. In the case of the Arteleku video collection—the collection we worked with, which we discuss in greater detail below—we know that the original videotapes, the shooting format, were destroyed in a flood in 2011. Moreover, the original digitized files, the processing format, are also lost. The only copies of the material that remained were access copies with a strong H.264/MPEG-4 AVC compression, originally made for streaming purposes.²

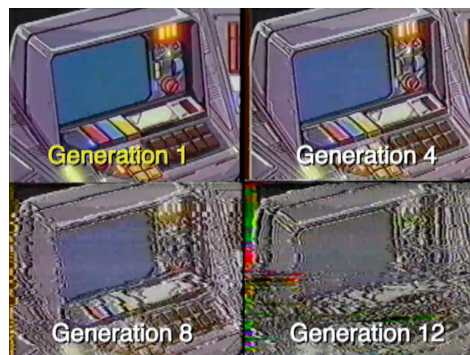


Figure 2: Screenshot of YouTube video showing an example of generational loss. BAVC MEDIA, “Generational Loss THE MOVIE,” YouTube, April 5, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ypomMnJ31o0>.

In order to make our short film using these compressed digital files, we decided to create new post-production files from the surviving access files, selecting a file format that would fit the needs of the post-production process—allowing us to edit the material without compression—while also being suitable for archival preservation. We chose the FFV1 codec with a Matroska container, given the institutional recognition of this codec and the efforts of the archival community to standardize it. As Reto Kromer, one of the developers and promoters of this format, explains:

To have a single file format suitable for the preservation of both film and video has been the dream of many archives, especially smaller ones, since the beginning of digital moving images. Today, on the horizon, we can see something that will provide exactly this capability, in a free and open-source environment . . . Though some issues remain unresolved, Matroska, with FFV1 (and FLAC), is on the way to becoming a solid alternative—especially for small archives or archives with extremely limited resources—for preservation masters and mezzanine files. (2018, 41, 44)

Kromer notes that, as of 2018, few software applications provided support for FFV1, which was therefore not yet a suitable choice for post-production, or “mezzanine,” files (44). We found this to remain true when we developed our project five years later, as FFV1 was still not supported by nonlinear editing applications. Since we wanted to work with FFV1, and because of our desire to design our workflow entirely with open-source software, we instead chose to make our short film using FFmpeg, a command line tool designed to process, transcode, and perform basic edits on video, audio, and other media files.

Nonlinear Editing and the Graphical User Interface

File transformations and conversions, including frame rate, aspect ratio, and resolution changes, are usually performed in the background of editing software, hidden behind the graphical user interface of applications such as Adobe Premiere Pro, Avid, and Final Cut. These applications render all kinds of transformations and keep them in temporary memory, with the objective of eventually executing and burning all of them into one final export, benefiting the non-stop workflow of the nonlinear editing process. In this section, we explore the implications of these GUIs on the training that film students and editors receive, as well as what valuable information they obscure. We conclude by examining how a command line tool like FFmpeg can recover and restore awareness of these processes to its users.

Stacey Irwin’s research on the relationship between editors and nonlinear editing technology in the late 1990s, and these tools’ standardization in the audiovisual workflow in the early 2000s, proved an important resource for our project. Her approach to identifying how the introduction of a new tool can not only change the process it is used for, but also the experience of the person who uses it—“the craft and the crafter” (Irwin 2006, 453)—became the starting point of our research. As she describes, nonlinear editing changed the experience of editors from a physical into a synthesized one:

For the film editor, the film was literally cut and pieced together with tape or cement and then played on a machine called a flatbed that projected the image on a small screen for viewing. For video editors, the tapes were logged and stacked and then parts of each tape were electronically transferred to a separate tape using an electronic edit controller, video monitors, and tape decks to

create a new whole from the collected parts. Today, everything from feature films to commercials, music videos to news stories are being synthesized almost exclusively through nonlinear editing computer technology. What kind of human-technology connection is forged through this creative interaction between computer user and computer tool? (2006, 454)

While Irwin centres her research around a human-technology dyad, we suggest that moving image montage is structured more around a triad—human-technology-material—adding room in the equation for footage. We can only assume that Irwin overlooks this because she is only thinking about software with graphical user interfaces, though she never mentions which specific editing programs she uses or focuses on for her analysis. While there are several differences between the variety of editing programs available and the features they offer, the graphical user interface, as Irwin’s informants’ testimonies relate, makes the software the protagonist of the process and takes the material for granted, relegating it to a secondary or even invisible role, privileging the GUI over the material.

The editor’s interaction with the GUI structures and limits what they are able to do with the program and material, and how. As Irwin further notes,

the computer use experience has become so “user-friendly” and template laden, that students in media programs today spend far less time creating projects “from scratch.” . . . A pedagogy that accounts for learned behaviors and attitudes, like the promise of instant usability and the need for expert knowledge once the software is taken off “template mode,” allows faculty and students to find common ground for understanding the practice of digital editing. (2010, 5)

This is where FFmpeg comes into play. This tool does not have a graphical user interface but relies on *recipes*, or prompts, that the user types into the command line. Because FFmpeg is not necessarily meant to be *user friendly*, the open-source community collectively creates, publishes, and gives advice on many recipes in forums and different support sites.³

Technology necessarily modifies the ways in which we work and the types of narratives we end up developing. Walter Murch has noted the importance of this relationship between technology and aesthetics. Writing about the ways in which sound design could be more creatively employed thanks to technological innovations, he notes that

There is a symbiotic relationship between the techniques that we use to represent the world and the vision that we attempt to represent with those same techniques: a change in one inevitably results in a change in the other . . . Almost all of the technical advances in sound recording, manipulation and exhibition since 1980 can be summed up in one word: digitization. (2000, n.p.)

In our case, we could sum up the developments in editing since the early 2000s with the word *nonlinear*. But while Murch sketches a history of progressive development and improvement of sound technology, we are concerned that the introduction of nonlinear editing technology and GUIs have caused some skills and knowledge to be lost. GUIs inherently predetermine editors' choices and obscure the technical transformations involved in the editing process. While Irwin has diagnosed similar issues, our proposed solutions differ.

Irwin (2010) seems to be more interested in changing the vocabulary and developing new language to describe the digital editing process—including by employing metaphors to help students connect with the editing tools—than in changing the technology itself. By staying focused on the technology, we instead propose a more critical approach to providing authentic empowerment for the student: as we suggest, limiting the editing tool to its most basic functions by writing prompts in the command line restores agency to the user behind the machine. Irwin suggests that “The more the editor practices and dwells in the nonlinear editing computer, the more the learning curve is mounted, the more familiar the software becomes, and the possible displacement, when it occurs, is easily overcome as the editor becomes re-oriented in the familiar environment of the software once again” (2006, 465). While Irwin encourages *dwelling* with nonlinear editing tools, developing a close bond with the computer program, we suggest that GUIs have *alienated* the editor from the material itself, as the footage is embedded within and mediated by the GUI. We believe that by using FFmpeg as an editing tool—a use not necessarily intended by its inventors—we can refamiliarize editors with the material and discover new ways of editing and working with moving images for artistic and pedagogical purposes.

As Lisa McDonald states, “Present day technicians are carriers of early formative practice and encounter modes of self-invisibility” (2002, 238). The tension between science, experimental philosophy, and technology is constant and “irresolute,” as they all rely on mutually producing each other. If we, as teachers and technicians—not necessarily restricted to the art or film industries—do not propose nuances in how we use our tools, we are in turn obstructing the light that is shed on our own profession. In other words, according to McDonald, in our ever-changing and fast-paced technoscientific world, technicians have a responsibility to teach and pass on their technological expertise, because it is only through practice and interaction with technology that one can transmit technical knowledge.

As one aspiring editor tells Irwin: “You just get so wrapped up in it and so much time has flown by that you don’t give your eyes a rest, or your back. Editors feel wrapped within their technological tool, lost in its presence” (Irwin 2006, 461). For this editor, the relationship with the footage is secondary to the process of interacting with the GUI—selecting, moving, cutting, pasting—which becomes a *flow*. Irwin notes that “without the software, the work does not exist. Only when the editor and the editing software meet in a place called the interface can the artful magic of the sacred space begin again” (463). We find this description of the editing process problematic in pedagogical terms. Our proposed method is not intended as a statement against nonlinear editing, but we firmly believe that letting students experience linear

editing—without the impediments of obsolete video technology—could de-alienate all the invisible micro-processing that happens in the background of a GUI. Young aspiring editors and students working with the moving image could become conscious of all the automated processes hidden behind the application interface by themselves making decisions about the standards of their media in the process of manipulating audiovisual materials. As another one of Irwin’s informants puts it: “I keep telling them it’s not what you work on, it’s about the decisions that you make. So I think that there is a problem with computerized editing if you don’t give yourself enough time to make decisions, to think about what you’re doing” (462).

Irwin’s research suggests that the arrival of nonlinear editing marked a significant breaking point, to the extent that many students today do not know a thing about how editing was done in the past. While film students and young aspiring editors may have some knowledge about the process of cutting and splicing celluloid on a Steenbeck, working with multiple video decks, controllers, and monitors in the analogue and early digital video era is an art completely lost to them. These discrepancies make us aware of the systematic hierarchies between different media, including film and video—hierarchies that should be questioned both in the film history and film production classroom.

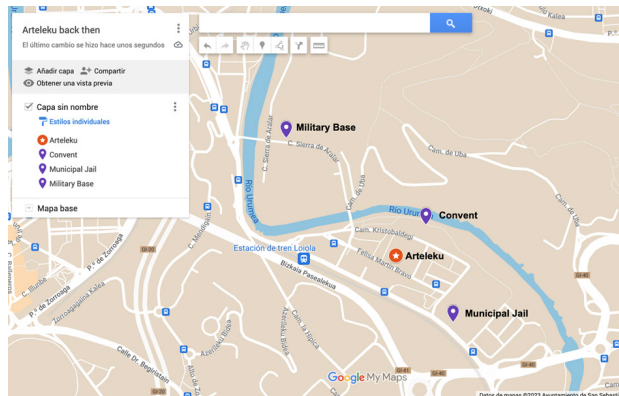


Figure 3: “Arteleku back then,” a Google Map created by the authors.

Arteleku: History and Context

Arteleku was located on the outskirts of San Sebastián, a touristic city in the eastern parts of the Basque Country, in a small industrial neighbourhood beside the Urumea river called Txomin Enea. Housed in a refurbished electrical supplies factory, the arts centre first opened its doors in 1987, located between a military base, a convent, and the municipal jail (see Figure 3). Despite being off the beaten path, local artists began to flock to Arteleku, and during the 1990s, it became a highly esteemed place with international recognition. The University of the Basque Country and its School of Fine Arts had opened in the region only a few years earlier, after much debate, and started offering classes in painting, drawing, textile design, ceramics, and photography (Vaquero 1990, 39). A local Video Art Festival, with cash prize competitions in addition to programs chock-full of international video works, had also been hosted

in San Sebastián between 1982 and 1984, organized by Guadalupe Echeverría, a key member of the arts council in the neighbouring city of Tolosa (Aguiriano 1992).⁴ With the political aim of supporting young artists and creative production in the Basque Country, there was a lot of money flowing into the territory.

The age of video was booming all over the world in the mid-1980s, especially in Spain, France, and the United States, and the need for artists to experiment with video as a new medium for expression, and the endless possibilities of this technology to record and play back moving images, created the conditions for various groups and collectives to emerge. Only one year after opening Arteleku and offering courses on lithography, screen printing, sculpture, and art restoration, the centre inaugurated its audiovisual lab for video production. Quickly, they began offering courses on audiovisual production techniques, including editing, performance, and more, in addition to establishing a video library open to the public. In 1989, Arteleku purchased videos from Bosgarren Kolektiboa, the most important local collective; mostly made up of U-matic tapes, the collection was expanded in 1993 with a large purchase from Electronic Arts Intermix, featuring work by Nam June-Paik, Marina Abramovic, and Vito Acconci.



Figure 4: Photo of the Arteleku team gathered at the documentation centre. The photo appeared in the book *Desartxibo*, published by the Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa in 2002 for Arteleku's 15th anniversary.

After two remodels of the building—the Northwest side in 1992, and the first floor in 2002—Arteleku was making strides to provide optimal space for its growing community and educational programming to local artists (see Figure 4). But its closeness to the Urumea river—featured in a July 1992 video performance by Pepe Espaliu—allowed the first floor to completely flood in 2011, and significantly damaged the library and computer space as well as administrative office. Incessant rain had elevated the river into the houses of the Txomin Enea neighbourhood and people had to be rescued, but Arteleku remained closed, with zero protocols for the

protection of their patrimony or artifacts. The aftermath clean-up became a group mission for the artists, secretaries, and educators who worked there. Arteleku's library became an "archive," and what was left of it was split between different cultural institutions around the county in an effort to simply safeguard the various items. Today, very little evidence remains of the arts centre's cultural and social impact within the community—even the building itself is gone (see Figure 5)—except for the living artists that continue their practice.

In 2008, after a contest in search of a new purpose for San Sebastián's old tobacco factory, a project was started to "converge" the "cultural services" of the county of Gipuzkoa to a more centralized location (*El Diario Vasco* 2011). A triple alliance between the city council, the Basque government, and the provincial council won the contest, forcing Arteleku to forfeit its arts education programs to the state, and in 2010, a formal agreement was set in place. After many years of remodelling, the new cultural centre, Tabakalera, finally opened to the public in 2015, with a focus on visual culture. This jaw-dropping six-story building, filled with pristine offices and white-walled gallery spaces, now holds some of Arteleku's history. The books salvaged from Arteleku's library were recovered and displayed in Tabakalera's Media Lab, but the equipment used for creative productions was not kept. While Arteleku was open to the public and provided equipment and facilities for community use, there are only three spaces in the entire Tabakalera building dedicated to the actual production of visual or fine art works, none of which are open for public use: a facility used by Elías Querejeta Zine-Eskola's audiovisual postgrad programs, a computer lab with postproduction studios, and an artist residency space that lacks real equipment for production and consists of modular wooden office cubicles. All spaces can only be accessed as a paying full-time student or as a winner of a competitive open call for audiovisual projects with a specific theme and gender or age restrictions. A few of Arteleku's tapes were donated to the postgrad program by the Akmea research group at the University of the Basque Country, and used for inspection, cleaning, digitization tests, and an investigative research project.

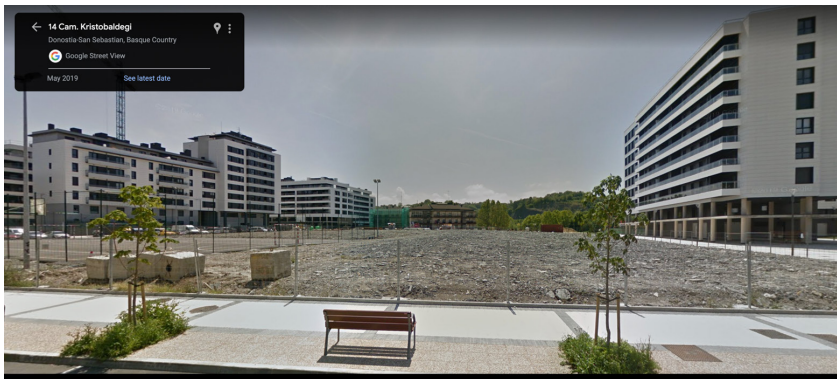


Figure 5: Google Street View showing the site of the Arteleku building. The demolition was part of the re-urbanization project of the Txomin Enea neighbourhood.

When we first discovered the existence of Arteleku as members of the Akmeketa “Perdidas de Generación,” or “Generational Losses,” project, we knew that we were in contact with materials that had a deep significance to the local community. Guided by Natxo Rodríguez and Arantza Lauzirika, who had been working on recovering the memory of Arteleku since 2017, our goal was “to build a diverse, ensemble narrative from the rich and complex *artxibo.arteleku.net* website, and to enable new readings, re-readings and interpretations of the archive(s)” as well as to “publicise the accounts of those who formed part of the centre’s history and make the collection available for possible future research, to ensure that the archive can be more than just a museum piece and an exercise in conservation” (Lauzirika and Rodríguez 2021, 52). Since 2021, Akmeketa has received support from the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid to maintain their website and publish their work, and in 2022, Akmeketa conducted and recorded interviews with people who actively participated in workshops and events at Arteleku. These video interviews were called “Bideokaxetak,” in reference to the videocassettes and tapes that made up a very big part of Arteleku’s library. In 2023, as part of our contribution to the project, we also produced a short film using some of the surviving footage.

An Afternoon at Arteleku: Digital Linear Editing with FFmpeg

In making our film, it was important for us not only to do justice to the history of Arteleku, but to activate the surviving material to tell a story tethered to the huge loss experienced in the arts scene and the creative circuit after the centre shut down. We firmly believed that the way we chose to interact with the material available to us had to be justified by a very strong concept. Inspired by the various ways that Arteleku’s history was being preserved through documentary films, dossiers, and “micromemorias,” we chose to challenge ourselves by working with our favourite videos from the Arteleku web archive.⁵ These videos appeared to be raw, unedited footage that documented the day-to-day happenings at Arteleku. Not only were we intrigued by the domestic quality of the videotape recordings, but the fuzzy, handheld mode seemed to manifest the spirit of the centre. Approaching these compressed videos as archival records, we accepted that we would not be able to access the original tapes and decided that the question of ownership was also not an important factor. In fact, our approach proposed a challenge by utilizing “institutional” material that may have originally been filmed for a promotional video but did not appear to have a clear purpose. Despite their crudeness, the gesture of editing together these orphaned videos allowed us to rescue these bits and pieces and place them in dialogue, to reactive the materials and depict an afternoon at Arteleku. Providing visual and sonic access to the mundane activities at this active arts space, which was once brimming with life, seemed to appeal to the sense of historical recovery which led our and Akmeketa’s efforts.

Referencing Manuel Castells (1996) in describing the cultural practice of editing, McDonald writes that “editors are [mass] media practitioners involved in this allegorical realm, constituting an active presence as both the architects of cultural expression, and concurrently, its users.” (2002, 247) This “new symbolic environ-

ment” defined by Castells reminds us that media is manipulated by both the user and editor, roles that the speed of images and technology has made impossible to separate. Being aware of our dual roles made us reflect on our “active presence” and document our own process. McDonald suggests that editors hold a responsibility in their power, which is in constant tension with their role as users of both audiovisual and printed media. We also felt a responsibility toward these images, to rescuing the only testimony left—in digital form, available through Arteleku’s web archive, where the generation loss suffered by the material is as palpable as the loss of the original tapes—from obscurity. These copies of copies, compressed for online streaming, became our originals. As the “architects” of their expressivity, working with these orphaned materials in a linear editing process, framed by the context of lossless workflows, provided a lot of room for experimentation.



Figure 6: Official film poster for *An Afternoon at Arteleku*.

Since the creation of our short film, *An Afternoon at Arteleku* (see Figure 6), transversed both the creative and archival domain in its editing process and form, we have considered Kromer’s ethical guidelines for film restoration throughout the process. As Kromer argues, the process must be reversible and remain open to further interventions by future generations, and the work needs to result in increased access to the material. Working in the digital realm can make these goals easier to accomplish as it is possible to document every process, every move, and every action along the way in order to be able to undo it, as “restorers today do not have the right to close off the doors to the next generation” (2013, 80). As Kromer explains:

In documenting the restoration process, the following questions must be answered:

- What is the state of the original element before taking action?

- What kind of intervention is done? And how? And why?
- What is the state of the original element after taking action?
- Which new elements have been produced? And how? And why?

Please keep in mind that if you go through an analogue or a digital restoration process, you end up with more elements to take care of, not less. (81)

While the aim of our project—making a short film from found footage—meant that we could disregard some of these questions, the ethical considerations undergirding them remained of utmost importance, especially as we were working with footage not shot by us. However, our project’s central goal, developed as we studied archival practice, was to create a case study for teaching these strategies. The “literary technology” we have developed to help activate these materials, including our website and this article, support our mission to continue pollinating these strategies for activating digital orphan materials. Working with a command line tool with no graphical user interface required strong documentation in order to go back and forth in our process to make changes and to check our work. In the following pages, we describe the steps we followed in the production of our film. The full step-by-step guide is included as an appendix to this article.

While generation loss and compression still happen in the digital realm, editing with FFmpeg allowed us to get around this problem. As our objective was to edit the footage and export a finished piece without further compression, we needed to standardize our materials. When we work with different formats in editing software with a GUI, materials are transformed and conformed without our knowledge to match the format criteria at both the timeline and export level. In order to clearly identify the materials we were working with and find the best standard, we had to read the metadata encoded within our footage to identify any discrepancies in frame rate, scan type, container, codec, dimension, aspect ratio, and more. For our project, we wanted to work exclusively with open-source software, so we used MediaInfo by MediaArea to identify these details.⁶

Knowing the unique properties of our media, we could start planning our workflow to fit our project. Being conscious about the origins of the footage gave us some useful hints as to the best way to manipulate this material. For example, many of the files run at 30 frames per second, following the North American NTSC standard, while in Europe the standard for video is PAL and SECAM, both of which run at 25 fps. This could be evidence of a moment when the technology was still in transition, and some of the cameras may have been brought to Spain from the U.S., resulting in mixed formats in the early years of video practice. We also encountered the presence of interlace scan lines in some videos, but not in others. While it would have been fair to assume that all the tapes were digitized interlaced, many of the files are progressive. That led us to believe that another step of file transformation, beyond AVC compression, took place between the original digitized copy of these tapes and the compressed H.264 versions to which we now have access. As such, knowing the technical properties of our footage not only prepared us to make more conscious decisions with it, but also to learn about and reflect on the complexity of audiovisual

media migration.

Next, we needed to standardize the material, which involved some decision making. What was the best way to conform this diverse footage to the same technical aspects? There were many reasons in favour of one decision or another. The important thing was that this decision needed to be made consciously and with justification. Usually, when combining media from different sources into one unified timeline, editing software with a GUI automatically transforms the source footage to fit the timeline's specifications. This typically leads to the loss of information, whether by expanding or compressing footage in order to fit a new aspect ratio or resolution, or dropping or duplicating frames in order to match a new frame rate.

For our film, we made a conscious decision about the dimensions we wanted our unique project to have. We decided to keep all videos in the 4:3 aspect ratio, scaling up all videos equally to 768 x 576 pixels, which is the standard PAL display resolution. In order to record this decision, we implemented a written log to trace all our actions and the reasons that justified our decisions. Since there is no automatic *undo* function to reverse an action and restore the project to a previous instance like in most applications and editing software, one must be able to trace exactly which steps one followed in order to go back to a previous state, which one does by starting over and writing a new prompt in the FFmpeg command line, modifying the specific parameter(s) that resulted in unsatisfactory outcomes. Each recipe in FFmpeg has very precise parameters, relating to different aspects of the digital files, and one must master the logic of each recipe to properly implement a workflow and chain of editing. There were times in our own execution of this project that we had to go back and modify recipes to produce more precise outputs that were easier to understand and replicate. Every “cut” one makes will also generate a new file, until one arrives at the infamous “final cut,” since in order to view each version of the edit the user must export a new sequence, as there is no graphical user interface to render a preview.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	File name	Title	Duration	Shot #	TC IN	MS	TC OUT	MS	NOTES
2	5 - 1989_Serigrafia_TC.mp4	Serigrafia II	17:20	SER2_001	05:00:30:04	160	05:00:37:20	800	Dos personas toman notas.
3				SER2_002	05:00:57:23	920	05:01:14:04	160	Planos detalle de objetos.
4				SER2_003	05:01:16:13	520	05:01:24:20	800	Mujeres trabajando en otro taller.
5				SER2_004	05:01:36:05	200	05:01:51:16	640	Reflejo vertical y paneo hacia la escalera.
6				SER2_005	05:02:00:00	000	05:02:03:07	280	Puerta a pasillo con teléfono.
7				SER2_006	05:02:12:10	400	05:02:31:00	000	Pintor y varios caballetes y dos planos mas de gente pintando.
8				SER2_007	05:02:34:10	400	05:02:46:00	000	Otro pintor de espaldas y zoom.
9				SER2_008	05:03:08:21	840	05:03:29:19	760	Pintora y dos personas miran otra pintura.
10				SER2_009	05:03:36:08	320	05:03:51:10	400	Detalle pintura y contraplano chavon hablan con chica.
11				SER2_010	05:03:52:00	000	05:04:04:18	720	Chica parada y paneo a izq.
12				SER2_011	05:04:10:22	880	05:04:23:22	880	Chavon y chica de nuevo discuten sobre la pintura.
13				SER2_012	05:04:34:03	120	05:04:37:14	560	Chica de espaldas trabajando en cuadro y en profundidad pareja hablando.
14				SER2_013	05:04:46:21	840	05:05:03:00	000	Chico sentado en el piso. Dibujando figuras geométricas.
15				SER2_014	05:05:21:23	920	05:05:51:21	840	Dos pinturas y descubre por paneo al pintor barbudo.
16				SER2_015	05:05:59:22	880	05:06:09:10	400	Persona que pinta los falsos Goenaga
17				SER2_016	05:06:29:12	480	05:06:42:21	840	Dibujante y señor hablan.
18				SER2_017	05:06:51:18	720	05:07:05:00	000	Mujer rullitos pinta un tarro de pintura.
19				SER2_018	05:08:01:20	800	05:08:07:14	560	Detalle impresiones.
20				SER2_019	05:08:22:10	400	05:08:31:13	520	Otro detalle más grande.
21				SER2_020	05:08:56:14	560	05:09:12:05	200	Pintor en lienzo translucido.
22				SER2_021	05:09:22:15	600	05:09:32:21	840	Pintor en lienzo translucido de perfil.

Figure 7: Our spreadsheet tracking the timecode for selected clips, made in Libre Office. Luiza's selections are marked in green, Lucas' in blue, and the ones that overlapped in bold.

Many of the steps and processes that follow are the same or very similar to those involved in working with regular linear video editing. For instance, to select what footage to include, we worked with reference copies with burned-in timecode to record the ins and outs of each selected shot on an interactive spreadsheet, created using Libre Office (see Figures 7 and 8). These timestamps were also used to trim the selected shots with the FFmpeg trim recipe. Even in this part of the process, which may seem trivial, the two of us were able to work on the same sequence simultaneously without erasing or hindering the other's work. Each could visualize freely, selecting our own ins and outs, while seeing what the other had selected, too. This collaborative editing process necessitated that we keep a very detailed record of the different shots we had chosen.



Figure 8: Video with burnt-in timecode.

Before compiling a first cut of the selected shots, we wanted to preview the sequence envisioned in our heads. We did this by using an open-source diagram app, Draw.io, where the first and last frames of each shot were placed in sequential order (see Figure 9).⁷ This tool gave us a panoramic view of the entire project as if it were a timeline in a GUI. These panoramic strips mimic the age of linear film editing by providing a visual overview of the entire sequence while activating a different kind of creative input and order.

Despite being a somewhat tedious and time-consuming process, digital linear editing has the capacity to restore the handicraft that is sometimes lost by working with editing software with a GUI, allowing the user to make every single file transformation a more conscious decision, as one is forcibly made aware of the specifics of each digital file. Full instructions for our digital linear editing workflow, using our film with footage from the Arteleku Video Collection as a case study, can be found in the appendix to this article. Almost all recipes were selected and slightly modified from *ffmpegprovisr*, a website created to “help users through the command generation process so that more people can reap the benefits of FFmpeg” (AMIA Open Source 2024).



Figure 9: Our mood board on the Draw.io app.

Conclusion

Drawing on Irwin's insights into how editing interfaces shape editors' processes and McDonald's call for editors to own their cultural power, our project proposes a pedagogical and creative shift: that by embracing command line digital linear editing with FFmpeg, editors can reclaim agency over their material and confront the hidden transformations performed behind GUI-based workflows. By carefully standardizing, documenting, and openly questioning each intervention in the footage, we can not only counter generation loss but also build a transparent editing methodology rooted in archival ethics. This approach disrupts the alienation caused by the GUI, restores the handicraft of montage, and foregrounds the triadic relation of human-software-material overlooked by much existing scholarship on editing. In doing so, we reject Murch's narrative of technological inevitability and insist instead on the active, ethical, and historically conscious role the editor can play as both user and architect of the editing process.

It is quite uncommon for those of us working in production to use the same tools as those in the archival field. By utilizing multiple technologies developed for media preservation (FFmpeg and the FFV1 codec) as part of the process of editing and filmmaking, we hope our proposal can speak to the necessities of all those who are interested in activating and preserving moving image materials at risk. This article is part of our effort to make our findings public, and we encourage the use and reimagination of our step-by-step process by anyone who shares our sense of urgency around the preservation of our moving image heritage. While the creative impulse may not be exercised daily, our closeness to film as professors, cinephiles, and archiving students provides ample ground for experimentation with the digital linear editing process using FFmpeg. Although the process results in a slower and more time-consuming approach to editing, working between technology and creativity reconnects us to the nature of the medium itself.

Notes

¹ See <https://artelekunogui.wordpress.com/>.

² See <https://artxibo.arteleku.net>.

³ Thank you to the Association of Moving Image Archivists community for developing ffmprovizr, which inspired us to make our own website, and to our professor, Reto Kromer, who taught us how to use FFmpeg.

⁴ Since the Video Art Festival depended on the official and more traditional “Film” Festival of San Sebastián, ties were cut and the project discontinued after the third edition.

⁵ The “micromemorias” are investigative essays exploring the history of Arteleku. See <https://www.akmeka.org/artxiboarteleku/works/home/>.

⁶ See <https://mediaarea.net/en/MediaInfo>.

⁷ See <https://www.drawio.com/>.

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Appendix: Step-by-step Guide to Use FFmpeg to Edit Orphaned Digital Materials

Tools: Make sure you have access to the following tools before starting:

- **MediaInfo:** a convenient unified display of technical and other metadata for audiovisual files. <https://mediainfo.net/en/MediaInfo>.
- **FFmpeg:** an open-source tool for handling and transcoding video, audio, and other multimedia files and streams. <https://ffmpeg.org/>.
- **Draw.io** (optional): a free online diagram application for making flowcharts and diagrams. <https://www.drawio.com/>.
- **LibreOffice** (optional): an open-source office software suite with programs for word processing, creating spreadsheets, and more. <https://www.libreoffice.org/>.

Video materials: You can experiment with your own selection of video materials. For reference, for the creation of our short film, we used footage from the following videos:

- *Producciones Arteleku*. 1991. 13 min, 9 sec. Format unknown. <https://artxibo.arteleku.net/es/islandora/object/arteleku%3A6201>.
- *Zona Abierta*. Taller. Artista y Máquina. 1992. 6 min, 10 sec. U-matic. <https://artxibo.arteleku.net/es/islandora/object/arteleku%3A3883>.
- *Pepe Espaliú, Este Río Es Este Río es Este Río*. 1992. 17 min, 43 sec. VHS. <https://artxibo.arteleku.net/es/islandora/object/arteleku%3A3875>.
- *Taller de Pintura de Jose Luis Goenaga*. 1993. 57 min, 42 sec. VHS. <https://artxibo.arteleku.net/es/islandora/object/arteleku%3A3977>.
- *Curso Serigrafía*. 1989. 17 min, 18 sec. Format unknown. <https://artxibo.arteleku.net/es/islandora/object/arteleku%3A608>.

In order to make it easier to understand the recipes, we have colour coded the text. If the text is marked in red, you will have to specify the file paths and/or file names of the video and other files necessary to run the command. If the text is marked in blue, you will need to specify the values (frame rate, pixels, and more) you want to use to modify your footage.

Step 0: Prepare your folder structure to keep the project organized. We recommend creating separate folders for your original files, the new preservation files, the post-production and reference files, the clip exports, the edit exports, and the access copies.

Step 1: Generate preservation copies of your footage. We used the open-source codec FFV1 and the container Matroska (.mkv).¹

Export a video with the FFV1 codec and Matroska container for preservation²:

```
ffmpeg -i input_file -map 0 -dn -c:v ffv1 -level 3 -g 1 -sliceCRC 1 -slices 16 -c:a  
copy output_file.mkv -f framemd5 -an framemd5_output_file
```

Step 2: Use MediaInfo to identify the technical specifications of your footage and make notes of any discrepancies between different files. All our material was PAL, 25 fps, and 4:3, but with distinct dimensions and scan types (progressive vs. interlaced).

Step 3: Generate post-production copies for editing, selecting the parameters for your type of scan, frame rate, and dimensions.

In order to de-interlace a video³:

```
ffmpeg -i input_file -c:v ffv1 -level 3 -g 1 -sliceCRC 1 -slices 16 -vf  
"yadif,format=yuv420p" output_file
```

In order to modify the frame rate⁴:

```
ffmpeg -i input_file -r output_fps -filter_complex "[0:v]setpts=input_fps/output_  
fps*PTS[v]; [0:a]atempo=output_fps/input_fps[a]" -map "[v]" -map "[a]"  
output_file
```

In order to modify the dimensions⁵:

```
ffmpeg -i input_file -map 0 -dn -c:v ffv1 -level 3 -g 1 -sliceCRC 1 -slices 16  
scale=width:height output_file
```

We scaled the material to 768×576 pixels to maintain the 4:3 aspect ratio.

Step 4: Generate new reference files with burnt-in timecode.⁶ The timecode is used to identify the cuts to be made. It is necessary to specify the font file, font size, font colour, box colour, and rate of your timecode (HH:MM:SS:FF). We set the starting timecode of each separate video with a unique hour for organizational purposes, meaning that the first file would start at 01:00:00:00, and the second file at 02:00:00:00, and so on. That way, when we took screenshots or selected ins and outs, it would be easy to identify one file from the other. This organizational strategy may not work if your videos run longer than an hour.

```
ffmpeg -i input_file -vf drawtext="fontfile=font_path: fontsize=font_size:  
timecode=starting_timecode: fontcolor=font_colour: box=1: boxcolor=box_  
colour: rate=timecode_rate: x=(w-text_w)/2:y=h/1.2" output_file
```

Our parameters were: font file = Apple Gothic, font size = 35, font colour = white, box colour = black, rate = 25/1 (see Figure 8 in our article).

Step 5: Pre-select the *ins* and *outs* of your footage by reviewing the timecoded footage using FFplay.⁷

ffplay -i input_file

Press the letter “P” or the spacebar to play or pause the footage. Press the letter “S” to advance frame by frame. Mark your ins and outs in a spreadsheet to keep track of your selections (see Figure 7 in our article).

Step 6: Convert the frame numbers in your spreadsheet to milliseconds using this reference created by Michael Allar.⁸ Since the FFmpeg trim tool does not work with frames, you will need to calculate the exact timing of each in and out. For example, if the frame rate is 25 fps, the duration of each individual frame is 40 ms: 05:00:30:04 would be converted to 05:00:30.160 (see Figure 7 in our article). You can use the following list of the most common frame rates to calculate the duration of each frame.

23.976 fps is 41.70838 ms
 24.000 fps is 41.66666 ms
 25.000 fps is 40.00000 ms
 29.970 fps is 33.36670 ms
 30.000 fps is 33.33333 ms
 48.000 fps is 20.83333 ms
 59.940 fps is 16.68335 ms
 60.000 fps is 16.66666 ms

Step 7 (optional): Generate thumbnails of the ins and outs—the first and last frames—of each selected sequence using FFmpeg.⁹ Select different file names for the first and last frame. We ended the file name of the last frame with the letter “B.”

ffmpeg -ss HH:MM:SS.000 -i input_file -vframes 1 thumb.png

Step 8 (optional): Utilize the open-source tool draw.io to create a diagram of your sequence.¹⁰

Step 9 (optional): If you want to see your footage in motion, you can create GIFs of your clips.¹¹

ffmpeg -ss HH:MM:SS.000 -i input_file -vf "fps=10,scale=500:-1" -t 3 -loop 6 output_file

Step 10: Export each selected sequence from the post-production files (the FFV1 files with matching parameters, without timecode).

```
ffmpeg -i input_file -ss 00:02:00.000 -to 00:55:00.000  
-c copy -map 0 output_file
```

Step 11: Create a .txt file (UTF-8) listing all clips in the desired order for the edit. It is important that the .txt file is saved in the same folder as your clip exports, and that it is formatted correctly.

```
file 'firstclipfilename.mkv'  
file 'secondclipfilename.mkv'  
file 'thirdclipfilename.mkv'  
file 'fourthclipfilename.mkv'  
and so on
```

Step 12: Combine the clips using the “concat” recipe.¹²

```
ffmpeg -f concat -i mylist.txt -c copy output_file
```

To make any changes to the edit, run through steps 5–12 again, selecting new ins and outs for clips or changing the order of the sequences. Have patience.

Step 13 (optional): Export a pillar-boxed HD version of your final cut.¹³

```
ffmpeg -i input_file -filter:v "scale=1440:1080:flags=lanczos,  
pad=1920:1080:240:0"  
-c:a copy output_file
```

Step 14: Create an access copy of your film.¹⁴

```
ffmpeg -i input_file -c:v libx264 -pix_fmt yuv420p -c:a aac output_file
```

Notes

¹ FFV1 has been proven to be a viable archival codec, and the Library of Congress now regards it as a suitable option for preservation. Matroska is an open container format that can hold an unlimited number of video, audio, and subtitle tracks in one file. Matroska file extensions are .mkv. See <https://blogs.loc.gov/thesignal/2023/12/embracing-ffv1-matroska-container-preferred/>.

² See https://amiaopensource.github.io/ffmpegprovizr/index.html#create_FFV1_mkv.

³ See <https://amiaopensource.github.io/ffmpegprovizr/index.html#deinterlace>.

⁴ See https://amiaopensource.github.io/ffmpegprovizr/index.html#modify_speed.

⁵ See <https://trac.ffmpeg.org/wiki/Scaling>.

⁶ See https://amiaopensource.github.io/ffmpegprovizr/index.html#burn_in_timecode.

⁷ See <https://ffmpeg.org/ffplay.html>.

⁸ See <https://fpstoms.com>.

⁹ See https://amiaopensource.github.io/ffmpegprovizr/index.html#one_thumbnail.

¹⁰ See <https://www.drawio.com/>.

¹¹ See https://amiaopensource.github.io/ffmpegprovisr/index.html#create_gif.

¹² See https://amiaopensource.github.io/ffmpegprovisr/index.html#join_files.

¹³ See https://avpres.net/FFmpeg/SD_HD.

¹⁴ See https://amiaopensource.github.io/ffmpegprovisr/index.html#transcode_h264.

Gauging Interest: Media Preservation Literacy and the Public Library

Nicholas Caluda

Introduction

Media requires continual preservation—a fact that is likely obvious to readers of this journal, but not something most of the public fully comprehends. As media consumption moves in an increasingly digital direction, fewer members of the public will be familiar with older media forms and the techniques necessary to preserve their own heritage, and the collective heritage of the twentieth century, or even recognize that these materials need to be preserved at all. As public libraries more frequently use DVDs, Blu-rays, and streaming services to engage patrons, older media formats in their collections—including 16mm films—which may contain unique content run the risk of being forgotten about and left to deteriorate due to negligent storage practices. Despite these two coinciding factors, public libraries remain undervalued as sites for media preservation education, both in academic discourse and in the collective mindset of librarians and archivists. While there are plausible explanations for this disconnect, I suggest that the public library is nonetheless an essential and untapped resource for hosting programs designed to educate the public about media preservation requirements and best practices. The purpose of this article, therefore, is twofold: 1) to discuss the implementation and results of such a pilot program and 2) to propose strategies and ideas for further exploration of this issue.

While media archival pedagogy and education have been the subjects of renewed academic interest, few academic works take seriously the possibility of educating the public at large about media preservation. Scholars agree that media preservation is of interest to the general public—as Hans Dieter Huber succinctly puts it, “where nothing is displayed to the public, nothing can be remembered” (2019, 13)—but there are a scarce number of publications exploring how to teach non-specialized audiences about media preservation. Many articles discuss the pedagogy of

social media or born-digital media (Bastian, Cloonan, and Harvey 2011; Copeland 2011; Rust 2017), and more explore the pedagogy of media at large in public libraries (Andrews and McDougall 2012; Gustafson 2017). There are also manuals that teach media preservation, including Anthony Cocciolo's comprehensive and approachable *Moving Image and Sound Collections for Archivists* (2017), and while numerous helpful online resources are available, their barrier to entry—that is, the basic understanding that media require preservation—still necessitates active efforts at outreach and education. Few works interrogate the spaces in which this non-specialized media preservation education takes place, or outline best practices for that education outside of the formal classroom setting.

Two recent dissertations discuss non-specialized media preservation literacy and pedagogy in spaces other than the public library, exploring the ways in which this education can be undertaken in media centres and dedicated workshops. Yu-En Hsieh charts the change in skill and attitude among workshop participants over the course of five years in Taiwan, ultimately concluding that

schools from K-12 to college should incorporate media archiving into their curricula. Learning by preserving their home movies serves a pedagogical purpose, affording students both experience and knowledge of media literacy and preservation, which empowers them to deal with their families' obsolete media artifacts and acknowledge their family [sic] ordinary images as significant cultural heritage artifacts. (2018, 186)

Hsieh's years-long study bears out the claim that non-traditional spaces are undervalued for media preservation education. Lindsay Kistler Mattock similarly looks at the important role of media arts centres for preservation and education. She notes that these hubs of media activity have been “described as separate and unequal to professional archives,” and that they “have not been fully acknowledged by archival practice or archival historians” (2014, 185). These spaces, she determines, “emphasize the need for outreach initiatives that address the specific technological and visual literacies necessary to fully engage with audiovisual records” (186). I contend that public libraries are similarly disregarded as sites of media preservation and education, which is further borne out by the relative lack of literature on the topic. As such, it is clear that more research can and should be done to gauge the effectiveness of certain spaces as sites of media preservation pedagogy. With this in mind, this article discusses one such option.

The Program

In my role as library associate, and later librarian, I tested my hypothesis by hosting an event at a Jefferson Parish public library to increase media preservation literacy, utilizing an existing public library program—Classic Movie Night—geared toward adults in the community. I marketed the program not as an information literacy seminar but as a continuation of this regular movie night, with the additional “hook” of seeing a film projected “live.” The draw of seeing how a classic film may have been

projected—in a repertory theatre, home, or even a public library—in the years immediately following its release, or before the advent of home video, was not just an educational opportunity, but an old-fashioned marketing technique.

This program was designed to be approachable for a wide range of attendees, based on my previous interactions with the community and the demographics of the Jefferson Parish library system as a whole. Jefferson Parish, located in southeast Louisiana, stretches from the southern tip of the state to Lake Pontchartrain, encompassing the area directly to the west and south of the city of New Orleans. The Parish library system includes sixteen branches which, per the U.S. Census Bureau (2023), serve a total population of around 440,000. While considered part of the Greater New Orleans Region, these locations serve mostly suburban, unincorporated areas: the River Ridge library, the branch at which this program took place, serves a population of approximately 13,500. The neighbourhood in which it is located is made up of two distinct communities: older residents who moved to the area as it was being developed, and younger families interested in raising their children in a suburban locale. As the survey results below suggest, these demographics have differing knowledge of media history, so the program had to be built with broad appeal in mind.

Attendees were shown John Cromwell's *In Name Only* (1939), starring Cary Grant and Carole Lombard. In many ways, this film fit perfectly within the scope of Classic Movie Night as the program had been run up to this point, allowing for a discussion on its leads' careers, historical views on social issues, and the evolution of film style; however, in other ways, the screening was an outlier. The film is not well-known in the "canon," having only been given a made-on-demand DVD-R release as part of the not-found-on-store-shelves Warner Archive Collection. This relative obscurity allowed patrons to approach the film without pre-existing perceptions and helped them realize the value of underseen and underdiscussed works. The film was also chosen because I hold a 16mm print of it in my home collection, and thus was able to project it live for patrons, using the time between reel changes to discuss the traditional methods of projection used in movie theatres (see Figure 1).

The post-screening presentation and discussion, usually designed around a textual analysis of the film or its history, as discussed above, focused instead primarily on media loss and preservation. This lecture was designed around home media formats as well as formats that would be found in a library—analogue tape (VHS, Hi8), small-gauge film (8mm, Super8, 16mm), and digital tape (MiniDV)—which I assumed that patrons would most likely be familiar with. The presentation began with a broad overview of film as a physical form, then explored reasons for film loss or degradation, such as fire (in the case of nitrate film) and vinegar syndrome (in the case of acetate film). Patrons were also given brief explanations for the loss and degradation of tape-based media. They were then asked to consider why film is important for our collective heritage, and why a film like *In Name Only* might be worth viewing in the twenty-first century. From here, patrons were told several practical steps they could take at home to take care of their own media collections, such as storing them in a cool, dry environment and performing regular condition checks. The planned outcome of this program was an increased awareness of media preservation best prac-

tices as well as the importance of home media preservation—an outcome that proved successful.



Figure 1: The author presents a small-gauge film to program attendees, many of whom had never witnessed film projection before. Photo courtesy of Ryan Jalbert.

Survey Results

A two-part survey was handed out to evaluate the effectiveness of a preservation literacy workshop in a non-classroom setting. As the survey was optional, not all attendees chose to respond, either in full or in part. Eight of the event's thirteen attendants answered questions before and after the presentation regarding their familiarity with home media formats, causes of media loss, and possible preservation methods. The pre-presentation survey questions were chosen to gauge respondents' awareness of major issues in media preservation, while the post-presentation questions were designed to have patrons reflect on their increased knowledge and ability to take action to preserve their own media. These questions ranged from "What percentage of film made before 1929 is lost?" and "What are possible causes for media loss?" to "What formats are you familiar with or do you have at home?"

Additionally, patrons were asked to rate their own understanding of media preservation on a scale from one to ten, with one meaning "not at all knowledgeable" and ten meaning "very knowledgeable." While most attendees reported having hands-on experience with at least one of the media formats discussed in the presentation, few rated themselves as knowledgeable regarding preservation of home media: before the presentation, the average self-reported score was below two. After the presentation, this number leapt close to six, with every response on the post-presentation survey higher than those on the pre-presentation survey. Although this figure is based on self-reporting, the implications of this data are worth considering. While nearly every respondent had crossed paths with film or tape-based media, and many still had them stored at home, few viewed themselves as knowledgeable enough to

maintain them as part of their personal collections prior to the presentation. Learning about media preservation best practices, including simple steps they themselves could take to be proactive about safeguarding their media, helped patrons feel more confident in their own ability to care for their media collections. This newfound confidence can possibly lead them to take the first steps in the care process.

One response on the pre-discussion survey had suggested that excessive cold may be responsible for media loss; by the end of the presentation, patrons clearly understood that heat and humidity—not the cold—are the main environmental concerns for film and tape-based media. Patrons were also consistently able to list several basic methods for media storage (“store in a cool, dry place”; “store in cool home environment”; “keep it inside, cold & dry”). This point is particularly relevant in Jefferson Parish and its warm, humid Gulf Coast environment. While one patron responded that their knowledge of home media preservation had not improved as dramatically, they nonetheless noted that they would consider taking their stored items “to a media specialist or someone knowledgeable,” which suggests an increased awareness of the importance of preservation work and the surrounding issues.

Recommendations and Takeaways

One of the most frequently asked questions in media preservation studies is “what gets saved, and why?” (Frick 2011). This article suggests that one of the answers can be found in our incomplete approach to media preservation education, and that a fuller answer to this question must involve a re-evaluation of non-traditional teaching spaces, such as the public library. Public library patrons may not attend archival screening nights, experimental microcinema showcases, or media preservation lectures; they may not even be aware of the existence of these events. Nonetheless, these patrons may hold or have access to valuable media that is worth saving—home movies, inherited collections, tapes of live broadcasts, and more. It is somewhat paradoxical, but nonetheless apparent, that the materials which require the most care are often held by those with the least knowledge to care for them. Hsieh found that even in a culture like Taiwan’s, which heavily values the transmission of generational memory,

few people pay attention to their own home movies, let alone think they are important enough to transform a history or change a stereotype about the past. However, through collective efforts at saving home movies owned by ordinary people, the history of and stereotypes about the so-called “underrepresented” have been changed. (2018, 151)

Making the public understand that their own media has value, and giving them the tools to care for it, is not easy—archives and museums can feel exclusionary and intimidating, especially if patrons already feel unwelcome in the academic world or unknowledgeable about preservation methods. Approaching them, instead, through public libraries, a place they may visit periodically or even often enough to consider “their own”—and which itself is underutilized as a place for preservation—is a way

to meet people where they are, within their comfort zone.

It is equally important to take a gentle approach to the material itself so as not to scare patrons away. This program was marketed not as a media preservation course but as a chance to see a 16mm film projected in person. While some patrons would likely have attended a screening regardless of the format, using analogue media had several benefits. First, it served as an additional reason for attending—feature-length film projections are not very common in the Jefferson Parish area. Second, it emphasized that film and media are material objects, while disguising education as entertainment. The filmmaking maxim “show, don’t tell” applies equally to teaching: having patrons interact with the film object imparts its value and fragility far more than a lecture alone could. In effect, the information literacy portions of the evening were hidden like a dog’s medicine in a roll of cheese, disguised in such a way that patrons welcomed them with great appetite.

This program format is likely difficult for public libraries to run every month; thus, a collaborative approach with local or regional media archives would be beneficial for all parties involved. While media holdings will vary among institutions, many public libraries today do not typically house large collections of analogue media with which to develop a program like the one discussed above—I myself used a film print from my own collection for this event. A partnership with a local archive can provide public libraries with the physical material necessary to hold a film-based screening and discussion, while archives can use the library to reach new audiences. Admittedly, public library program attendance can vary wildly: while the event discussed in this article had only thirteen attendants, a similar program I hosted later, at a different location, saw more than 150 people turn out. Cross-promotion and collection sharing can only increase attendance, and potentially put patrons in touch with archivists in a familiar setting. This olive branch may result in distrustful community members reconsidering—or considering for the first time—developing a relationship with an archive.

Some public libraries may have small-gauge film or analogue videotape scattered throughout their own collections. Libraries with existing VHS or film print collections should utilize those collections regularly, not only for educational purposes, but also to ensure they do not wither away on a shelf. Using these materials in programming will require continual preservation and regular maintenance efforts, or at least a general condition check. Ultimately, material that can be exploited for programming is more valuable than material that sits ignored, by virtue of it being utilized at all.

Conclusions

It is clear from the results of the survey and from discussions with attendees that media preservation education in public libraries is a valuable avenue toward increased media literacy in the populace at large. Audiences are willing and able to learn about preservation practices if the material is marketed and presented to them in an accessible and engaging way—and if they are not fully aware of what it is they will be learning. As Mattock suggests, media arts centres can provide “an open, dynamic,

and pluralistic structure for archives” and “possibilities for new models for the preservation and archivization [sic] of audiovisual media . . . for all organizations and institutions preserving these materials” (2014, 186). So too can public libraries.

While it is noteworthy that even one presentation made a difference in attendee confidence and knowledge, this study is limited by its singular nature—patrons may attend programming on a sporadic basis. A similar study taken over a longer period of time, such as the one undertaken by Hsieh (2018), would provide more opportunity for exploring the general benefits of media preservation education. I hope that future scholars will continue this work and consider collaborations with or use of their own public library to expand our conception of the range of valuable sites for education, preservation, and analogue media.

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When We Gather 'Round the Giant Stone Peacock

Petra Totten

When We Gather 'Round the Giant Stone Peacock is a ten-minute speculative nonfiction film that centres around objects and ideas inspired by—and found within—the grounds of the John P. Robarts Library at the University of Toronto. The film is all about shifting the scales of value, giving equal weight to the personal, ephemeral, and displaced as to the academic, institutional, and archival. Placing all sources on the same footing rejects a colonialist hierarchy of power, allowing audiences an opportunity to build community and connection by inviting them into the interior world of the film and its operations. To this end, the film actively creates an archive of memories and experiences through ephemeral scraps and fragments. The scenes vacillate between personal recollection and academic writing on trans+ studies, media studies, and ornithology. Although the film moves between rumination and research, the Robarts Library remains the grounding element: as a prime example of twentieth-century brutalist architecture, it is often considered an eyesore or monstrous building. It is also often said to resemble a peacock or turkey. Archival history says that the architects did not plan the volucrine façade, but oral history has created this consensus, deepening its lore and mystery (Anderson 2023). At the University of Toronto, it stands as a temple of learning and knowledge, restricted to those affiliated with the university. This film rejects the colonial tenets of scarcity and security by affording ephemeral traces the same import as recorded histories and employing speculation to breathe space into places and institutions that are hostile toward trans+ flourishing.

The film opens with a quote by Elizabeth Freeman: “It sees the body as a method, and historical consciousness as something intimately involved with corporeal sensations” (2010, 96). Freeman is writing about erotohistoriography, the process of encountering history as a body *now*, and how that process shifts meanings in both the past and present. An erotohistoriographic approach to archives is intimately tied

to the body and takes sensory inputs as seriously as it takes archival sources. The feel of a weathered poster against skin is just as necessary and evocative as recovered educational footage of Robarts when it first opened in 1973. Stephanie Springgay names this approach counter-archiving, or “anarchiving” (2022, 112). Intervening in archives in this way “disrupt[s] conventional narratives and histories and seek[s] ways to engage with matter not typically found in official archives, the affective experiences and lived histories of human and more-than-human bodies” (112–13). Blending sensory and traditional archival sources changes how an audience approaches such work, creating a more collaborative rather than passive space.

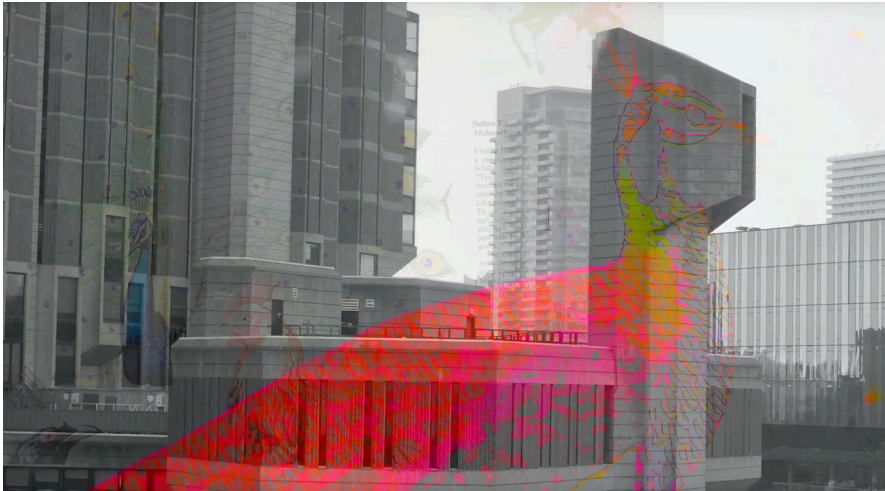


Figure 1: Still image from *When We Gather 'Round the Giant Stone Peacock*.

In *Poetic Operations*, micha cárdenas summarizes a poem by Venezuelan trans+ poet Esdras Parra: “If you find yourself a ‘yearling,’ no longer human but a one-year-old foal with lanky, unmanageable legs and sudden dependence, you will have to complete an impossible act of stitching with your teeth to become human again” (2022, 27). This suturing of disparate parts is at the heart of my working definition of a trans+ poesis. More broadly, poesis is the essential act of creation, of bringing something into being that did not exist before that effort (Agamben 1999, 68). I argue that a trans+ poesis has an extra layer: that the act of creation is not generative, but additive. The created object or thing is not simply conjured from an imagination but is constructed from already existing parts. These fragments of life—bodies, hormones, thoughts, histories, ideas, places, meanings—are reconstituted based on the will and desires of the creator. In *When We Gather 'Round the Giant Stone Peacock*, poesis is the grounding method through which the film interacts with the diegetic ephemera. This gathering of parts gives way to serendipitous experimentation by blending images and even ideas. Smashing sources together as diverse as birding books, institutional critique, and Canadian politics changes the original meanings of each source, shifting them into a new register of reception.

ument, one that is grounded and has weight. This firmness is reflected in the film through the immobile images. The camera lingers on objects and within scenes in order to feel the whispers of the objects being shown, but also as an exercise in stillness. Some of the first legible images shown are of Robarts' exterior, in all its queer brutalist glory. The façade is immovable as it is captured by a handheld camera. The shifting of the frame suggests a subjectivity that is actively being placed upon the building, pointing to possible alternative understandings of the building not just as a steadfast monolith. Fluidity is also introduced through the editing with jump cuts or superimpositions. The jump from still to dynamic image shakes the assumptions of a permanent subject and jars the audience out of a singular understanding of the building. The weight of stillness is applied evenly across the film, whether the subject in frame is Robarts or a torn sticker on the ground. This levelling moves the monumental library and traces of trans+ life into the same strata, with the added suggestion that there is give in the immovability of the structure, and purpose in the sway of the handheld camera. These tactical moves echo the voiceover's call for mutual aid and support at a time in Canadian culture where many are calling for the exclusion of trans+ people from society.

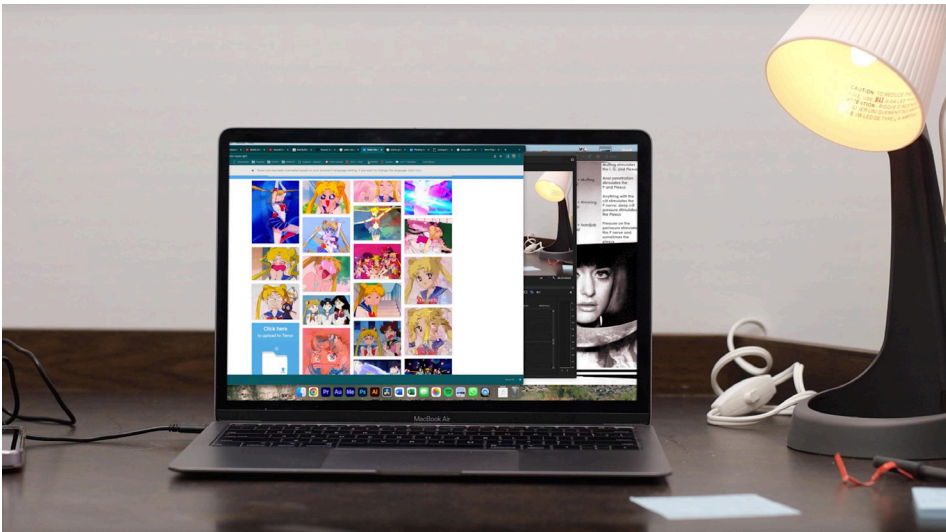


Figure 3: Still image from *When We Gather 'Round the Giant Stone Peacock*.

Gathering points have always been vital to trans+ existence, arising at different times in different iterations: support groups, drop-in programs, trans-specific communities and rituals, and even chatrooms, bulletin board systems (BBS), and social media platforms (Dame-Griff 2023). The film's title is an invitation to trans+ people to gather and engage in our collective creation. While Robarts might not seem like an ideal meeting place for trans+ people—the installation of electronic turnstiles requiring card access to enter is the most recent in a long line of exclusionary security measures—this film uses it as a case study in space-making. As the largest academic library in Canada, Robarts sets a harmful precedent of exclusionary pedagogy, but

this film asks how alternative pathways to knowledge and community can still bloom in the cracks. By considering all kinds of artifacts as worthy of attention, care, and preservation, *When We Gather 'Round the Giant Stone Peacock* illustrates how trans+ life can be found and fostered in any place and time.

The film can be watched in full at <https://www.synoptique.ca/issue-11-1>.

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ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Now or Never: Teaching 16mm Archiving and Preservation at Purchase College

**Oscar Becher, J.M.S. (Andi) Emberley, Camila Garcia Cabrera,
Nathan Holmes, and Lindsay Miller**

For the past three years, faculty and students in the Cinema and Television Studies program at Purchase College have been working closely with the 16mm film collections on campus. In a class taught in spring of 2022, “Cinema and the Archive,” Professor Nathan Holmes introduced students to issues in film preservation and archiving using films from the campus library and the school’s BFA film program. After the class finished, this work continued with the founding of The Purchase Film Archive (PFA), a student-led group, headed up by Andi Emberley and Camila Garcia Cabrera, dedicated to preserving and programming 16mm film on campus. These efforts have been gamely supported by Oscar Becher and Lindsay Miller. Becher, trained at the L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation and New York University’s Moving Image Archiving and Preservation (MIAP) graduate program, and Miller, also a MIAP graduate and a freelance video archivist, are currently archivists at Vinegar Syndrome, a film restoration and distribution company specializing in exploitation, horror, cult, underground, and X-rated films. Together, they have run class workshops, supervised internships for Emberley and Garcia, and been on hand to answer all manner of questions as the archive project has grown.

The 16mm collections at Purchase College reflect its rich history as a public, arts-focused liberal arts school, and include student films, dance films, documentaries, and educational films, among other curiosities. At around three hundred films, the collection is not large—although with donations it is growing quickly—and several films are in advanced states of decay. But with rewinds, a light table, and spreadsheets in hand, students have been able to investigate and document the material aspects of screen media and develop a broader understanding of the roles these films played, both culturally and institutionally. Since its inception, the PFA has screened 16mm

films for film classes, projected older dance films synchronized to the music of Björk for a campus Björk Film Fest, and presented screenings for a visit by renowned underground filmmaker Craig Baldwin. The group is currently involved in a project to digitize a number of student-made 16mm films from the 1980s. The hope is that some could be made available online in order to celebrate and promote the college's film program and its connections to film culture.

Holmes taught "Cinema and the Archive" for the second time in the spring of 2024, this time with Garcia and Emberley as teaching assistants. This iteration of the class featured some adjustments. More emphasis was placed on "useful cinema" (a category that comprises a good majority of recently donated 16mm films), Miller offered an in-depth presentation on video formats (see Figure 2), and students worked in groups on an "Adopt-a-Film" project. This latter project involved inspection and research of an individual film within the collection in order to provide information on its production, distribution, condition, and potential for programming or creative uses.

As the class was wrapping up, Holmes, Garcia, Emberley, Becher, and Miller sat down to discuss how teaching the film archives at Purchase College had evolved over the past two years. They each brought a handful of questions they wanted to ask each other.

OSCAR BECHER: How did this all start? Where did you find the film?

NATHAN HOLMES: At a certain point when I started working at Purchase, another professor, Greg Taylor, screened a film on 16mm for a class I was helping him with. I think it was D.W. Griffith's *The Lonedale Operator* (1911). I knew that he had gotten the film from the campus library so I was curious about what other films they might have. After a little bit of investigation, I got the library to show me the film collection, and I was excited by all the titles that I saw on the shelves. There was Chaplin, Eisenstein, the sorts of things you might see in a film history class, but there were also Maya Deren films, John Berger's 1972 *Ways of Seeing* BBC series, and a number of interesting titles I didn't recognize. I started thinking about what kind of teaching possibilities there might be here, or how we could use this collection in the context of a cinema studies class related to physical media. This was all very much a steep learning curve for me. I have no training in archiving or film preservation, and I struggled to even operate the 16mm projector the first time I wanted to show a film in a class! But I did know what the smell of vinegar meant, and that the storage situation for the films was not ideal, so I put aside considerations about my own qualifications in favour of just seeing what we could do with this material. The class was a way to teach myself film preservation, and I thought that the best thing to do would be to create a scenario that would allow students to see the films the college had, and to explore archiving and preservation issues through them in a sandbox style. So that was the impetus for the first version of the class. There was an existing class on the books called "Cinema and the Archive" that was oriented around film history research methods, mostly with

digital databases and so on. I shifted the focus of the class so that it used 16mm as a case study for media preservation issues in general. Andi and Camila were students in that first version of the class, and I'm wondering if they remember what they thought of everything, or what they expected out of the class.

ANDI EMBERELY: I don't think I was really expecting anything from the class. It was a requirement for our major.

[Laughter]

AE: But talking about the physicality of media and some questions you were asking about whether or not digital storage is as important and secure as many people believe it is, those ideas really intrigued me. But then we got to work with the actual film and got to see how the films in the library were of such wildly varying quality. There were some really great examples of films that we could project, but there were also films like *Ugetsu* (Kenji Mizoguchi, 1953), which was seeping some strange liquid. Seeing the variety of ways that film can deteriorate really inspired me to look more into what I could learn about that, and what I could do about it.

CAMILA GARCIA CABRERA: I also wasn't really expecting anything out of the class as it was a requirement. But as the first class went on, I remember being like, I've never even heard of such a thing in my life! There was a lot of talk about digital storage and questions about where Netflix or other streaming platforms store their movies. There were a lot of philosophical questions about where media is going in the future. And I was very much intrigued by that. And then the whole hands-on thing that Nathan had us do where he split us into two groups was very useful in explaining to us like the steps it takes to create programming and general media awareness out of this media that potentially doesn't work in the way it's supposed to, along with some media that does work. And then it became a thing for me to be like, well, you can do things with things that don't work, which was nice.

NH: The development of the syllabus for the class was really influenced by the book *Scratches and Glitches* by Jurij Meden (2021). It is an insightful (and funny) book about what archiving and curating film looks like in the present. In one of the chapters, Meden discusses how it is as important to preserve film as it is to preserve the audience for film. This idea, that the process of preserving film involves preserving an audience, was something I really wanted to try to put into practice. It made me think, yes, this class should be about learning about film preservation, but it should also have a programming component. It should be about trying to build an audience and a broader understanding around campus about things like physical media. So, over the course of the class there would be a division of labour, and students who wanted to continue doing print inspections, after our training by Oscar, could do so, and other students, called the programming group, would figure out ways to activate the archive and get people outside the class interested in

film on film. With around 22 students to manage, this turned out to be logistically a bit tricky, but the underlying idea of the class is that students get introduced to film materials, preservation, and archiving in the first part of the class, then are able to determine for themselves which aspect of this work they'd want to pursue for the second half of the class. A lot of this was still really theoretical for me, so I was counting on Oscar to be able to guide us through some of the more nitty-gritty stuff, and thankfully he was up for it. I am interested to hear what Oscar made of what we were doing from the outside.



Figure 1: Oscar Becher leads a film handling workshop, 2023.

OB: I think I had heard from our mutual friend Dino Proserpio (multi-hyphenate podcaster, record dealer, and cult film presenter) that you were looking for someone who knew anything about film archiving. I remember that you were using the National Film Preservation Foundation handbook, which provides a lot of very good information about film handling, what to look for when you're working with a film element, and how to be careful about it. But most of all I was excited to visit the class because my favourite thing to do is explain the basics to people who have

seen films and seen cinema, but have never really encountered the archiving and preservation side of film. Seeing an actual film for the first time is really exciting for me. I think getting to actually see what you guys were doing too, actually bringing film out and allowing people to learn about film on film, really won me over because I could tell that there were motivated people in the class, namely Andi and Cam, who were stepping up and showing interest right away. I saw how committed people were to blindly learn how to inspect film, which is a really long, complex process. As you said, there are trained experts in this field, but it's a field which is overrun with imposter syndrome, even for people who have done this for years and are trained in these types of methodologies. I could tell at the beginning there was a little bit of hesitancy, students who would worry about touching the film. That was very interesting to me because you don't know what it is until you touch it; it's innocent until proven guilty. And when we actually finally got to see everybody getting to wind through films, test the shrinkage, see how many splices there were, and then eventually organize an event which was centred around showcasing what all the students found, I was just kind of like, this is a very cool initiative. It doesn't matter if you have a special accreditation as a film archivist, everybody who went through that class now knows more about film archiving than the vast majority of people on the planet. So, I was won over by the whole idea and the execution of the class.

NH: I think a key moment whenever you visit a class, Oscar, is when you bring out all the different film of various gauges and formats and just kind of throw it on the table and invite students to mess around with it. It's an eye-opening moment for students when they get to touch the film and crinkle it up and feel it in their hands (see Figure 1). These are, after all, cinema studies students, who are accustomed to watching films, discussing them, and writing papers about them—touching film isn't ever really considered.

OB: It's something that I don't think anyone ever really expects to do.

NH: When they're invited to handle the film directly, I think there's a turn in the class. Up until that point we've been talking about the loss of so much film, about the volatility of nitrate, the fragility of film as a medium. And now all of a sudden they're touching it, scratching it with paperclips, writing on it.

OB: Yeah, there's a lot that can go wrong when you're handling certain elements, so it's good to have a little caution. But I also like seeing when people realize how film melds with your hand. If you're dealing with polyester versus acetate you can kind of bring that out to other areas. Every field of archival study deals with different materials and each of those materials affect relics of recent and not-so-recent history in their own unique ways. While most people may point to a material and classify it as plastic—an overarching term with little specificity—knowing exactly what that material is and how it will age over time can also teach valuable lessons about

economics, chemistry, and different periods of history. By handling film, even students who have little to no experience or interest in film archiving can bring information they've gleaned into their everyday life, or into their eventual area of specialization, whatever that may be. I'd like to throw the conversation back to Andi and Camila now and ask what they enjoyed about first being students in the class and then subsequently TA-ing it?

AE: My favourite part of the class was . . . well, there were good and bad parts about what I want to say. I was the editor of the report that we were putting together about the overall condition of the library's film collection. It was really a lot of fun to do all those inspections and put together this report and to think about how we're going to frame our argument for preserving these films, and how we're going to try to convince people that this work needs to be continued. Because I realized, doing this, that this work doesn't stop with the report.

NH: Yes, that report you edited at the end of the semester was actually the beginning.

AE: On the other hand, the struggle I think was having two groups dedicated to such different aims, one dedicated to programming and one dedicated to inspection. Those groupings didn't necessarily allow for students to specialize, and we got a lot of people who were just not super interested in what they were doing. It got a little bit difficult to work with them at points. In the current iteration of the class, we've abandoned that approach and we're doing an "Adopt-a-Film" project instead. Students are working in smaller groups to investigate a single film in the collection. They're looking at not only what the content of the film is, but also its condition, and how it circulated. This has made it a little easier for students to figure out what they are interested in. It's made it easier for teasing out what individual students are delighted by.

CG: The difference between being a student in the class and being a TA in the class is that I feel like there is a better recording system now. My favourite thing about archival work is putting the data in a spreadsheet and being all organized about it, like Lindsay over here. I really think that in order for me to be teaching, or at least alongside students teaching this material for the first time, having that really organized spreadsheet system set in place beforehand has been really important. Now when we inspect films for the Adopt-a-Film projects they'll be recorded for future Purchase Film Archive meetings. I really respect Lindsay for having me do spreadsheets during my Vinegar Syndrome internship. There is this very cool thing about digitizing and having a digital component related to something that is so physical, like film. Considering that we're now talking about education, I wanted to ask Lindsay what she thinks the benefits of doing this kind of work are for a more digital generation of students. How do we get students intrigued with the physical stuff as a digital generation?

LINDSAY MILLER: That's a really good question. I know when I was studying video production and podcast production during my undergraduate degree, I found myself getting really hung up on technicalities. We were learning about all the important filmmakers and all the auteurs, but I was sitting there saying to myself: I don't know how a film camera works, I've never shot on film. I just never had those opportunities. So, I think what's really important, especially if you're just interested in filmmaking in general, is understanding how the technology has developed. And yes, it gets very technical and not everyone needs to know how to correctly identify what the original camera negative is, but it's good to understand how a film camera works: film started out like this and then standards were set, it evolved into this, and so on. The other question is how you keep people interested, because when it comes to the digital side of things I think that's actually where the education gets a lot drier. It's a little bit harder to understand and, because it's ones and zeroes, it's not something you can really visualize super well. I know I was having a hard time with this kind of thing when I started learning about digital preservation. I was often like, just *what* are you talking about exactly? What do you mean? So, I think introducing the physical side really helps to understand the process in the long run. It should also be mentioned here that there are a lot of different jobs in archiving. It's not just the film inspection part. It's not just the database entry part. There's a lot of other things you have to deal with—copyright, for example. So the physical side of things exposes people to what there is out there.



Figure 2: Lindsay Miller leads a presentation on video formats, 2024.

AE: I want to piggyback off that with a question for Oscar. You've been making these educational content videos about film and film preservation. I want to know about your inspiration for doing these videos and your target audience. Is it people who might already know about this stuff? Are you trying to be an appealing personality in order to drag more people into the preservation world? What's your M.O.?

OB: That's a good question. I do want as many archivists as possible. I think I have a soft spot for people who are processing archivists. I was always interested in theory and history and research, but I'm always fascinated by the people who get down in the trenches, get down in the dust and the dirt and the mould and try to save as much information as possible. I think archiving is a really dry subject and it's that way for many different reasons. So I do like to make these silly educational videos in order to get people interested in this stuff. It's fascinating to get in the weeds and try to get very granular, literally granular if we're dealing with film, about very specific subclassifications and classifications of things that are obsolete media that no one can find information about. But to be perfectly honest, I always have the same audience in mind. Lindsay and I both work for a for-profit company where funding and resources are acquired through advocacy targeted at specific people. We do preservation and conservation, so we are doing the not-for-profit work of a for-profit company. We often have to advocate for resources from the people who own the company. The very first video was all about vinegar syndrome and how it relates to film cans. At that point I was making a very large bid to purchase an enormous amount of archival film cans, which are very expensive, but which would allow us to finish up cataloguing and inventorying our back stock. However, I had been told no multiple times. The basis of that first script was to remind the owners of the importance of these cans. I wanted to say to them: this is really important, this is part of our mission. My hope was that if we were able to put it out to people who buy Blu-rays and care about the movies, they would also care about the actual resources being allocated toward Lindsay and I's area, which is the film archive. But I'm interested in going back to talk in more depth about where different collections came about at Purchase. Is there one single collection and has there been an active attempt to expand the realm of the film archive?

NH: When the class started, I only understood that there was a single collection, which was the Purchase Library's 16mm collection. That collection is composed mostly of classic art films, as well as educational films and documentaries. A number of these films were labelled CIR, or Center for Instructional Resources, which is a department on campus that no longer exists. There are a lot of dance films in this collection, including films made by Meredith Monk, the Dance Theater of Harlem, and other modern or avant-garde-leaning companies. My inference was always that those films were used within the college's dance conservatory. I subsequently learned that one of the first film professors here, Miriam Arsham, who was friends with Maya Deren, had worked on some of these

films as an editor, including *Night Journey* (1960) with Martha Graham (directed by Deren's ex-husband Alexander Hammid). I imagine that the Deren films we have, like *The Very Eye of Night* (1958) and *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945), would have been used in Arsham's classes. But in the process of teaching the class we also found that there were other 16mm collections. There is a Film BFA program at Purchase, and there was a storage room that held a lot of films made by students over the past 30 or so years, including some that won student Academy Awards, and first films by Hal Hartley, Abel Ferrara, Azazel Jacobs, and others that we're still in the process of uncovering. We recently located an incredible student film incorporating gorgeous stop-motion animation, *10,000 Demons* (1985). It was made by Joseph Laudati, a student here in 1985, who went on to work in animation and was featured in the special effects magazine *Cinemagic*. A student currently in the "Cinema and the Archive" class has been in contact with Laudati to learn more about the film, and with luck we'll be able to digitize it.

We've been really fortunate to work with faculty and staff that understand film, and who have the institutional knowledge to say where many of these films came from. Many of the professors in the BFA film program were taught how to make film on film, and there are still projectors, rooms with projection booths, splicers, rewinds, and Steenbecks around. So there's an infrastructure of tools and people that have been really supportive, even if they often don't really know why we're interested in 16mm. But there's an exciting exploratory and discovery dimension to this work that I think really animates students.

One thing that is happening in this iteration of the class that I think has been really useful for students, is that we've been learning more about forms of film that are different from commercial cinema or art cinema. Talking about orphan films, sponsored film and what is called "useful cinema," and home movies has helped them to understand that there's potentially more interesting films in the collection beyond the more recognizable titles like *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941) or *The Gold Rush* (Charlie Chaplin, 1925), and how these different kinds of films can be valuable, both historically and aesthetically.

LM: While we're talking about orphan films, industrial films, and things like that, I'd like to ask Andi and Cam something. While working at Vinegar Syndrome during your internship, you came across a lot of porn, didn't you? I'm curious about what your reaction to that was at first. Were you hesitant or apprehensive? Did working with porn change your viewpoints?

CG: Well, I was already interested in sex in film. I was always interested in, like, the morality of it. I was always interested in, like, should we have more of it? Should we have less of it? What does it mean for the story? And I think that working for Vinegar Syndrome and seeing more gruesome stuff than what mainstream cinema usually offers... it was a good turning point in my ideas about it. I honestly was kind of content with it. I just feel like it became normalized, and it was fine. I think that some of the stuff there is questionable, but there's five different warehouses in

that building so of course something's going to be questionable. It's just a matter of what you do with it and how it should be treated. So the internship involved learning about that as well, which is what I really, really appreciated, and walking into the most normal activities, normal jobs I've ever encountered was nice.

AE: I was raised to be sort of prudish and this material is not really my area of interest, but my attitude is: it exists, it's not something to be afraid of, and we're working in a professional environment doing work that needs to be done. That holds precedence over any squeamishness I may have about the content of the films. I think if I were to have my perfect pie-in-the-sky job, it probably wouldn't be porn, but also, I don't really want to work on mainstream material. *It's a Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra, 1946) should be preserved, but that's not what I want to do, either. I want to get down in the mud and do things that other people are not going to do, because they still need to happen, and that's sort of how I view it.

OB: Well, can I also say: sex is an enormous concept in cinema, and every single archive is going to have sexually explicit materials in some form or another. The dream scenario is to have people who can see what the researcher in a hundred years is going to want to see, and what the filmmaker in a hundred years is going to want to study. I think that one of the great things about the "Cinema and the Archive" course is what you were able to do within a relatively short span of time, and how Andi and Camila were set up to pursue various trajectories. During their internship, Andi and Camila were exposed to the various genres that exist in every film archive. In the end Andi was able to unearth, and this was confirmed by another researcher, about seventeen or eighteen lost films. Without a person looking at years, titles, edge codes, confirming that these were the best versions of these titles, outside of fragments on VHS, these films would never even be thought of again, let alone seen. In addition to that, Camila went through an entire half of our archive—about 2,500 titles. She added metadata, A-D strip information, fixed label errors, updated database records.

LM: Right, Camila assisted on an audit that we performed last year, on the company's tenth anniversary. A lot of films were acquired over that period and there had been multiple archivists. No one had sat down to take a look at whether or not everything in the database corresponded to what was on the shelves. The audit was necessary since we are moving buildings, but it was also good to do because we were able to correct a lot of simple mistakes made by others.

OB: That's really an enormous amount of work that can get done within the timeframe of a semester. And at the end, Andi and Camila came out of the internship having accomplished a really tangible and important thing that they could show people they'd done. So they learned incredibly quickly, and part of that had to do with passion and genuinely caring about the areas that they wanted to grow into.

AE: Going back to the question about expanding the archive at Purchase. We have already started the process of doing new acquisitions. Nathan introduced us to Tony Spalla, a retired camera operator in Yonkers, New York who once owned a video production company. He has donated films, television shows, some documentary footage, that we're slowly making our way through. We also have a collection donated from a local movie theatre, and those are, again, a lot of documentaries, shorts, things like that. It's all very exciting to get our hands on more film materials, especially because the materials on campus, a lot of them are not projectable. We've already had some real success with projecting the better of the elements from our new acquisitions. But in terms of expansion, space is always an issue. We don't yet have a dedicated space. We only recently actually got a permanent space to perform film inspections that we can access regularly. So, space has been a bit of a struggle, and I wanted to ask Lindsay if she had any thoughts on how digital organization might be able to help us with this problem of being all over the place, physically.

NH: We're drowning in film over here!

LM: I can certainly relate to that. I think that metadata is just so key to archiving in general. It's very, very important to keep track of what you're doing, even if it seems like something very mundane. For example, Oscar and I, whenever someone pulls a print to be scanned or whatever the element is, we'll make a little note in the database: this person took the print out of the archive on this date, etc. That way, if someone's looking for it, we automatically just know where it is and there's not a wild goose chase to go find it. It's really important to keep on top of all that data, as well as figure out a system that really works for you. When you start getting into archival science and things like that, they're going to talk about Dublin Core and MARC records and all the different standards of things. No disrespect to any of those standards, they're all perfectly good standards, but sometimes it just doesn't work for your organization. Luckily, we already had a system in place when I first joined Vinegar Syndrome, so I was really easily able to jump into our database and make changes as we needed. We've made a lot of changes since I started, which was over a year ago. These changes can be really small. Oftentimes, it's just like one single word. I have arguments with myself about tagging certain things and certain subjects all the time, because it's just important to consider the language that you use when describing materials. Also, in terms of organization, you've just got to know where everything is. You've got to have a way of labelling everything. Otherwise, it's just a mess. An archive without any sort of database inventory is not an archive, it's just a mess.

CG: I have some things to say about that. I am also involved with WPSR, the campus radio station, and my work there has also helped me realize that having a database is having an archive. I have interns at the radio station, and our archival

roles were the most popular out of the three roles we offered. We had PR, tech, and archival, and loads of people wanted to sign up for the archival positions—we couldn't accept them all. It made me realize how happy I was that people are not only interested in this thing that seems so new to this campus, but also that there are multiple parts to archiving, especially with a database. For example, I have one person dedicated to the CDs. I have one person dedicated to the vinyl. We even have a student collection that we're starting and it involves researching CDs in the collection that are from students from 2005. And then we have people that are musicians now come in and add to that collection. It does make me realize that all these crates and all this stuff that was in the station for ten years wasn't truly an archive until someone took the time to make a system out of it and have people actually in charge of the various materials.



Figure 3: Camila Garcia Cabrera demonstrates an Eiki projector for a class of three- and four-year-olds, 2025.

NH: You took all that experience that you gained with Lindsay and applied it to a different site and different media. That's fantastic. Jumping off that a little bit, it strikes me that there is a lot of student interest in archiving on campus, in addition to the work that you're doing at the radio station. Purchase has a TV station, for example, that also has an interesting archive of material. I'm wondering, and I guess this is a question for the whole room. Is this normal? I know Purchase can be pretty idiosyncratic. It's always been a very subcultural campus, so I wonder if that makes it a uniquely receptive place for archival activities. But since this conversation is meant for an issue of a journal that is about teaching media archives more generally, I think people would like to know if this could be something that they

could do at their own institution, be it a liberal arts school, a state school, or even a high school. Is there a general turn toward archiving that's happening that other educators could be taking advantage of?

LM: I think newer generations are a little more in touch with the importance of keeping records of things. A lot of people are really getting into journaling and diaries, just like date keeping in general. This is just something I've noticed recently, and I think that is part of it.

CG: I think that a lot of colleges don't realize the history that they have. A big reason that Purchase students are so involved with their history is that they understand that they had and still have an incredibly rich, for example, music scene. This is a really big art school and people love to put their talent everywhere. People like to digitize and record their talents. For example, I just went to a pie-eating contest, and everything was recorded. This contest (put on by Purchase TV) was a *remake* of a contest that they had back in the day because they found it in the archives, which was very interesting. Also, the student centre here, The Stood, has always had great programming, and it's really interesting to hear people who remember the shows there. There's people on the internet being like "I was there when that happened." Then you have people being like, isn't this cool that this event is still a thing? For example, Culture Shock (a spring music festival started in 1993): Destiny's Child played in 1998, Drake played in 2009. That's very fascinating and very enriching for the festival and for the Purchase community as a whole. I think that if a lot of other colleges try their hardest and dip their toe into their history, they would not only appreciate the school that they're going to, but really appreciate the history and try to remake it.

AE: Yes, I think there's a growing interest in histories that lie outside of the mainstream. I remember when we were students in the "Cinema and the Archive" class, we were talking to the TA about something and he mentioned a director that I didn't know. And then he said, "oh, I don't mean to be offensive, but do you like *know* people?" And I did my best not to be offended. But I later realized that that's not really what I'm interested in. I'm not interested in the people, I'm interested in like, why is this film about a library with a kid talking to George Washington Carver here (*Check it Out*, a 1983 educational film about library research)? What's the deal with that? I have a friend at Mount Holyoke, who is very invested in archives and has been for a really long time. And her work is mostly about bringing to light things that enable people to question the popular narratives of history.

NH: One thing that I think is really great about having the Purchase Film Archive as a student-run club is that it means that in addition to archiving being taught as a required class, students are also able to contribute, like Cam said, to a community or a culture of archiving that's occurring across campus. I think that's been really helpful for energizing the class too, because there's now a built-in culture that's

providing an audience and a basis for other kinds of connections to happen. The one *big problem* with this model, if we can call it that, is that Camila and Andi are going to be graduating this year in the spring. I will be there to cheer them on, but we are very conscious of the fact that someone else is going to inherit the club and the film archiving projects. I'm going to be here, still, but I can't do it by myself. This is the perennial problem: students are only here for four years, and then they leave. So, this process of training and introducing is ongoing, which can be interesting, but also frustrating. It can make progress difficult to see.

AE: Definitely, it's a little bittersweet. I've had so much fun doing this stuff for the last two years. I've loved doing the work at Vinegar Syndrome, and I'm excited to think ahead to what my opportunities with this set of skills that I've been building could be. I also love the materials the Purchase Film Archive works with, and I'll be sad to leave it behind. I am fascinated by what we actually have here and what it tells us about the community at Purchase and the larger Westchester community. It's really fascinating to me. Our goal right now is to try to pick these individuals who are showing some interest and convince them, no, this is actually the coolest thing you've ever seen on this campus, and you need to take up this mantle of preservation from me.

NH: For people looking to start a project like this, students or faculty, being evangelical about what you're doing is the best route. I guess that leads naturally into the "where do we go from here?" question, but I also want to know from Oscar and Lindsay, who have both done graduate work in archiving, what they think about teaching film archiving to undergraduates. This is typically part of graduate-level training, so what can film archiving do, or not do, at the undergraduate level?

OB: It makes me think of something that Andi already brought up, about the preconceived notions that people have about studying film. You typically get asked: Are you interested in directors? Are you interested in acting? Are you interested in filmmaking? Are you interested in film history? But I think it's really, really important to get at least a very basic knowledge in film archiving, or just preservation practices as early as humanly possible, even if you're not formally trained in these types of things. I think formal training and graduate preservation programs are absolutely necessary, but I genuinely wish I had a collection to sift through while I was an undergrad. I feel like I spent so much time after graduation trying to figure out why I wasn't fitting into these preconceptions about whether or not it was film history, or filmmaking, or something in between that I was interested in. Also, I was from a fairly new school, where basically we had a DVD collection, and that was it. If you get experience, not even just with film, but learning soft and hard skills with these types of materials, you can bring it into other areas.

Film is one of the most fascinating mediums, because it involves dealing with people, it involves a painterly touch, it involves the idea of writing. It involves

so many different forms of art, and the archiving of it also can be transferred to other things that you do, just either in daily life, or as professional experience. Finally, Lindsay and I deal with really difficult people all the time, and I think archiving is a really good way of learning how to professionally deal with people and with institutions. It's about negotiation and what you're able to do with and within institutions. It's about expanding in the ways that can inspire people, like Camila and Andi and Nathan have been able to do, and it's really about the ability of the single person to convince those who are not totally invested in film or archiving, but need to learn about it in order to see what *we're* passionate about. It's not us-versus-them, it's "how do we get everybody to understand what we think is cool about this stuff?" or at least see it a little bit more like we do.

LM: I think very similarly to you, especially when it comes to, like you said, any kind of archival skill you can easily apply to any sort of job, and I think that's particularly important with filmmaking nowadays, considering that most of it is done digitally. You need to have digital backups! I talk to people all the time, they don't seem to believe this. They're like, it's in the cloud, don't worry about it. Amazon's got it, don't worry about it. And then I just have to say, just let me play a hypothetical with you: this is not a conversation about *if* the digital media fails but *when* it fails, then what do you do? It's not a fun question to ask but these conversations are necessary. Yes, it's tough with costs and things like that, but if you move up in the industry, you're going to see these things happening. So, it's really important to get that kind of exposure as soon as possible, so that way you can kind of integrate it into your everyday life. I also think it's really important to teach students *how* they can use the archive in their work. I know when I was an undergrad, they taught me, you know, oh, this is our library, this is how you search for a book, blah, blah, but they never really explained the special collections that they had there. I don't even know if my college had any film in their archive, but when I was doing video production, I was particularly interested in documentary film, and when you make documentary film, you pull from the archives a lot of the times. Well, then you have to start thinking about copyright, and you have to think about, well, what's fair use in this case? A lot of media law kind of stuff. So it's all really tied together, and, yeah, you don't need to know every single thing, but just having the general awareness, especially of the legalities of things, is always just going to be a bonus, in my opinion.

NH: There was a moment recently in class where we were discussing *Film, Living Record of Our Memory* (Inés Toharia Terán, 2021). The idea of the ephemerality of all these media came up, and I think for a lot of people, not just students, there is an idea that this stuff will just be around forever, and that it doesn't need care or stewardship in any sustained way. One thing you come to realize is that, even with all the care and stewardship that you can give it, this media might still disappear someday because an archive will burn down or will get bombed or, through neglect or lack of resources, fall into disrepair. In a certain sense, archives confront you with

death. There is an existential dimension to this work that goes beyond media and film. You realize that—to use a familiar phrase—everything solid is going to melt into air at some point. So part of this work is about confronting impermanence.

OB: That's a very good and optimistic place to end.

[Laughter]

NH: But maybe this is why I threw caution to the wind with regards to my personal qualifications or training. It was now or never for these films. Tom Gunning, who taught at Purchase, once said that life is a rebellion against death. Maybe that's what film preservation is, too, a revolt against death.

Readers who would like to see the students of the Purchase Film Archive in action can view the short documentary *PFA and Beyond*, made in 2023 by Purchase film student Rebecca Moore, at the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OG-QiXHFudA>.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Book Review

Malte Hagener and Yvonne Zimmermann, eds. *How Film Histories Were Made: Materials, Methods, Discourses*. Amsterdam University Press, 2023.

Merve Ünsal

How Film Histories Were Made: Materials, Methods, Discourses is a self-reflexive anthology of essays that reaches beyond the book's subtitle to develop a sensibility in relation to film history that is inclusive, expansive, and porous. As Trinh T. Minh-ha challenged and moved beyond the premises of ethnographic documentary filmmaking in her 1982 *Reassemblage* to "speak nearby" her subjects, *How Film Histories Were Made* achieves a similar proximity and co-habitation with film histories. The anthology considers the making of film histories as an act that reckons not only with the medium itself but also with historiography and history.

The subsections for the book reflect a range of scales in terms of objects of study and sensibilities of research that reveal the medium of film as an expansive field, hosting at times conflicting temporalities, histories, and communities. These sections include "Models of Film Historiography: Philosophy and Time," which features Jane M. Gaines' "What Next? The Historical Time Theory of Film History," a technology-driven take on Koselleck's theory of historical time (59–84); "Film History in the Making: Processes and Agendas," including Yvonne Zimmermann's close reading of an artist's historiography in "Hans Richter and the 'Struggle for the Film History'" (209–34); "Revisiting Film History: Institutions, Knowledge, and Circulation," featuring Michael Cowan's inclusion of the audience as a phenomenon extending the realm of film historiography in "What Was a Film Society? Towards a New Archaeology of Screen Communities" (315–46); "Rewriting Film History with Images: Audiovisual Forms of Historiography," including Chiara Grizzafi's exploration of film criticism as a historiographic medium in "Audiovisual Film Histories for the Digital Age: From Found Footage Cinema to Online Videographic Criticism" (389–416); and "Into the Digital: New Approaches and Revisions," including Sarah-Mai Dang's

“Representing the Unknown: A Critical Approach to Digital Data Visualizations in the Context of Feminist Film Historiography” (467–94).

The book makes room for multiple cadences, the focuses ranging from geographical in Firat Oruc’s “Historicizing the Gulf Moving Image Archives” (237–62) to temporal in Heide Schlüpmann’s “The Discovery of Early Cinema: The Moment of ‘Silence’” (119–32), and from medium specificity in Volker Pantenburg’s “A Televisual Cinematheque: Film Histories on West German Television” (349–70) to case studies in Benoît Turquety’s “A Film-maker’s Film Histories: Adjacency Historiography and the Art of the Anthology” (189–208). This scope, albeit producing a halting reading experience at times, serves as a proposal in and of itself: the materiality of film as a medium is informed by the political economies from which it emerges, but is not dictated by its context. As such, the production of film histories as a field needs to reach beyond plurality and polyphony to embrace the writing of film histories as an ongoing, active, material, and self-conscious act that contends with conflicting agencies and temporalities.

In “Introduction: Unpacking Film History’s Own Histories Towards an Archaeology of Film Historiography,” Malte Hagener and Yvonne Zimmermann launch their investigation within the framework of a confrontation. By looking at how film histories have come to be the way they are, they seek to reorient toward a consideration of archival research in tandem with contemporary and shifting theoretical considerations of the present (15). While the authors focus on plurality (17), the essays in the volume comprise a statement that transcends the plurality of film histories: film histories are inherently defined by what constitutes a film image, a history, and the material and immaterial connections between the two. Alexandra Schneider and Vinzenz Hediger’s essay, “Tipping the Scales of Film History: A Note on Scalability and Film Historiography,” on whether film histories are scalable, manifests the main inquiry of the introduction. This question, derived from Anna Tsing’s problematizing of scalability as “banishing diversity” (460), encapsulates the inherent problem of any plurality: “the singular, resistant, incomputable” composes film histories (461).

The editors’ use of digital methods to challenge assumptions about film histories as discourse is an exciting premise when potentially extended from film histories to films. Treating film as a medium and as a data point, they rightfully predict that “the digital can act as a catalyst for a methodological turn” (29). This methodological concern, which they stage in the introduction, is reflected in the attempt to bring film histories into the future by constructing different relationships with its past. The attempt to produce narratives while critiquing the very existence of narratives, by actively deconstructing their components through digital tools, helps readers imagine a dethroning of narratives within historiography, embracing the hyper-specificity and hyper-generality unique to the medium.

Thomas Elsaesser’s “The Aporias of Cinema History” is a cornerstone of the book. In this essay, Elsaesser considers the fraught relationships between memory, technology, and human through film while tackling what the medium entails ontologically to hint at the epistemological ramifications and contradictions of film.

Launching his investigation with a look at the term “uncanny ontology” (48), Elsaesser situates moving images to have a unique link to the writing of history as moving images are embedded within life while reaching beyond the limitations of any temporal delineation. As such, while film may have an indexical relationship with the living, moving images also undermine what living can mean by their very existence: moving images are both living and not-living, and as such, histories of film inevitably are haunted by livingness innate to the images’ movement. By then engaging with “operational images,” Elsaesser further situates his consideration of film as a medium that serves functions, operating as an “extension of man,” via Marshall McLuhan (50), to then consider moving images as one rendition of the human interaction with technology, thus positioning film not as a historically specific medium of the last hundred years but a part of the overarching narrative of the post-human. This argument is striking as it liberates the moving image from the boundaries of the medium while also setting aside shifting technologies of film as a defining characteristic. In other words, the understanding of film as prosthetic to the human body (53) helps to reckon with the moving image as a modality, transcending genre, era, and geographic specificity to delve into the moving image as part of the human experience and body. This conceptual shift facilitates the integration of film history with the constant use of moving images in military technologies while ushering in artificial intelligence, as Elsaesser’s essay seems to have anticipated generative AI’s upheaval of what constitutes the soul of the medium: film was never only indexed to the moment, but always “layered” of filmic images (55). He thus proposes to interrupt the “loop of belatedness” (56) by conjuring up Benjamin’s *Jetztzeit* (now-time) to place the future of film not in linear progress from what has been, but as hosting multiple pasts, temporalities, and agencies. Elsaesser’s essay thus encapsulates the re-thinking that the editors proposed in the introduction to ask the “why” of film history through the “how.” Film history and historiography need to address film’s inherent link to both time and a slice of time; it is therefore uniquely positioned to articulate the human as in time and with time.

Benoît Turquety’s “A Film-maker’s Film Histories: Adjacency Historiography and the Art of the Anthology” is a case study of Peter Kubelka’s curating and archival practice within the larger framework of making anthologies. Turquety’s interpretation of programming as a “paratactic form of discourse” (190) interweaves filmmaking and film historicizing as practices that articulate more than a lineage and a gathering. Turquety begins his investigation by analyzing the 1976 exhibition catalogue *Une histoire du cinéma*, which accompanied the film programming of 212 films under the title “Anthology Cinema Presents” (191). Turquety identifies the effort of Peter Kubelka, who curated the exhibition, as representing a history of independent cinema as integrated within the filmmaker’s practice, via P. Adams Sitney (192). Underscoring the timing of this exhibition at the moment when films began to enter the collections of contemporary art institutions, the author locates the historiographic endeavour of “Anthology Cinema Presents” as a continuation of the founding of Anthology Film Archives: the institution’s emphasis on locating “film as an art” and as a “museum” in their launching manifesto serves to place “curation” as

a practice (190). The screenings at Anthology realize curated programming, which comprises time-based programming for a museum practice of archiving and preserving. The founding collection of Anthology Film Archives, *Essential Cinema*, locates a specific number of films as a foundation on which the programming is built. As such, the name of the institution could be interpreted as comprising the subtitle of the book that this essay is included in: the materiality of film is housed in the archives through the discursive tool of anthologizing. Kubelka's 1996 program, *Was ist Film*, featured 63 screenings (195). The filmmaker's reticence to discuss the concepts behind his selection in an interview published in 2013 as well as his insistence that the program is about the experience itself becomes a methodological intervention in the making of film history with Kubelka's statement "The model for my programme is film montage" (196). Treating film as material for his practice, Kubelka thus makes a larger statement about the time-based medium of film, which Turquety interprets within the framework of poetry anthologies. Quoting Jeremy Braddock, the author situates the anthology as bridging ancient knowledges with the beckoning future (199), as Turquety concludes that anthologies, in addition to being (precious) historical objects, are also forms of history writing—montages that write history through adjacency (203–204). Turquety interprets this strategy to allow blank space for future historiographies that can grow rather than revise these existing montage-as-historiographies. Through the figure of Kubelka, the montage-maker, the author opens up anthologizing as a potentially radical, guerrilla tactic (205) that dislocates power from the historian to the maker.

Although Turquety hints at this implication, he does not go into pedagogy too deeply, other than mentioning the pedagogical ramifications of a historical education through time spent with essential cinema. The ramification of his argument for pedagogy deeply resonates in 2025 as montage, kinships, affinities, proximities have material implications in teaching film history. As we no longer have the luxury to be comfortable with the blank spaces left to be filled in by different anthologies, education in film histories needs to be self-anthologized, which I feel is one of the undercurrents of this book. Turquety's essay could be seen as self-reflexive within the self-reflexive, as this anthological book about film history shifts the ground with each essay, confronting the medium of film and the method of historiography with an urgency that feels relevant in the present context when histories and images of histories appear to have dissolved. The essay places the maker as a figure that does more than making. While not unique to filmmaking, the emphasis on the making of history serves to open up film history as a field that self-critiques as a form of making. The self-reflexivity of the essays included in the anthology would vastly benefit from section introductions or a concluding note from the editors that articulate the throughlines, as the necessarily focused analysis of each essay at times forgets the larger questions of the volume. It is possible to assume that the editors allow the essays to speak for themselves, but given the breadth of the topics and methodologies included, more guidance could have benefitted the unity of the book.

The unspoken epilogue of this manifold anthology is Benjaminian: film histories engage with film, which as a medium is of time but not in time. Engaging

materially with a temporality that refuses to sit still is why film historiography has a seemingly fickle temperament. It is why film resonates across time in ways that are unique to it. The commitment of film to time connects this medium to media elsewhere, weaving together temporalities, histories, materialities, calling for a methodology that needs to flicker between the now-time and the not-now-time. Consequently, the epilogue would be about memory and our ongoing efforts to generate intelligence with it. The feat of this volume is in its recognition and admittance of the slippery nature of historiography as a material practice that promises and, at its best, delivers an intervention on time itself.

Book Review

Nezih Erdoğan and Ebru Kayaalp, eds. *Exploring Past Images in a Digital Age: Reinventing the Archive*. Amsterdam University Press, 2023.

Cate Cleo Alexander

In November 2018, İstanbul Şehir University hosted an international event called “Forgetting the Archive” to celebrate the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism’s launch of a digital film archive featuring mostly early silent films. Presentations at this event formed the basis for a collection of articles titled *Exploring Past Images in a Digital Age: Reinventing the Archive*. As stated by the editors, the book was “submitted to the publisher during the toughest days of the COVID-19 pandemic” (Erdoğan and Kayaalp, 17). Two contributors, Gustav Deutsch and Thomas Elsaesser, unexpectedly passed away before the completion of the book; they are represented by an interview with Deutsch and a reprint of a previous article by Elsaesser. Despite these considerable challenges, the edited collection presents useful additions to scholarship on early film and film archives. It is the latest publication in the “Framing Film” series by Eye Filmmuseum and the University of Amsterdam Press. This series, which has promoted discussions about archival theory and practice since 2009, is aimed towards both the academic research community and archival practitioners.¹ The book itself is written primarily from the perspective of film scholars and filmmakers. *Exploring Past Images in a Digital Age* is fundamentally about the challenges facing film archives in the late 2010s and early 2020s. As the editors state in the Introduction: “It is a call, in other words, to ‘forget’ the conventional ways of approaching film archives and to embrace new frontiers in film studies, hence ‘reinventing’ in the book’s title” (11).

The collection is organized into three parts. The first section, “New Frontiers? Between Absence and Presence in Archives,” delves into questions of copyright, representation, and early films. Ian Christie raises timely questions about copyright and film archives, effectively outlining how the politics of copyright have shaped the development of film archives in Europe and North America and how it continues to

impact the accessibility of films. Peyami Çelikan shifts the geographic focus to analyze Orientalist tropes in early travel films through their depictions of women and cityscapes within the Ottoman Empire. Making the argument that “YouTube is not a film archive, and it will never become one” (58), Serkan Şavk discusses the history of Yeşilçam and its current presentation on YouTube. Nurçin İleri draws on her experience as a historian working in the role of an archivist for Boğaziçi University; her article explores how personal archives can speak to broader histories, using as an example the private collections of two intellectuals associated with the University.

The second section, “The God of Small Films, Or What You Have Found is Not What You Have Lost,” centers primarily on the topic of found footage. The section begins with a reprint of an essay by Thomas Elsaesser where he explores the ethical implications of appropriating found footage. Ege Berensel expertly weaves academic theory with personal anecdotes to explain the specific cultural context of salvaging Turkish 8 mm home movies. In memory of Gustav Deutsch, Claudy Op den Kamp publishes a 2010 interview with Deutsch where he discussed his personal experience as a filmmaker using archives, including copyright issues and the sometimes conflicting needs of archives and filmmakers. Through a close study of *The Atomic Cafe*, Sibley Labandeira reflects on the reuse and reappropriation of historical footage well before the internet.

The third section, “What the Prints (Don’t) Tell,” provides more holistic discussions of film archives as institutions. Drawing from her experience as an archivist, Fumiko Tsuneishi provides a comprehensive and thoughtful analysis of the challenges of digitization and choosing what to preserve—as well as what to lose. Nico de Klerk argues for the importance of heritage institutions and archives providing key context and secondary provenance for early films as a matter of public accountability and accessibility. Rashmi Devi Sawhney proposes the concept of the “uncontained archive” to account for incomplete, dispersed archives, particularly in postcolonial contexts.

The following topics are woven throughout the collection: colonialism and Orientalism; ‘non-traditional’ and ‘non-Western’ histories of film and film archives; preservation, restoration, and digitization; copyright, ownership, and legal issues; personal and private collections, ranging from fonds about individuals to home movies on 8mm film; filmmakers’ use of found footage; film formats (nitrate, 35 mm, 8 mm); and academic analyses of individual films. As might be expected from the intellectual origins of the book, the subject of early films and the history of early cinema is the most prevalent and recurring theme; on this front, it provides many important and useful additions to scholarship. One of the best contributions of this volume is its varied geographic scope, spanning the Ottoman Empire, India, Japan, Austria, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and more.

The chapters are primarily in discussion with a classic canon of scholars—for example, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Stuart Hall, Edward Said, and Walter Benjamin—though there is also some good engagement with recent work by Jaimie Baron.² At times, the volume reflects a disconnect between film studies and archival scholarship, the latter of which has provided extensive discussions about the chal-

lenges of digitization, accessibility, and social media.³ It would be helpful to read this work alongside recent work on platforms and political economy; for example, when considering the presence of historical films on platforms like YouTube.⁴

Despite featuring as one of the title's keywords, "digital" sometimes feels like an afterthought in the volume, often appearing in the introduction and final thoughts of chapters but not centrally featured in the main argument. Some authors also express significant pessimism and antagonism towards the digital: Christie expresses concerns about archival relevance "amid digital superabundance and excess" (33); Elsaesser regrets the "de-professionalization" of film editing through the increased accessibility of video editing software and characterizes video sharing sites such as YouTube as "narcissistic self-exposure" (109); and Berensel memorably declared, "I am horrified by the digitized future" (133).

This collection is at its best when examining specific contexts through a narrow scope, using the personal anecdotes and experiences of the author. Two particular standouts are "The Infra-ordinary Archive: On Turkish 8mm Home Movies" by Ege Berensel and "Preservation and Resignation: A Study of Survival" by Fumiko Tsuneishi. Berensel provides a vivid cultural context for the salvaging of 8mm home movies in Turkey, providing details like the various groups that sort through refuse, the networks of trade and purchasing in 8mm film, and regional variation in home movies (e.g. the tendency toward outdoor shots in Istanbul and interior shots in Ankara). These personal anecdotes are threaded with academic theory, providing compelling analysis of the capitalist constructions of "amateur" and "professional" as well as patriarchal structures in home videos. His exemplary culturally specific analysis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of film preservation and the study of home movies more broadly. Likewise, Tsuneishi draws upon her personal experiences with film digitization and preservation to provide a comprehensive, eloquent, and thoughtful analysis. She provides a nuanced critique of digitization workflows using specific examples from her own career as an archivist, arguing that "a digital restoration is nothing more than an accidental outcome that relies on the technology that happened to be available at the time" (193). Her theoretical discussion of loss and preservation is perfectly balanced with practical suggestions for workflow.

Overall, the book's contributions are framed through the perspectives of film scholars and filmmakers. It may be usefully incorporated into a curriculum with other publications from archive studies, digital humanities, contemporary media theory, and platform studies to help build interdisciplinary bridges and address the key challenges facing film archives in the modern age.

Notes:

¹ "Framing Film," n.d.

² Baron, 2014; Baron 2020; Benjamin, 1988a; Benjamin 1988b; Deleuze, 1993; Derrida, 1996; Hall, 2001; Said, 1978; Said, 1983.

³ See: Benardou, Champion, Dallas, and Hughes (eds), 2018; Cameron and Kenderdine (eds), 2007; Cowan and Rault, 2018; McKinney, 2020; Sherratt, 2020; Sherratt, 2019.

⁴ For example: Burgess and Green, 2018; Cifor, 2021; Gillespie, 2018; Hoffmann, 2017; Poell, Nieborg, and Duffy, 2022.

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Book Review

Stefanie Schulte Strathaus and Vinzenz Hediger, eds.
*Accidental Archivism: Shaping Cinema's Futures with
 Remnants of the Past*. Meson Press, 2023.

Yung-Lin Wang

Louis Lumière famously declared in 1895 that “cinema was an invention without any future” (13). Yet, as time passed, Chris Darke astutely remarked that if cinema were deemed a medium “without a future,” then video art would find itself as one “without a history,” specifically with the incorporation of cinema into the realm of the art museum and audiovisual archive (2001, 172). Another twenty years passed, Stefanie Schulte Strathaus and Vinzenz Hediger continue to challenge the concept of cinema by asserting the ongoing change of the archive. Despite various shifts, including the resurgence of artist films, amateur filmmaking, personal footage within traditional cinema spaces, and the emergence of personal cinema fuelling an archive fever, the fundamental question persists: How does the future of cinema take form through accidental archiving?

On this note, the boundaries of cinema have been continually challenged and expanded, evolving from short clips into entire film studio systems and entertainment consumption and further transforming into a medium for artistic creation, shifting from the black box into the white cube, or other screening sites and internet platforms. Similarly, film archives have been thought of as repositories of film history and the past of cinema research. Our imaginations and conceptualizations of archives are constantly being renewed and challenged, particularly as both film and archives gradually “institutionalize” over time. In the past, we asked, “What is cinema?” Now, we ask, “Where is cinema?” Such questions also arise about the archive: What is archive, and where is archive?

Accidental Archivism: Shaping Cinema's Futures with Remnants of the Past aims to explore the aspects of archiving in film practice that have been overlooked in mainstream historical contexts, probing forgotten footage and interpretations to facilitate

curation as an archival practice. It features insights from more than 40 filmmakers, curators, and film theorists who explore the expansion and ontology of film and archive, covering topics such as nationality, transnationality, decolonization, digitality, the spatial and gender politics of film, and activism. Through this multifaceted exploration, the aim is to reconstruct a fragmented and accidental film culture. The unpredictability of the archive prompts us to reconsider archival practices and encourages the development of new archival models.

With the expansion of contemporary film practices, cinema no longer possesses a singular fixed meaning, though it never did. The transformation of film indicates a change in today's audiovisual archive; cinema's diversification encourages us to consider that the archive may have changed from what it was. *Accidental Archivism* takes on a constellation-like form, bringing together writings on the accidental nature of archives, interviews, essays, and even manifestos that encourage a reflective, penitential approach to archiving. The expansion of archives, documents, and remnants of the past helps us understand contemporary practices and serves as a gateway to a new constellation, where archives coexist with elements that were once foreign to them. This constellation is emblematic of a significant shift in the concept of archives. Like the branching nodes of memory, the history buried underground sprouts anew under the sunlight, encouraging its readers to ponder how accidental archiving has been mobilized into contemporary film culture and history.

The book unequivocally explores the concept of accidental archiving through five diverse themes. The first, "Archival Accidents," rigorously examines the unplanned deviations that fundamentally shape artistic practices and film historiography, asserting that the archive has transcended its traditional role as mere institution of heritage. The subsequent sections, "New Archive Spaces and Places," "New Cinephiles: Beyond the Manspreading Machine," and "New Cinekinship," provide a powerful re-evaluation of cinephiles from the uncompromising perspective of accidental archivists. Finally, "The Vast Domain of Unseen Films: Mapping the Cinema We Never Knew" robustly focuses on envisioning potential archives and the future for films that are not yet secured.

Stefanie Schulte Strathaus, curator of the Arsenal Film Institute and Video Art, revisits the history of art and film, examining the distinction between art and film as well as the divide between commercial and independent cinema. In an earlier essay, she refers to this as an "in-between" space, exploring this space by emphasizing the interplay between film programming, curating, and montage, asserting that a program inherently requires at least two films to embody this "in-betweenness" (2004, 8). Furthermore, she posits that the cinematic experience extends well beyond the confines of the traditional movie theatre. The concept of montage, often employed by theorists of urban modernity to capture the fragmented nature of everyday life, also informs her reflections on film and can be expanded to include her thoughts on the archive. She argues that film memory and experience are not restricted to the cinema. In her chapter in *Accidental Archivism*, she further explores the notion of accidental archiving, which creates an in-between state between image and archive, as well as between institutions and collections, highlighting the role of human agen-

cy and memory. The artists Gaby Babić, Karola Gramann, and Heide Schlüpmann, interviewed in the book, support this idea by asserting that “the audience is the archive” (188). In this way, this notion of contingency and the supplementation of history and memory enriches our understanding of film and its future potential.

Film scholar and co-editor Vinzenz Hediger argues that YouTube represents today’s archive. He refers to Okwui Enwezor’s argument on post-coloniality and the representation of the “visible others” under an empire’s rule. Hediger points out that the limitation of an archive can be seen in how the colonizers and subsequent elite segments portray visible others during the pursuit of decolonization. He questions how the true multitude can manifest in such a complex relationship and suggests that the archival mode is a border that needs to be crossed. Hediger also states that, unlike traditional archives, YouTube acts as a “window-shopping platform” and disperses the curatorial authority of archivists to allow for multitudes of different stories to be showcased.¹ Similarly, Erika Balsom’s chapter, “From Singular to Plural,” also maintains the importance of encountering archival materials online. She asks, “How many excellent repertory series of recent years would never have taken place were it not for encounters that first occurred online? Things have changed. With the flood of files, a changed notion of ‘the archive’ comes into being—a *cinéma imaginaire*, to revise André Malraux’s formulation” (192). She advocates for the collaboration between archivists and scholars to explore the evolution and expansion of archives, promoting diverse meanings and an inclusive approach to archival studies.

Intriguingly, the idea that an archive serves as an arbitrary, petrified, or colonial institution can also be glimpsed in Nigerian filmmaker and archivist Didi Cheeka’s interview in the book. His statement revolves around one question: How do we challenge and broaden the practice of working with institutional archives—especially regarding access? He thinks archival institutions are stymied by official funding and state apparatus that “lack the political will to confront the challenges of contemporary practices of memory” (68), while memory has become a booming topic in filmmaking. He notes that history was recently banned as a standalone subject in Nigerian classrooms, necessitating a parallel mode of accidental archivism in order to access Nigerian history. Film archivists often uncover forgotten pieces of history through fieldwork, research, and curation. For instance, in a later discussion, Cheeka reflects on the way the Angolan Civil War was reframed from the colonizers’ perspective within Portuguese archives (419). These overlooked or under-described pieces of history, often casualties of national conflicts or remnants of totalitarianism, seem to exist like ghost states. Discovering these forgotten memories is often a matter of chance, which is why accidental archiving is so important.

Hieyoon Kim’s essay on South Korean artists Jang Minseung and Jung Jae Il’s video art installation *Round and Around*, commissioned by the Korean Film Archive to commemorate the Gwangju Uprising, is another interesting example.² After South Korea democratized in the 1990s, although many archives have been opened to the public in the past decade and the Gwangju Uprising is extensively reported and commemorated in the media every May, this assembled democratization narrative has neutralized the suffering of the victims. Therefore, these two artists went over

the dusty footage from the state and public archives, looking for what they refer to as off-the-mainstream, the minor histories outside the cinematic frame that are not presented. The artists' use of the alterity of cinema and archive prompts us to inspect the historical fissure of one traumatic event, paving the way for lost memory.

To reflect on Stefanie Schulte Strathaus' initial concept for the book, "the audience is archive" (188), once again, memory itself is a kind of politics. Both film and archive serve as public spheres. The significance of memory and that of cinema intertwine and merge in the archive, randomly generating various possibilities—those not yet unearthed, rejected by the hegemony of the film machine and national narratives, decayed by time, restored and reborn, or still existing in the darkness waiting for a gaze. It is about the infinite accidents of moving images, from being filmed to being forgotten, found, and even stored in the audience's memory.

In retrospect, how can we reconsider the remnants of the past and the future envisioned ahead? The archivist Laura Millar reminds us to look to "the creators of those tools—the holders of those memories—for guidance in their interpretation, mediation, and articulation, so that we may bring those individual memories into the light and share them for the benefit of all members of society" (2006, 104). *Accidental Archivism*, to some extent, is more about the forgotten multitude, and it raises the important point that archives are not necessarily neutral. By systematically collecting, studying, restoring, and discovering materials, it explores how archives continue to exist today and how these practices can alter our perspective and experience of film.

The otherness of film and archive, and the trajectory of history, as the central cores of this book, inspire the reader to contemplate fragments of history, within which we see the shared traumas of humanity—the dispersals, the endurance, the torments, and the inequalities that exist in the world. It helps expand the possibilities of memory, soothing the restless souls burdened by suffering. In this regard, the archival turn helps us speculate about the future of cinema. In the act of watching, the observer traverses an imagined path, crossing through different times and places. This notion is related to the illusions created by cinema, but unlike the window imposed by cinematic realism, this experience involves encounters that are more disjointed. The discourse surrounding cinema is an ongoing dialectic, much like the evolving nature of archiving and forgetting. The future of cinema is intricately linked with incidental archival practices, especially in light of the fluid global political and economic landscape influenced by geopolitics and the post-pandemic era.

This book compiles various current approaches and discussions on the experience of image databases. Rather than providing a single definition or a methodology in archival studies, it examines the politics of the archive, focusing on the histories excluded from the database. In this digital age, images are widely distributed across various online platforms and spaces. Public spheres such as art galleries, museums, film festivals, site-specific screenings, and archives further underscore the democratic and activist essence inherent in cinema and archiving, rendering them increasingly significant. These intersections serve as pivotal points in broadening the scope of cinematic and archival discourse, enhancing individual and collective memory, and navigating the complexities of cinema and archive identity. *Accidental archivism* in-

volves rediscovering those that are present yet do not appear in the form of present things; it serves as a new possibility of researching cinema or producing cinema with the uncertainty of the past and future, even the unidirectional nature of memory.

Notes

¹ In the original text, Vinzenz Hediger refers to YouTube as “the shop window mode” (59).

² The Gwangju Uprising was a democratization event in South Korea in 1980. The government at the time used police forces to massacre the people to suppress their protests. The South Korean film industry has since recreated this event into many films, such as *26 Years* (2012), *Fork Lane* (2017), *A Taxi Driver* (2017), and many others.

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Book Review

Tarez Samra Graban and Wendy Hayden, eds. *Teaching through the Archives: Text, Collaboration, and Activism*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2022.

Yasmine Benabdallah

A collaborative project, co-edited and with many chapters co-authored, *Teaching through the Archives: Text, Collaboration, and Activism* reflects on how the archival turn operates in rhetoric and composition. The book is motivated by a desire to trace the disciplinary evolution of rhetoric and composition while simultaneously exploring how teaching and learning through archives can transform the field—and, in turn, academic practice. More than a methodological handbook, the volume presents a provocative challenge to the way scholars conceptualize archives, knowledge production, and pedagogy. However, the book's specialized language and frameworks may make it less accessible to readers from other disciplines, hence limiting interdisciplinary engagement.

Beyond its collaborative approach, the book challenges existing archival research practices, including the status quo of the “recovery and redemption” paradigm, which has traditionally defined archival research in rhetoric and composition. The book is a manifestation of its editors and contributors’ desire to move past the reverence to archives that the paradigm calls for; an invitation to think of “the archive as collaborator, not master,” as a space of epistemic possibility (xiii); and a series of propositions that consider “archived objects and historicized spaces to function both as critical subjects and as critical agents” (4) and explore a dialectic relationship between archival research and rhetoric and composition pedagogy.

The book is structured into three sections: “Archives as Text,” “Archives as Collaboration,” and “Archives as Activism” (7). Each chapter is an example of how teaching about, for, and through archives teaches different skills to students, with each contribution narrating a unique experience of teaching a course that grows with and from a pedagogy of archives (2). Even though the book’s structure risks

compartmentalizing what are inherently interconnected approaches to archives, it also allows for the exploration of archival pedagogies from different perspectives. The contributions recount the making of writing courses that model the use of archival research about diverse topics, archival research about rhetoric and composition, and writing about or for archives. Many of the contributions are reflections on how teaching with archives is iterative and creates a new temporality within the course and between its different versions every time it is taught. Woven in the texts are references to student feedback as learning opportunities to change archive-informed pedagogies. Although deeply rooted in a disciplinary discourse, the book's contributions are relevant to all writing-based disciplines since writing is inextricable from the experience of teaching and learning at the university level. The invitation to critically engage with archives as spaces that construct knowledge and are not free from biases, to think about, with, and through them, can benefit people who teach and research outside rhetoric and composition.

The first section, "Archives as Text," opens with a chapter by Lisa Mastrangelo about a course that invites students to learn about local histories through university collections, encouraging them to grapple with research questions that may not have discrete answers and the complexities of what they may have understood as failure or as impossible. Subsequent chapters in this section offer additional nuanced approaches to archival research. Lisa Shaver's chapter reflects on a course that aims to teach about feminism through university archival collections, specifically thinking with critical imagination not only to "understand the past, but also to illuminate contemporary contexts" (49). Through this archival research, students examine the history of feminism in the university and create a dialogic relationship with the women they encounter in the archives. Jane Greer's chapter explores emotion and affect in archival research and what they enable in archival relationality and pedagogy. The text considers the students' experiences—as shared with the author—of learning about their present and future through the past.

The ethical dimensions of archival work also emerge in Katherine E. Tirabassi's chapter, which focuses on a course that uses archival assignments to help students face the ethical challenges of writing stories, "to develop a collaborative code of ethics about creating stories about the past" (76). By working with archival documents, students confront complex questions of temporality, examining how the stories they write might fill, perpetuate, or subvert archival gaps. By inviting rhetoric graduate students to examine rhetoric and composition archival documents in university collections, the course described in James P. Beasley's chapter leads the students to consider their own professionalization as future professors in the field and their position within the institutional space. Rather than focusing on the archive as a space to frame the primary source, which the recovery paradigm centres, the authors posit that the invitation to think about the archive as a space that illuminates the secondary source teaches the students even more about rhetoric and allows for a recontextualized reading of the primary sources.

The second section, "Archives as Collaboration," understands archives as collaborative spaces of knowledge production. It starts with a chapter by Jennifer

Enoch, Megan Keaton, Ellen Cecil-Lemkin, and Travis Maynard detailing a course that invites students to take part in cataloguing and curating an archival collection. Through the internship program, student interns learn and practice writing styles specific to archives, which they can later use in various professional settings. Shirley K Rose, Glenn C. W. Newman, and Robert P. Spindler's chapter explores archival research as a space for interdisciplinary collaboration between graduate students and faculty across departments. The text focuses on listening to the archives and collaborators, and the ethics of care such listening implies and teaches students (121). The productive tensions between archival preservation and rhetoric principles of "heteroglossia" and "recursive context and continuous circulation" emerge in Jenna Morton-Aiken and Robert Schwegler's chapter (136). By reading archival practice as a rhetorical exercise, the chapter embraces the inherently changing nature of archives, highlighting their gaps and absences as productive spaces of learning—a useful lesson for graduate students in both rhetoric and composition and library studies. Understanding archives as a space of collaboration calls for breaking the closed archival circuit, encouraging students to see their interventions as part of a symbiotic relationship between the archive and the user or visitor.

By bridging students' everyday digital practices with professional archival technical work, the course described in Erin Brock Carlson, Michelle McMullin, and Patricia Sullivan's chapter reimagines archives as dynamic, multi-modal spaces of knowledge production. The assignments allow students to understand "archive-as-container," "archive-as-discourse," and "archive-as-database" (160), in turn building a complex understanding of recordkeeping, which contributes to developing their ability for collaborative projects and communication. The authors also invite teachers to consider archival and recordkeeping practices as already integrated into their pedagogy. Jonathan Buehl, Tamar Chute, and Laura Kissel's chapter reflects on their experience teaching proposal writing through professional writing in the archives. The course teaches students about writing in the workplace for diverse purposes, all while contributing to the archives by assisting archivists in their writing tasks for "acquisition, description, preservation, and access" (179).

The book's third section, titled "Archives as Activism," focuses on what students can contribute to archives of activist movements and how they can use archives for activism and social transformation. Through situated research practices, students learn to critically interrogate institutional narratives and their positionality within broader historical contexts. Laura Proszak and Ellen Cushman's chapter describes how students learn to negotiate their sense of place within the institution and with non-institutional partners, collaborators, and communities. The students engage with archival research, both within the university and considering the university's role in neighbouring communities. Drawing on Walter Mignolo's "epistemic delinking" concept (2009, 197), the chapter presents archives as a tool for unlearning institutional narratives.

Janice W. Fernheimer, Beth L. Goldstein, Sarah Dörpinghaus, and Douglas A. Boyd's chapter examines how, through the process of logging and indexing interviews, their course taught students listening and recordkeeping, providing

them with ethical methods to learn from and preserve materials. Questions of ethics are also explored in Courtney Rivard's chapter, which recounts a series of course assignments involving Wikipedia. One of the intentions of the course is to fill in the gaps of Wikipedia's archive and question the power underlying knowledge platforms available to students. The assignments also allow students, through creating and revising articles, to learn that writing is not fixed, that it can constantly change, and that it is a fluid exercise.

The afterword, written by Lynée Lewis Gaillet and Katherine H. Adams, reflects on the purpose of the book project. A wide range of contributions for various strategies of archival instruction, the chapters present students as archival researchers, curators, rhetors, and audiences (300). More than a collection of pedagogical strategies, this book represents a critical intervention in how we teach archival research, challenging scholars to see archives not as passive repositories, but as active, transformative spaces of intellectual engagement. By repositioning archives as collaborative, activist spaces of knowledge production, the collection offers a nuanced framework for understanding how historical materials can actively shape scholarly and pedagogical approaches. The archives offer a space to rethink and redo rhetoric and composition praxis, modelling what they could also offer to other disciplines. To that end, the book's appendices provide documentation to support the chapters, including templates for assignments, feedback forms, writing prompts, and resources that the reader can use for their work or in the courses they teach.

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Book Review

Eleanor Patterson, *Bootlegging the Airwaves: Alternative Histories of Radio and Television Distribution*. University of Illinois Press, 2024.

Axelle Demus

People born before the reign of streaming platforms likely remember making a mixtape of their favourite radio programs or recording a beloved TV series on VHS. These recordings could then be shared with loved ones—or, sometimes, with like-minded strangers. Eleanor Patterson's *Bootlegging the Airwaves: Alternative Histories of Radio and Television Distribution* explores such affective yet often overlooked histories of radio and television bootlegging. Bootlegging, Patterson explains, refers to “the productive act of making a recording” of media objects, “unsanctioned by the companies that produced them” (3). Bootlegging, furthermore, also refers to the ways in which these unsanctioned recordings are then distributed “via specific actors and processes” (3).

In her cultural and historical study of bootlegging, Patterson effectively argues that on-demand and replay culture, which permeates today's media environment, is a continuation of longstanding practices that existed before the digital. Studying bootlegging, she further proposes, provides insight into how broadcast content continues to be a part of our media ecosystem even after its scheduled air date, thus disrupting the widespread narrative of radio and television as always-already ephemeral and immaterial. Bootlegging, instead, enables broadcast content to be dissected, remade, and controlled. Essential to this study is also Patterson's framing of bootlegging as both a *distribution* practice and a *fan* practice. As such, Patterson insists that bootlegging is first and foremost a form of “embodied distributive labor” (149), as she traces how such informal economies of media distribution are intimately linked to the physical and emotional labour of those who create and circulate bootlegged broadcast content.

The archive and its absences shape *Bootlegging the Airwaves*—as it often

does with cultural histories and, especially, histories of broadcasting, where archival material is haphazard and hard to find. Patterson, indeed, acknowledges the difficulty of documenting and keeping track of grassroots cultural practices like bootlegging. Her book, therefore, underlines the necessity of resorting to creative and imaginative research methods to account for neglected broadcasting histories which are often unavailable in official and institutional archives. In particular, *Bootlegging the Airwaves* draws heavily from material created and collected by fan communities, such as fanzines, classifieds, and community forums, which the author supplements through interviews. Thus, Patterson posits, the same affective investments that led to recording and trading broadcast materials also led to their preservation.

As she meticulously documents her archival process throughout the book, Patterson provides her readers with crucial advice on how to do broadcasting history from below, turning the book into an essential theoretical and methodological resource for radio and TV historians. This book is all the more beneficial in contexts where national television archives, for instance, do not exist, such as in Canada, where I am currently located, and where media historians often have to resort to illicit broadcasting records and fan-produced material to write television histories. Furthermore, by mobilizing histories from “the bottom up,” in this case histories that emerged from communities of radio and television fans and collectors, Patterson is also pushing against dominant academic narratives that overwhelmingly focus on broadcast networks. In making a case against what she calls “institutional determinism,” Patterson encourages scholars in the field to further look at “the messy, muddled heterogeneous nature” of broadcasting histories (9). For instance, the book disrupts established scholarly understandings of television as a private family activity by accounting for the many ways in which bootlegging led to communal experiences of television viewing. Patterson’s simultaneous reflection on how identity politics shaped bootlegging practices likewise leads her to interrogate and complicate assumptions about how gender, sexuality, and race intersect with the associated practices of watching, trading, and collecting broadcast content. Patterson brilliantly concludes that such practices, therefore, are contingent on context, content, and community (78). Thus, Patterson’s book is a superb example of how to write broadcasting histories outside the purview of the networks.

Bootlegging the Airwaves is organized around four case studies which shed light on bootlegging and its regional, national, and transnational contexts from the 1960s to the 1990s. These four case studies are framed by Patterson’s excellent introduction and by a contextual chapter that looks back to the Progressive Era to investigate the concomitant development of home entertainment and recording technologies. Patterson’s well-researched first chapter traces the advent of technologies like the phonograph, the kinoscope, the film camera, and, eventually, wireless radio, and how they “rearticulated popular culture as a media commodity experience” (43) and responded to “the urge to make the ephemeral into a fixed record” (30). These developments, the author shows, led white, upper-middle-class individuals and families to start recording and collecting popular cultural objects. By introducing these older developments before turning to the selected case studies, this

preamble aptly illustrates how bootlegging is not a recent phenomenon, but one that actually precedes the book's temporal framing. As such, this chapter offers detailed and compelling examples of historical antecedents that support the book's overall arguments.

The second chapter, which constitutes the first main case study of the book, continues the discussion initiated in chapter one by looking at the development of fan subcultures dedicated to sharing and trading recordings from the classic era of network radio in the United States following the introduction of magnetic tape. While radio fans began connecting with each other in the 1950s and early 1960s, Patterson explains, the late 1960s and 1970s saw the formation of an informal network of "Old-Time-Radio" (OTR) fan communities, as "radio bootlegging became more systematically organized and structured through clubs, fanzines, and conventions" (58). This chapter offers a rich and detailed overview of the various communities and platforms that were created around collecting and trading OTR recordings, while accounting for how the period in which these network formations were situated informed the meaning of the material that was being collected and traded. Looking at OTR fanzines and zooming in on the 1920s minstrel radio show *Amos 'n' Andy*, Patterson outlines the lively debates that occurred within OTR communities around the program's racist content and showcases how these debates were deeply informed by the context of the post-Civil Rights era within which OTR fans were situated. In so doing, the author skilfully articulates another one of the book's key premises by providing an example of how bootlegged materials can be reinterpreted in light of contemporary politics as they circulate beyond their original context.

"Radio collectors were the forerunner of the tape-trading protocols that would come to define much of television bootlegging in the 1980s" (57), Patterson explains in chapter two, thus setting the stage for her discussion of television in the following sections. *Bootlegging the Airwaves*' third chapter investigates how women, who were part of fan communities dedicated to American buddy-cop television shows in the 1970s and 1980s, used trading and collecting to articulate female pleasure. Focusing on the popular TV show *Starsky & Hutch* (ABC, 1975–79), Patterson draws on the rich textual material traces left by fans to investigate women's active engagement with the program through the practice of bootlegging. Through close analysis of various fanzines, the author successfully showcases how female viewers, for instance, used videorecording technology and its playback abilities to imbue *Starsky & Hutch* with queer meaning by speculating about the homoerotic relationship between the two titular characters (86).

Patterson continues to explore the affective engagements of television fans in the next two chapters of the book. In chapter five, *Bootlegging the Airwaves* takes its readers to Australia to draw attention to the global circulation of bootlegged media. Mobilizing the popular series, *Star Trek (The Original Series)*, (Paramount, 1966–69 and *The Next Generation*, Paramount, 1987–91), as its object of study, the chapter looks at how bootlegging across borders increased access to a series whose distribution in Australia was limited by the country's technological infrastructure as well as syndication and licensing rights. In what may be one of the book's most

captivating chapters, Patterson shows, for instance, how some well-connected fans acquired and transported bootlegged 16mm copies of *The Original Series* episodes to screen them at a time when *The Original Series* broadcasts were haphazard, and videotape recorders were not widely adopted in Australia (108–13). With the later popularization of the VCR, *Bootlegging the Airwaves* demonstrates how *Star Trek* fan clubs began organizing viewings of bootlegged VHS tapes, many of them imported from the United States, in meetings and Sci-fi conventions across the country. This chapter's impressive weaving of technological history with social, cultural, and economic history truly showcases the lengths through which fans' distributive labour was "a necessary tool to overcome Australia's geographic and sociocultural position on the periphery of the global media industries" (122).

The last case study of the book brings the readers back to the United States with a discussion of televised wrestling fandoms, who, too, responded to the limited access to wrestling content nationally by circulating recordings of and information about regional wrestling matches to other parts of the country. In addition, Patterson's fascinating chapter gives evidence of a nationwide network of wrestling fans whose identity as fans and wrestling experts was shaped by bootlegging practices. In this chapter, Patterson draws heavily from the archives of *The Wrestling Observer* to show how the magazine became a (trans)national forum for televised wrestling fans in the 1980s and 1990s. Patterson's thorough research process in this chapter is remarkable and further highlights the tremendous work done by fan communities to distribute and preserve media objects that they cared deeply about.

Although each case study casts a light on "small, concrete examples of bootlegging radio and television that challenges dominant narratives of broadcast distribution in the twentieth century" (15), there are echoes and resonances throughout the book, as the case studies clearly respond to and interact with one another—through discussions of bootlegging's ability to impact the interpretation of broadcast media objects over time, collecting and trading as a tool for community and identity building, or the expansion of the geographic reach of broadcast content via tape sharing. Furthermore, the author takes time and care to connect the past she documents with the present by reminding us that many of the distributing and viewing practices of the past mirror and even anticipate behaviours and forms of engagement which we tend to attribute solely to the digital (97, 122). *Bootlegging the Airwaves*' conclusion emphasizes how the histories Patterson lays out in the book "remind us how the practice of bootlegging and tape trading radio and television have shaped our current media landscape" (153), while pointing to the limitations of streaming services and their illusion of user control and unlimited access to content.

Bootlegging the Airwaves is an incredible contribution to the fields of television and radio studies, which will no doubt encourage future historical scholarship to further take into account everyday practices of engaging with broadcast content. In addition to being an excellent addendum to radio and television studies, *Bootlegging the Airwaves* will undoubtedly become an invaluable teaching resource for undergraduate and graduate cultural and media studies courses, as it provides an outstanding overview of the state of broadcast studies in the U.S. In this book,

indeed, the author is in active conversation with many other experts in these fields, thereby giving students an opportunity to engage with a variety of critical viewpoints on the topics of television, radio, and fan cultures. Its transnational scope is also much appreciated, as it serves as a call to further decentre broadcasting histories away from the United States and toward other broadcasting contexts. At the same time, Patterson's engaging and accessible scholarship will no doubt be a resource for fans themselves to think through their media-collecting practices. More than simply being "alternative," the histories of radio and television distribution outlined in the book are both vital and invigorating. They are a testament to the exceptionally important cultural work performed by everyday people, and a hopeful reminder that there is a breadth of topics that have yet to be explored in the scholarship to expand our understanding of broadcast histories and their meanings.

Book Review

Ryan Conrad, ed. *Toronto Living with AIDS*.
PUBLIC Books, 2024.

Thomas Waugh

I need to pause before proceeding with this review of *Toronto Living with AIDS*, the brilliant and essential new collection of archival documents, analyses, interviews, images, and reflections, edited by Ottawa archivist, artist, author, curator, activist, and teacher Ryan Conrad. I see my laudatory wordlists have already started. But before evaluating Conrad's unearthing from the archive of an all but forgotten cohort of queer media activists from a quarter century ago, I need to declare potential or perceived conflicts of interest. Not only has the author said some very nice things about my own work in the sub-subfield of his book (the Canadian, queer, AIDS-related media archive), but he is also my past and ongoing collaborator in this and several other sub-subfields. Moreover, he was my doctoral advisee in Interdisciplinary Humanities at Concordia University (graduated 2017), as well as a member of my extended queer chosen family. He was also my vegan housemate for six years (graduated 2017!) and co-conspirator in all manner of shady artistic, social, and *political* endeavours. Are these alerts to possible conflicts of interest just acknowledgments of likely perceptions of bias, or rather are they probings of a kind of generative overlap in a domain sustained by friendship as a way of life (Roach, 2012)?

There is more. On another register, as I was reading Conrad's ten interviews with surviving original actors in the stirring chapter of Toronto media history that he brings to light, and then the eleven short "reflections" by their generational legatees, I was suddenly hit by the names of three young men who had also been part of my chosen family during the period under study—Chris Cockrill, Kalpesh Oza, and Gregg Rowe. I felt once more my deep bereavement of a quarter century ago, tempered only by the sudden reminder that Gregg, an eager PLWA student enrolled in the first rendition of our Concordia HIV/AIDS course, is alive and well in 2025

and an outgoing member of AIDS Community Care Montreal Board of Directors! Hi Gregg! Is one supposed to review books that connect you to old comrades and bring you on a deep personal level to the verge of tears?

This fine kettle of ethical fish surely reflects what another of my doctoral advisees, Antoine Damiens, has called “sticky strings and traces of past and present encounters—my own as well as that of . . . friends and colleagues” (2018, 20). Damiens goes on to an extremely perspicacious point:

Friendship and fucking, be it in an academic context or at festivals, structure artistic and intellectual productions. The separation of the personal from the intellectual, often held as a cornerstone of so-called “objective research,” erases not only how queer people sustain communities but also how our artistic and scholarly endeavours are always the result of collaborations and chosen networks of friends . . . Friendship/fucking, gossip, and ‘insider’ knowledge structure queer scholars’ experiences. (20)

But of course, this manifesto about friendship and networks is also what this sturdy book about the archives is really about. Damiens’ invocation of “fucking,” however, leads me already to voice one slight reproach and get it over with. Why is “fucking” delicately avoided in this book, alas, by interviewer and interviewees alike? Is it perhaps a normal pattern in the queer archive when subjects remember relationships in the light of day and stress of microphone, or a reflection of a tendency of that moment at the height of the pandemic at the start of the 1990s when fucking was a complex and delicate subject indeed? I know of this volume’s avoidance because I was there, and I remember. Such lacunae certainly require mention, especially in our discipline of queer studies, of course, but I have leapt ahead of myself.

In the light of my intense personal feelings, interpersonal memories, histories, and questions, in the light of this probing of so-called “conflicts,” how can I write an objective scholarly review of this book? Here is hoping that it will be even more valid and productive than a distanced, objective, “scholarly” review that “separat[es] . . . the personal from the intellectual” (Damiens 2018, 20).

These lengthy inaugural meanders now over, I move toward focusing more directly on this book. As this special media archives book reviews section of *Synoptique* testifies, and as one of Conrad’s intrepid interviewees pronounces, “archives are in the air!” (155). After a quarter century of internet immediacy and its attendant societal amnesia that feels so paradoxical, we have been facing collectively in academia and elsewhere the urgency of the archive. I am encouraged by all the honing that is going on of the vigilance, versatility, and vehemence required for preserving, making use of, and keeping alive our various hoards, especially pre-web heritages within the disciplines of media and cultural studies, and by the youngsters who are uncovering the words and images of my old friends from the 1980s as if they were Babylonian cuneiforms. *Toronto Living with AIDS* is an exemplary case study.

Conrad’s introductory essay, “Cable Access Queer: Revisiting Toronto Living with AIDS (1990–1991),” was previously published in *Jump Cut* (2021). It is

a thorough overview of the original project, its personae, and its trajectory through the years. The author's personal voice and historical insights shine through this essay. But the other 80 percent of the *Toronto Living with AIDS* book is a triumph of collectivism, like most of Conrad's previous seven books, and many of his more than two dozen video and art projects over the years. "It's great to have another 25 voices in there that aren't mine," he says in an email interview about *TLWA* (correspondence with author). This is no exaggeration: his interview skills—empathetic, interactive, tactful, and savvy—bring out the best in his subjects, who are all lively, funny, astute, diverse, and still committed after a quarter century of neoliberal devastation. Conrad's often faux-naïf millennial innocence (born in 1983, he literally missed the worst ravages of the pandemic) often triggers some astute soul-searching by the Generation X artists who thought everyone had forgotten, and as an interviewer Conrad does not hesitate to fill in the gaps. His sense of the historical context is thoroughly researched and rigorous and always productive. For example, Conrad's reflection on the "serendipity of the timing of the explosion and spread of the virus happening at the same moment where video technology is becoming more and more accessible to artists and activists," lobbed at Richard Fung, triggers in the artist a crucial clarification of the obsolete technology used in his *Fighting Chance* (74).

The conversations reveal the extent to which "generation" was a vital dynamic within AIDS culture, and Conrad never tires of lamenting the evisceration of the gay male generation preceding his own and the loss of the mentorship and transmission of culture and rituals so entailed. He did so especially in his original 2017 doctoral dissertation based on American instances, *Reviving the Queer Political Imagination: Affect, Archives, and Anti-Normativity*. This fruitful, intergenerational problematic eventually takes over this new book when the eleven "reflections" kick in, mostly from Conrad's fellow millennials!—from curator Jon Davies to trans activist-filmmaker-author Chase Joynt to multi-disciplinary Indigenous artist Jamie Whitecrow. A high point of this 50-page "reflections" section comes when veteran activist and scholar Alexander McClelland makes a timely connection between the archival videos and urgent twenty-first century issues:

Looking to the past of AIDS activism is not always a nostalgia trap. With a historical understanding, the life and death of scientific debates around the toxic drug AZT, we can see that those of us on the margins have always fought for access to knowledge and decision-making to help save the lives of our communities. While then it was the toxic anti-HIV drug AZT, today it's the toxic drug supply. (273)

Conrad's friendly interviews with the ten now-midlife veterans (not surprisingly, several original players are deceased, most notably project co-founder Michael Balser) confirm the importance of interviewing as both a tool of archival resuscitation and confirmation of what Damiens calls "the role of queer sociality in academic knowledge production" (2018, 20). We are so lucky that ten or more of the original cohort are not only alive and kicking, but also brilliant.

Several interesting findings come out of this rich and eclectic assemblage. For one thing, the Toronto chapter in cable community television is a very rich and diverse adventure across several media genres, hardly ever before on the radar of scholars (except for Conrad and yours truly) and finally now calling out for historical analysis and re-circulation. Conrad shows how different it was from the New York City episode earlier in the 1980s, which featured household names like Vito Russo, mostly because the precedent down south regaled in steady state funding while Toronto relied precariously on corporate sponsorship: paradoxically, the reverse of the customary U.S./private-vs.-Canada/public arts dialectic. This sadly was what resulted in the censorship of the Toronto work—toxic masculine and cable-subscriber hysteria going berserk at the benign sight of male-male kissing and discreet communal showering in the videos by Rashid and Saxena and by Fung respectively—leading to the cable corporation's cancellation of the whole series while still in the pipeline (fortunately not before ten of the eleven tapes were finished).

Toronto's "Public Arts/Culture/Ideas," an enterprise based at York University and instigator of a prolific outlay of books, journals, and exhibitions, is to be commended for publishing this sturdy, high-protein book, for all its steep \$40 price and small print run (400 volumes, alas). It is ironic that Conrad's saga of a *private* corporate video project stymied by homophobic management panic in 1991 would be published by an outfit that is a triumph of Canadian *public* arts funding three decades later. The title page mentions SSHRCC, York, the Ontario Arts Council, the Canada Council, and MITACS, plus the Council-funded Vtape and Archive/Counter-Archive! These credits speak volumes. Were any stones left unturned? With such "adequate" funding (for once!), is it any wonder that the book is so handsome, and especially that, as is appropriate, the illustrations, 35 frame grabs and posters, most in colour, are lush and vital testimony in themselves?

Conrad organizes the eleven tapes that were produced during the AIDS cable project into four distinct categories:

- "Documentaries" includes two works pursuing investigative research: 1) *The World is Sick (sic)* by John Greyson and 2) *The Cause of AIDS: Fact & Speculation* by Colman Jones.
- "Talk shows" includes two works based on the standard televisual format: 1) *The Great AZT Debate* by John Greyson and 2) *AIDS: A Family Affair* by Marc Bérubé and Steve Walker.
- "PLWA tapes" includes two works based on individual portraits of People Living with AIDS: 1) *Person Livid with AIDS: A Day in the Life of a Gay Man Living with AIDS* by Michael Smith and 2) *The Medicine Show* by James MacSwain and Gregory Wight.
- "Education and Outreach tapes" includes five works addressed to ethnocultural communities: 1) *anOther Love Story: Women and AIDS* by Debbie Douglas and the late Gabriella Micallef, 2) *The Colour of Immunity* by Glace Lawrence and Black CAP, 3) *Nibo' Apinewin* by Ted Myerscough with Ojibwe elder Verna Johnston, 4) *Fighting Chance* by Richard Fung, and 5) *Bolo! Bolo!* [Speak! Speak!]

by Kaspar Saxena and Ian Rashid.

Yet, one thing missing from the volume is clarity around how *Synoptique* readers can access these eleven archival tapes, either as educators, artists, fans, or stakeholders: which is surely the point of keeping moving image archives alive... It turns out that five selected original tapes are available for streaming free for school use from Vtape, thanks to the parent project Archive/Counter-Archive, along with a bountiful Guide for Postsecondary Education streamable from that productive York University-based outfit plus Vtape. Five others are distributed at Vtape's usual steep rate and through their twentieth-century distribution protocols, despite the organization's less-than-friendly search machine. This dysfunctionality around access is no doubt due to the normal time lag in producing academic publications, even crossover ones like this book, rather than any oversight on the editor's part. It is due also apparently to the complexity of inter-organizational collaboration that has brought this resource into existence. The eleventh tape, the late Michael Smith's *Person Livid with AIDS*, is available thanks to its serendipitous rescue by Conrad from a shoebox in another Toronto activist's estate—but only as performance documentation from the AIDS Activist History Project site, too raw, long, and unedited for distribution at Vtape.

But this complicated murkiness around access will not hold you back from the frenzy of archival discovery and resuscitation that this groundbreaking book from Ryan Conrad will almost certainly lead you into, if you persist. "AIDS activists changed the world" is Conrad's opening salvo (6). Over the next almost 300 pages, he demonstrates that archival rescue and resuscitation will also change the world. Along the way, this friendly, resourceful, and inventive archivist/interviewer proves that "queer sociality" will help as well!

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Book Review

Rosanna Maule, *Sustainable Resilience in Women's Film and Video Organizations: A Counter-Lineage in Moving Image History*. Taylor & Francis, 2023.

Farzaneh Ebrahimzadeh Holasu

Rosanna Maule's *Sustainable Resilience in Women's Film and Video Organizations: A Counter-Lineage in Moving Image History* offers a thought-provoking exploration of feminist and LGBTQ media activism across North America and Western Europe since the 1970s. In this book, she presents a meticulously researched analysis of six feminist media organizations: Drac Màgic, Women Make Movies (WMM), Groupe Intervention Vidéo (GIV), Leeds Animation Workshop (LAW), bildwechsel, and the Centre Audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir (CASdB). With precision and critical rigour, Maule argues that the resilience and longevity of these organizations underscore their role as "counter-archives" that challenge and reimagine traditional moving image history through a "contingent, anti-hierarchical, non-linear approach to moving image culture" (9). Her work not only addresses critical gaps in feminist/LGBTQ media historiography but also contributes to contemporary discussions about the "sustainability" (19) of grassroots activism in an increasingly neoliberal and digitized cultural landscape. Throughout this book, Maule's prose is both accessible and critical, reflecting her deep engagement with feminist theory and her extensive fieldwork with these organizations. Her use of primary sources, including interviews with founding and long-standing members, enriches her narrative and provides insightful perspectives into the lived experiences of feminist media activists. She also integrates historical and cultural context seamlessly, offering a nuanced understanding of the broader political and social forces that have shaped these organizations' trajectories.

Structurally, Maule begins by situating the founding of these organizations in the socio-political context of the Women's Liberation Movement and second-wave feminism, noting their shared commitment to advancing gender-focused audiovisual work. Here, Maule builds upon B. Ruby Rich's notion of feminism's search for

women's cinema as "part of a broader strategy to claim a larger world for women" (2013, 160). Despite differences in typology, scope, and regional context, these organizations coalesce around a common goal: to create alternative infrastructures for film production, distribution, and preservation that foreground feminist and LGBTQ voices. Maule identifies three key factors that have sustained these organizations: "community-driven structures, affordable cinematic technologies, and anti-discriminatory practices" (1). By embracing these principles, Maule argues, these organizations have resisted the patriarchal and corporate dominance of mainstream media while fostering inclusivity and diversity in their practices.

A notable strength of the book lies in its case studies. The chapters in *Sustainable Resilience* seamlessly weave together historical analysis, theoretical insight, and empirical evidence. In doing so, Maule explores the collaborative ethos that underpins these organizations, emphasizing their rejection of hierarchical governance in favour of inclusive and community-focused practices. For example, Women Make Movies, founded in 1972, evolved from a grassroots initiative into the world's leading distributor of films by and about women, later expanding into "a production facility and a community workshop, both to train women in filmmaking and to produce films within a feminist-informed context" (56). Here, Maule highlights the organization's innovative production assistance programs and its role in promoting historically marginalized voices in the global cinematic landscape. Similarly, Drac Màgic, based in Barcelona, demonstrates how feminist organizations can sustain long-term cultural relevance, advocating for "a political and theoretical practice of feminist media" through initiatives like the Mostra Internacional de Films de Dones festival, which promotes gender diversity and social transformation (135).

In Montreal, Groupe Intervention Vidéo (GIV) demonstrates remarkable adaptability by employing digital platforms to "adapt video to women's needs and struggles" (62). Through its flexible approach to "participative and interactive activities" (62) and its efforts to "rethink its targeted audiences" (63), GIV remains steadfast in its commitment to feminist and LGBTQ representation while successfully broadening its reach to diverse audiences. The Leeds Animation Workshop, "a feminist-informed collective" which is "pioneering a new relationship between power and the people" (64), takes another approach, producing animated films on social issues that engage with diverse audiences through innovative storytelling and public screenings. Bildwechsel ("image change"), based in Hamburg, serves as a transnational hub for feminist and queer artists. Defining itself as "an artist+ and activist+ self-organized group," the centre fosters connections and supports projects that challenge conventional media practices. Lastly, Paris' Centre Audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir (CASdB), with its extensive archive of feminist and queer works, illustrates the importance of "the dissemination and preservation of feminist film and media works and history" in maintaining cultural memory and advancing gender equity (77).

Employing feminist and queer theory, Maule's examples emphasize the material, emotional, and ethical dimensions of archival work in her reading of the histories of these organizations. Scholars such as Judith Butler and Ann Cvetkovich inform her analysis, particularly in framing these organizations as counter-archives

that disrupt hegemonic narratives of memory and history. Through careful historical research, Maule reveals how feminist media collectives have sought to redefine traditional notions of archiving and historiography, emphasizing participatory approaches and inclusive methodologies. Maule is, however, sure to acknowledge the inherent challenges in feminist historiography, including the uneven power dynamics of transnational feminist praxis and the predominance of white, middle-class leadership within many of the organizations she examines. In this history, Maule also critically addresses the limitations of these organizations, particularly their “positions of privilege as white, middle-class, Western feminist organizations” that still, in part, reproduce broader social hierarchies and structures of power (46). While she acknowledges these shortcomings, she situates these organizations in a broader transnational feminist network, highlighting their efforts to engage with diverse identities and promote intersectional approaches to media activism. For instance, WMM’s emphasis on representing women of colour, LGBTQ women, and women with disabilities demonstrates its commitment to expanding the scope of feminist media practices.

Another particularly compelling aspect of Maule’s analysis is her discussion of the “digital transition” of these organizations (198). She examines their innovative use of online platforms for distribution and archival preservation, noting both the opportunities and challenges presented by digitization. For example, organizations like CASdB and bildwechsel have embraced digital tools to enhance accessibility and sustain their activist missions, while also grappling with ethical considerations related to the representation of vulnerable communities. The examination of these dynamics in *Sustainable Resilience* offers a thoughtful reflection upon the evolving nature of feminist media activism in the digital age.

While Maule’s focus on organizations from the Global North may limit the scope of her analysis, she is careful to acknowledge this limitation and to situate her work in the larger context of feminist media activism. Her reflections on the tensions and divisions within the Women’s Liberation Movement, particularly regarding race, class, and sexuality, add depth to her critique and highlight the complexities of feminist praxis. By engaging with these issues, Maule not only enhances the critical relevance of her work but also invites further inquiry into the global dimensions of feminist media history. *Sustainable Resilience* serves as both a testament to the enduring legacy of the feminist media organizations and a call to action for future generations of activists and scholars. In chronicling the achievements and challenges of feminist film and video organizations, Maule offers a powerful narrative of resilience, creativity, and collective action that is as inspiring as it is academically insightful.

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FESTIVAL REVIEWS

Festival Review

Festival International du Film Ethnographique du Québec 2024: Reimagining Museum Space

Maria Natalyuk

In May 2024, Festival International du Film Ethnographique du Québec (FIFEQ) celebrated its 20th anniversary. Curating two streams of programming each year across Montréal and Québec City, FIFEQ offers free admission to the public for the five days of its run time, providing an opportunity to enjoy ethnographic cinema both from Canada and all over the world. This year I had a chance to attend two curated screenings in Montréal, which I will discuss further in my review. However, first I would like to provide some insight into the structure of the festival and highlight additional events FIFEQ offers to its audiences. Taking place at three main locations—Cinema Public, McCord Museum, and Cinema Moderne—this year, the festival offered some additional activities and panels for patrons to attend. These activities included a collaborative workshop, titled Sensorial Memories, where, with no prior experience required, patrons could design their own artwork by recording sounds and images of their environment. These would later be edited together to showcase the particular emotion the participants had chosen to evoke. This workshop provided a beautiful hands-on experience of haptic memory preservation, which brings one closer to understanding the process of ethnographic filmmaking and demonstrates the creative potential of our everyday setting.

In addition to audience engagement in filmmaking practices, this edition also offered two thematically curated screening streams: Retrospective and Autochtonie. The Retrospective offered cross-screenings of films by Chantal Akerman and Alice Diop, focusing on the intimate and personal as the guiding themes for the film presentation. By curating these two iconic directors together, the festival created a connection between them beyond the formal stylistic elements, most importantly through shared emotions and feelings in the films. The Autochtonie section included

the KISHKISHI program, selected and curated by Jack Belhumeur with the support of Indigenous film studio Wapikoni Mobile and McCord Stewart Museum. The KISHKISHI program presented a variety of Indigenous films that deal with topics of identity, culture, heritage, and tradition both from Canada and internationally.

Apart from the opening and closing nights, as well as the special thematic screenings mentioned above, each show followed the same structure: a main feature accompanied by three to four selected shorts, sometimes also followed by a Q&A session or a discussion afterward. Both the museum screening room at McCord and the intimate, smaller theatre space at Cinema Moderne bring together members of the Montréal community, students, and cinephiles in an atmosphere of highly personal stories told through images and voice-over narration on the screen. In this review, I will address the two screenings I had an opportunity to attend, and discuss how the questions of identity, memory, personal archives, and their preservation function differently based on the films' topics and locations. I will retain the discussion of the original programming of the films, and I will address them in the contexts in which they were intended to be seen by the festival.

The first screening took place at McCord Stewart Museum and consisted of four films in total, one feature documentary and three shorts, one of which was animated. *The Memory of Glitch* (2023) by Suzanne Elizabeth Schaaf addresses the topic of loss and recreation, engaging with the larger themes of climate change and environmental struggle. Schaaf returns to her childhood home in Oregon, which has suffered from and is currently under constant danger of wildfires. She attempts to recreate her past through a combination of Google maps, weather patterns, strangers' photos online, and personal videos. The unreliable nature of the sources, as well as the lack of material, fails to restore the pre-fire landscape of her hometown in its entirety. However, the director employs her memories, emotions, and nostalgia to fill in the blanks through voice-over narration to emphasize the importance of her personal connection to the place, which many would only be able to access through media. The contrast between surveillance-style Google Maps footage and individuals' experiences of the land and forest demonstrates the limitations of technology and artificial intelligence in recreating history, as some things will inadvertently be "lost in the glitch." The film demonstrates how environmental disasters do not only destroy landscapes and physical objects, but erase the traces of human emotion, connection, and presence.

Lake Baikal (Baikal Nuur, 2023) by Alisi Telengut focuses on the restoration of language and visuals, almost creating a learning guide for the Buryat-Mongol language through animated sequences of Baikal Lake, located in Russia. The images of nature, fire, and landscape merge with the voice-over, creating a deep connection between the physical manifestation of land and the linguistic element that describes it. The merging of the two solidifies culture with the landscape, making them virtually inseparable. Once again, the theme of nature and emotions merge to showcase the feeling of potential loss, both signifying the environmental hazards for the lake and the endangered state of Indigenous languages in Russia.

Leyla Jafarova's "*We Live with Maybes*": *Searching for Missing Relatives in Post-*

War Azerbaijan (2023) is a documentary that tells the stories of mothers whose sons disappeared during the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the first war of Nagornyi Karabakh in the 1990s. The screening's timing, on May 9, was ironic, as it is the date for the Victory Day holiday that commemorates the end of World War II, which is celebrated in the majority of the countries that used to be part of the Soviet Union. Made in a classic "talking head" tradition, the film takes its viewer into the intimate home space of women who have not lost hope of finding their sons. The memories preserved through pictures, belongings, and, most importantly, their own emotions serve as the last connection they have to their disappeared relatives. The film actively promotes the notion of community, not simply as an entity based on location or spoken language, but rather as something formed through collective grief and emotion. When faced with the absence of any hope for physical evidence, the most important form of archive becomes the spiritual one, as visits to a fortune teller and dreams serve as proof of their sons being alive. These mothers have nothing but memories, photographs, and trust in their dreams to support their convictions. In an attempt to commemorate their experience, they create their own spaces of memory, grief, and connection: a dedicated space at the graveyard, installed by the state, or a plaque at the local school, become physical manifestations of their loss. These objects are interpreted differently by each of the film's subjects and, at the same time, become larger symbols of commemoration and loss. The archive in "*We Live with Maybes*" is something one cannot physically hold on to, but what exists in the heads and minds of the individuals, and yet is at the same time shared by the whole community.

The next day, on the evening of May 10, the screening took place at Cinema Moderne. This time, the program included four films which, each in their own way, deal with the reconstruction of the past and re-tracing of one's identity, by re-imagining physical evidence to construct a new vision of history or the contemporary world. In the short film *Kaua'i 'ō'ō* (2023) by Samy Benammar, the director uses the recordings of the extinct bird species Kaua'i 'ō'ō layered over the last recorded visuals of it, to reanimate and temporarily bring it back into existence. Using found footage and audio, Benammar revives the bird for the audiences, well aware of its life's limited temporality. Similarly, *Solar Book* (2023) by Azar Saiyar meticulously examines the objects stored in a museum, questioning what is lost or gained when something becomes an exhibit. Contrasted with the found footage, the objects, carefully picked up and demonstrated to the camera in complete silence, are decontextualized in the archival space, nevertheless bearing the traces of their lifespan in nature.

Also set in a museum space, *Broken View* (2023) by Hannes Verhoustraete traces the story of the magic lantern, a technological device used to show pictures of the Belgian-occupied Congo in Europe. The film creates a collage of historical footage, with its form gradually transforming from the slides of the magic lantern to film reels, and finally, VHS cassettes. Constant, overt manipulation of these mediums challenges the conventions of flat documentary images, distancing the viewer from the topic. Verhoustraete creates a palimpsest of experiences, centralizing black bodies as active objects, constantly reminding the viewer about the context

and colonial background of the photographs on display. Ever present in the film is a voice-over narration, which utilizes decolonial discourse and theory to reframe the history and context of the exhibition of these images. *Broken View* reverses the typical ethnographic approach of depicting racialized bodies by confronting the viewer with the subject looking back at us. The very map of the African continent in the film is reconstructed from the enslaved bodies, highlighting the “resources” that could be extracted from the region, constantly reminding us of the capitalist aspect of colonialism. In contrast, images of religious education—the equally violent ideological side of colonialism—show Congolese men and women behind desks while the pastor preaches to them. The photographs, and the magic lantern itself, are represented throughout the film as methods of control and oppression, taken out of the “neutrality” of the museum exhibition space. *Broken View* further deconstructs these photographs by reversing the gaze. In the latter half of the film, the viewer is presented with pictures of poverty-stricken white families back in Belgium. The people stare blankly from the screen, as the narrator states that these pictures would have never been shown in Congo or the salons of the bourgeoisie. Layered and complex, *Broken View* demonstrates the inseparability between colonial violence and technological modernity, actively challenging the way one approaches the inventions of the past.

In the closing film of that evening, *The Rootless* (2023), Finnish director August Joensalo attempts to retrace her Karelian heritage, by engaging with the personal archive of her grandparents. The memory journey is tragically interrupted by her grandfather passing away, which makes the director wonder about preserving his history and his own identity in the current age. The documentary, tragic and nostalgic, is filmed in the style of a poetic family blog, capturing the three doing household chores, picking mushrooms, and investigating old photographs. *The Rootless* is a beautiful story of loss, identity, and love that presents history as a highly personal and temporary entity, one we may never be able to truly know or control.

As the credits started rolling, the light came on, and people slowly exited the building on a warm spring day, I could not help but think about how we conceive of archives, museum rooms, and exhibition halls in our everyday lives. Highly depersonalized, they appear to us as containers of the past, dry facts on plaques, and abandoned artifacts. The films that I have engaged with in this review demonstrate precisely the opposite: quotidian objects become full of feelings and memories, as they are revived through the lens of the camera and the editor’s skills. History—a catalogue of faceless dates and names—becomes full of intimate fleeting moments that one cannot preserve or restore, even with the help of the most advanced technology. This year, FIFEQ has invited the public into a new world of seeing and engaging with the past, and I, for one, cannot wait to see what they will offer its Montréal and Québec audiences next year.

Festival Review

Two Years at the Festival de Nouveau Cinéma

Agustín Rugiero Bader

The publishing schedules of *Synoptique* move in mysterious ways and the former issue was out in June, before I could offer you my review of the 2023 edition of the Festival de Nouveau Cinéma, celebrated in Montréal every October. This year, I returned to the festival with a clear picture of its nooks and crannies—the sections, the venues, the people presenting the films—and, fuelled by an inordinate amount of bánh mì (there is a nice and convenient place close to the Cinémathèque), I expanded on the ten-films-for-free starter press package to try and see everything I could. This is in no way a comprehensive review of the festival; I did not get tickets for all the movies, nor was I able to make it to all of the sections. (The National Competition and many of the retrospectives fall outside the scope of this review, for instance.)

Furthermore, to review a festival as a whole is a complicated undertaking. When we go to the cinema, there is always the temptation to think of movies as something isolated, standalone. The theatre is a self-effacing infrastructure, with darkened rooms, comfortable chairs, a big glowing screen—Roland Barthes’ proverbial “gleaming vibration whose imperious jet brushes our skull” (1995, 420). But context does matter, and even if I have rewatched some of the films I saw in the past two years at FNC, the fact is that my reception of them has been coloured by it: the people with me at the screening (friends and strangers), the time of the day, and the festival as an institution. Additionally, going to FNC always entails some measure of grappling with the festival’s position *not only* in the broader context of Montréal and Québec’s complex internal politics—as did Max Holzberg (2023) in our last coverage of the festival—but also in the cultural life of cinema in the city. Thus, what follows is my attempt to channel the experience of the last two editions of FNC, the films I enjoyed and the things I observed, heard, and thought. Forgive me if some of

the details are foggy—I did not really keep notes.

Planning for it is almost half of the excitement. To read an entire programme, to bet on a weird-looking movie, to read online about others trying to avoid any information that will betray the plot, to find the equilibrium between making an educated guess and robbing myself of a surprise twist or turn, to calendarize (painfully aware of the inevitable overlaps), taking into account the fact that the 5:30 movie in Quartier Latin is two hours, so I perhaps cannot, alas, make it to the Concordia Auditorium for the 7:30 screening without missing something. Spending an afternoon on this may not sound exciting, but it does keep me busy.

If you are a bit less committed, FNC makes it easy by offering you the *Incontournables* section (styled as *The Essentials* in English), where you will find the usual suspects: the Weerasethakuls, Schraders, Arnolds, Kaurismakis, Triets, Rohrwachers, and Zhangkes that have paraded in Cannes, the Berlinale, TIFF, and at other massive festivals the year before. Some of these films will eventually have wide releases, and some of them will be screened at Cinema Moderne, but how *delectable* it is to have an opinion formed on *Anora* before any of your friends have seen it. And, in the case of those other films, the ones that will not have a wide release at all, this is one of the great services a festival like FNC provides: the possibility of seeing wonderful, undercelebrated films on a big screen.

That does not mean, however, that all other *inessential* sections do not include remarkable work. Last year's International Competition, for example, was host to the sparse and harrowing Chilean international coproduction *The Settlers* (Felipe Gálvez, 2023), which follows a group of three mercenaries as they go from land-prospecting to genocide in early twentieth-century Chile. The film is beautifully shot, reappropriating the western genre's landscape aesthetics and themes, explicit in its depictions of violence, often presented in a puzzling way. An example of the latter is the rape of one of the film's terrible protagonists, which reads almost like a joke. On the other hand, it offers brilliant moments, like its finishing zoom-in shot of Rosa, an indigenous woman being forced to pose by authorities for film in a set that disguises the squalor in which she lives. As the shot closes into her defying semblance, someone off-camera asks: "Rosa, do you want to be part of this nation? *Drink the tea.*"

The Settlers took home la Louve d'Or despite sharing its section with the 2023 Caméra d'Or winner, and one of my favourite films from last year, the astounding *Inside the Yellow Cocoon Shell* (Phạm Thiên Ân, 2023), a slow and deliberate exploration of grief and religion in Christian Vietnam. In a way, following the trace of many so-called "slow cinema" directors—your Bi Gans and Apichatpong Weerasethakuls—but so rabidly original in its framing and pace, the movie opens with a motorcycle crash that serves as an excuse to also show the lively nightlife of Saigon. The contrast between the lived quality of the images and the sudden accident makes for a positively jarring yet genuine experience, a resource the film employs successfully often. As the deceased woman's five-year-old son and brother-in-law travel into the Vietnamese countryside to give her burial, the latter goes through the proverbial inner journey that is also deeply emmeshed with the complex relationship

between Christianity and Vietnam. Thiên Ân's camera moves deftly between spaces and depths, frames and reframes funerals, lucky veterans, churches, farms, former girlfriends who become nuns, derelict buildings, shallow streams, smoking chickens... it offers everything but a clear-cut conclusion, leaving us adrift in deep waters.

Additionally, at the 2024 festival, I managed to catch the screening of the Daniel Langlois Innovation Award recipient, Klára Tasovská's *I'm Not Everything I Want to Be* (2024). It is a delightful documentary that utilizes the photography work of Libuše Jarcovjáková in a masterful demonstration of sequential narration. The photographs are organized and edited (cut, reframed, resized) together with a booming soundtrack and stroboscopic effects to chronicle Libuše's life in Czechoslovakia and beyond in the later years of communism. These vignettes of her life are accompanied by the thoughts in her diaries, read by the photographer herself.

The section *Histoire(s) du cinema* offers, like Godard's series of the same name, a reflection of current cinema through its past. 2023's *Histoire(s)* offered a compelling pairing in Kléber Mendonça Filho's *Retratos Fantasmás* (2023) and Khavn's *Nitrate: To the Ghosts of the 75 Lost Philippine Silent Films (1912–1933)* (2023). The former is an exploration of the Brazilian filmmaker's childhood cinemas and the places where he started shooting films. It repurposes archival material, behind-the-scenes photography, home videos, and combines them with documentary-styled newly shot material of the current state of some of the cinemas. Toward the end, in a dazzling turn of events, the film turns fiction as Mendonça Filho is picked up by a cab driver who, in response to his being a film director, tells him he can become invisible sometimes. As they both drive back to Filho's home following the long route of now familiar cinemas, the cab driver disappears, and the only evidence of him still being there is the moving steering wheel.

The sometimes-porous relationship between reality and fiction is also brought into focus in *Nitrate*, where incredibly prolific filmmaker Khavn reimagines a ghostly history of the Philippines' 1912 to 1933 screens. It is a film composed mainly of found footage material, clearly inspired by early cinema, with silent wide shots, rudimentary special effects, and recognizable plots—fantastic, for the most part. The kicker here is that the found footage is in itself a fantasy, a reimagining of the films that were lost to nitrate combustion due to poor conservation during the beginning of the last century. The film is wilfully, though not unapologetically, misleading, however, and the images are confused, noisy, deteriorated. They create narrative avenues and paths never to be followed, they imply *something else*—something vanished, disappeared. Like ghosts, they appear before our eyes and, just like that, they are gone. As with *Retratos*, what is implied here is the constructed nature of history, and the very important role that “nonfiction” seems to play in it. Like in *Cocoon*, however, these films do not seem that preoccupied with a distinct argument, but with the affective quality derived from witnessing the unsettling of an assumed narrative. Khavn's film eloquently poses the question: *How many ghosts can the Cinema contain?*

Weird, yes. But if fun-weird is what you are looking for, then perhaps you might take a gander into the sections *Temps 0* and *Les Nouveaux Alchimistes*. The

former includes films that mostly play with genre cinema—“rebellious filmmakers and movies that bite”—which also makes it the perfect section for the Quentin-Dupieux-movie-of-the-year. In 2023, for example, *Temps 0* was dedicated to Bruce Lee movies, but they still managed to show *Yannick* (Dupieux, 2023), a film where the eponymous character takes control of a terrible play he’s watching during his only free day of a week-long trip to Paris. Dupieux once again treads the thin line between verisimilitude and wackiness as Yannick pulls out a gun and decides to rewrite the comedy for everyone’s enjoyment. I missed this year’s Dupieux—*Le Deuxième Acte* (2024)—but I did get a ticket from a friend for Norifumi Suzuki’s *School of the Holy Beast* (1974), a nunsplotation *pinku eiga* with indelible photography and a blasphemous sense of irony. Some of the images in it are stunning and, though narratively it is confused and misleading at times, it is funny, campy, and cutting in its depiction of goodness and evil.

For even weirder, try *Les Nouveaux Alchimistes*. As their website highlights, the N in FNC stands for “New” (FNC, n.d., “Mission & Commitments”), and the festival has been quick to include the latest trends in filmmaking throughout its history, from showing video and TV episodes early on to embracing experimental cinema and its concerns with innovation (FNC, n.d., “History”). *Les Nouveaux Alchimistes* continues this work by screening daring projects by new filmmakers. Such is the case of Emilia Beatriz’s *barrunto* (2024), which was prefaced with a video introduction by the filmmaker, who leaned on the underlying themes of their film (the relationship between arms testing and the life of landscapes at large) to comment on the current mass murder being perpetrated by Israel in Gaza. Beatriz’s movie is a patient exploration of two separate landscapes, those of Puerto Rico and Scotland, which are both places where they have lived and where NATO has tested arms, particularly nuclear weapons. A film that reads more like poetry, *barrunto* imagines a sentient nuclear entity that moves between both landscapes, querying about the meaning of life (our life, their life) and existence, both in this world and beyond. Though confusing at times, the film is short and abrasive in such a way that it can nonetheless produce a concentrated effect. It shines the most when it fully commits to its own discourse and embraces its own materiality; that is, when it resorts to actual celluloid developed with the waters and materials of the landscapes it records. There, images are subject to the arbitrariness of nature, a contingency that frees *barrunto* from the many ideas it attempts to convey and plunges it into the indeterminate, experiential register where, curiously enough, its apparent message is clearest.

Utterly inscrutable in its own way is Cristóbal León and Joaquín Cociña’s *The Hyperboreans* (2024). The pair established themselves through the success of *The Wolf House* (2018) and the Ari Aster co-produced *The Bones* (2021), and they remain solidly audacious. León and Cociña’s latest feature follows a *mise-en-abîme* structure of intermingling parallel worlds where their trademark puppets coexist with real human beings in an increasingly weird matrix-slash-invasion-of-the-body-snatchers-like Chile that exists only in the minds of its inhabitants and is controlled by a supposedly pure master race, the Hyperboreans, of which Cociña and León themselves are part. The Hyperboreans hold ties to Hitler, who did not die in World

War II but escaped to Antarctica. (Now, I can write that up again, but it will not get any clearer. Which brings me to the question: *should it?*) The film is a staggering experience, not just because of its plot, but because of the myriad techniques and resources being employed in it: from collage, to stop motion, to puppetry, to virtual and visual effects, and the admittedly hilarious twists and turns of plot and characters (starring an actress/psychoanalyst and a romantic metal-head white-knight hero), the deadpan delivery of Pynchon-esque rewritings and over-writings of history, and the always creeping awareness that a *real* fascist Chile might be lurking beneath the surface, à la Bolaño. Quite the experience.

The other animation film I saw this year is *wunderkind* Gints Zilbalodis' *Flow* (2024), which looks to be Latvia's entry for the 2025 Academy Awards (Hipes 2024). The film is shown in a section called *International Panorama* (a bit of a catch-all) but it is also advertised in the *P'tit Loups* section, which led to the Cinémathèque being populated by many more children than I suspect is usual. On that point, I want to say that I am definitely in favour of teaching children about complex realities through cinema. And yet, I could not stop thinking about how distressed I would have been as a child had I watched *Flow*'s incredibly cute early 2010s videogame-graphic cat come close to drowning, again and again, for what must have been (or at least felt) like 70 percent of the movie. The film in itself is beautiful at times, the imagery is expansive, the waters flow naturally, and the animals are admittedly well portrayed, even if I disliked that, as the film went on, they became progressively more humanized—this might seem a personal preference, but the film very much deals with what humanity looks like after human beings are gone, so it is not entirely beside the point. Despite all the animals in the film being in risk of mortal danger for most of it, and the pervasive feeling that one of them might stray and lose whatever safety and reassurance they have gained from each other's company, the most not-for-kids moment is the unexplained/allegorical death/disappearance of one of the members from the crew. None of the animals talk so there is really no making sense of this beyond what one can immediately imagine. This is no shortcoming of the film, however. In fact, the film's best moments appear in the unexplained/unexplainable being encountered by these creatures that can only really engage with it matter-of-factly and have no use for explanations—which may perhaps be suitable for a human child. Or for very moved me, who really wants to know whatever happened to the white secretary bird.

On that note, let us return to where we began: *Les Incontournables*. On the last day of the 2024 edition of the FNC, Zoé Protat, director of programming for the festival, presented Andrea Arnold's *Bird* (2024). She explained that the last screening of the festival is always a film that she finds particularly interesting, and that she makes it a point never to miss it. This year, it was clear why. Arnold's film moves nimbly in the stark contrast between whimsy and heartbreak. A dark comedy embedded in an even darker drama, it deals in an impressive way with the intrusion of grown-up realities into the life of a child forced to come of age too soon.

In 2023, FNC's last screening was held in the magnificent Cinéma Imperial, currently closed for renovations, and facing an uncertain future (Bongiorno

and Ngala 2023), perhaps the greatest loss of this year's festival. The screening in question was Jonathan Glazer's *The Zone of Interest* (2023), which needs practically no introductions. The truth is that a considerable amount of films selected for *Les Incontournables* find themselves precisely in that situation, be it because of the awards they win, like Justine Triet's *Anatomy of a Fall* (2023); the names behind them, like *May December* (Todd Haynes, 2023); or the fact of their belonging to a cultural zeitgeist that seems to engulf everything else, like Sean Baker's *Anora* (2024). I am sure you will read your fair share of opinions about those films, and there is no real need to throw mine in the pile. But it still bears mentioning that *Les Incontournables*, in the end, is designed as a list of recognizable films and artists, and that the work organizers like Protat put into this design is more than worth our attention.

Without providing too protracted a review, then, allow me to at least highlight some of the films that make up this section of the festival. 2023's *Evil Does Not Exist* (Ryūsuke Hamaguchi), first of all, was a prime example of what an audience does to a film and vice-versa. The film is, following the director's previous, *Drive My Car* (2021), a deadpan exploration of the vicissitudes of different interrelated characters, this time in a little rural town caught up in a debate over whether or not to attract tourism through "glamping" (glamour camping, in case that took a second). The film explores the pernicious means tourism (and capitalism at large) employs to restrict dissent and reconvert it into profit, all of which is brutally cut short by a shocking, sudden ending that left members of the audience audibly gasping (and myself thanking that this was not an experience I was having on my own). I experienced a similar feeling throughout Albert Serra's *Afternoons of Solitude* (2024). In this, his latest feature, the Catalan *enfant terrible* abandons fiction and turns to documentary, following Peruvian Spanish bullfighter Andrés Roca Rey during a few *corridos* in Spain. The film is violent, terrifying, and does not spare the audience any sort of details in its portrayal of the *corrida*, but it also very interestingly dissects the liturgy and male chauvinism inherent to the bloodsport. Serra's unflinching commitment to sustained contemplation pays off in a series of truly brilliant moments (the ritual of dressing the *matador*, an off-hand remark, a tear), the only issue being that one is forced to sit through a bull's dying gaze to see them. Perhaps the act of watching it with others softens the blow.

Jia Zhangke's monumental *Caught by the Tides* (2024) revisits the filmmakers' own work as a way of considering the changes China has undergone during his tenure as one of its greatest filmmakers. Utilizing archival footage from different sources, materials from his previous films (in which actress Zhao Tao was a pervasive presence), and newly shot scenes, Zhangke rethinks and hones some of the themes that, we can now see, have always been latent in his oeuvre. China changes at breakneck speed but Zhao ages slowly. Monumental and human times converge. Throughout the film, Zhangke keeps his frame on the love story between Zhao's character, Qiao Qiao, and Guo Bing (played by another Zhangke regular, Zhubin Li), and everything that happens around them moves so fast that they both appear to be in stasis, endlessly waiting for each other.

An opposite dynamic is explored in Aki Kaurismäki's *Fallen Leaves* (2023),

as Ansa and Holappa seem themselves to be caught in the unbreakable circle of post-and-permanent-recession capitalism in Finland. Kaurismäki's reworking of his own usual obsessions utilizes love as a way of discussing salaried work, alcoholism, and solitude, among other subjects. It is, regardless of what it might seem, a charmingly shot comedy that redoubles on Kaurismäki and his actors' knack for perfect timing and delivery, his poetic portraiture of humble living conditions, and his fantastic musical moments. It even throws in a charming little dog for a change.

There have been very few works at FNC that I really did not like, and I feel that—counter to what criticism is usually supposed to invest itself in doing—there is not much sense on discussing disappointments when the overall experience has been so thoroughly rewarding. Such comments would only serve to muddy the overall impression that I am trying to share. The fact is that personnel at the festival work really hard to make it happen, and this is clear from the experience that attendees have. All the projections I attended were presented by someone (sometimes more elaborately, sometimes less), and the selection clearly has its own identity, despite its resemblance to many other auteur festivals around the world (*D'A* in Barcelona, for example, offers a similar flavour). Whether you are looking for the latest Cannes heavy-hitter, a weird new experimental work on the politics of landscape, or a fun little comedy that cross-examines capitalist society, come October, pop into the Festival de Nouveau Cinéma. It is always nice to see what is up.

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Festival Review

Coming Out Journeys: Highlights from the 31st Hot Docs Film Festival

Amir Hossein Siadat

At the 31st edition of the Hot Docs International Film Festival, held April 25 to May 5, 2024, I was particularly eager to watch films that, according to their descriptions, utilized home movies and personal archival material. This method of selecting films not only aligns with my personal interests and studies but also allows me to compile a collection that fits within a specific category for this report. However, upon watching the films, I discovered more similarities than I had anticipated. The films seemed to converge in a unique way, collectively creating a vision of our contemporary era. Initially, the connections and lines we perceive between these films might be attributed to the experience of watching them consecutively. Indeed, when films are viewed in quick succession, the impact of the previous one lingers, potentially influencing our perception of the next. In the following review, I will strive to trace a coherent path, identifying points of connection among the films while also acknowledging their distinctiveness and individuality.

As its title suggests, *My Dad's Tapes* (Kurtis Watson, 2024) prominently features home movies as one of its primary materials. Before the story begins, we see clips from these videos, all of which reflect a very intimate and pleasant atmosphere. Like any home movie, they evoke feelings of happiness and a zest for life. These films were taken by a father who appears to be cheerful, a family man, and full of energy. Shortly thereafter, the film delivers a shock: the father has been dead for years. Just as we start to grasp the magnitude of this loss for his wife and children, another, even more shocking revelation is made—the father died by suicide. This turn of events is both unexpected and startling. How could this man have done such a thing?

The film's director and narrator is the man's son, who, after watching his father's tapes, decided to confront the topic of suicide—a subject that had been avoid-

ed by those around him for years. It seems that the passage of time has finally made the family members ready to address this traumatic issue. The director interviews his mother and sisters, neither of whom observed any indications of dissatisfaction or depression from their husband and father. This not only transforms the suicide into a perplexing mystery but raises questions about the very nature of home movies. It may seem that home movies, having penetrated the private and intimate spaces of homes, often reflect reality without interference or distortion. However, this documentary challenges that assumption. How could a man so depressed and unhappy that he ultimately died by suicide present such a pleasant image of himself and his family on camera? It appears that the patriarchal ideology, which views the family as a sacred institution and family life as conventional and normal, governs the camera capturing these images.

No matter how harmless, intimate, and real these images appear, they remain under the influence of this ideology. There exists an unwritten law compelling the cameraman and those in front of the camera to appear satisfied and happy. Thus, even in the realm of home movies, which are typically meant for the family's eyes only, are people not still acting? From this angle, the final coming out of the director suddenly takes on thematic importance. At the film's conclusion, the director confesses to his sisters that he is gay. This moment prompted a thought: could the father's suicide have been the result of living in a more veiled and secretive era, essentially leading a double life? One of the director's effective techniques is aligning the visual texture of contemporary moments with that of his father's videos. During these scenes, it is as if we are seeing the world through his father's eyes or the lens of his camera. This technique evokes the feeling that the father's spirit is present, witnessing the family's reflections and judgments about him.

The movie *Seguridad* (Tamara Segura, 2024) follows a similar theme. Here, too, the focus revolves around the figure of the father. Once again, photos taken by a father, who seems to possess artistic sensibilities, are used by his daughter, a filmmaker, as material for her work. However, unlike the father in *My Dad's Tapes*, this father does not come across as family friendly. On the contrary, his alcohol addiction and extremely violent and erratic behaviour at home were traumatic for his family. Now, ten years after his death, his daughter has begun to narrate the wounds inflicted on three generations of the family—her grandmother, mother, and herself—by her father's violence. The film's formal and narrative strategy closely resembles that of *My Dad's Tapes*, relying on archival footage and interviews. The director mentioned in an interview that her greatest challenge was convincing family members to discuss their secrets on camera. Additionally, she had to ensure that her vulnerable, elderly loved ones would not suffer further by revisiting the deeply traumatic events that have profoundly scarred their souls.

However, the challenge the filmmaker faces in giving the film an interpretable dimension and transcending the personal-family theme lies in creating a blurred link between the trauma of this family and the socio-political system of Cuban patriarchy. She openly admitted that her goal was to present a different image of Cuba—one that highlights the darker side of a country often romanticized through tourism

and the commodification of its political ideology. This is a place where visitors will even buy T-shirts with Castro's face and wear them during their stay! In this regard, the use of footage related to military activities in Cuba, and especially images of Castro, serve an implicit function—to transform this small family narrative into a metaphor for larger Cuban society's relationship with Castro, the spiritual father of the nation. In other words, the film endeavours to extrapolate the story of this family to reflect the history of a nation. Perhaps this is why the daughter, the filmmaker, not only distances herself from this household but also feels as if she is escaping from her homeland by immigrating to Canada.

Continuing to explore parent-child dynamics within this festival, we encounter *A Mother Apart* (Laurie Townshend, 2024), which examines an unconventional mother-daughter relationship. The film's main character, Staceyann Chin, is an LGBTQ activist poet whose mother abandoned her during childhood, leaving a lasting impact on her life. It is as if Chin has spent her entire life searching for her mother, only to be disappointed each time she finds her, never receiving the love she deserves. At one point, the mother remarks about Chin: "She always finds me." Through Townshend's camera, which maintains a close intimacy with Chin, we gradually observe the lingering effects of this trauma on both her outward demeanour and inner psyche, exploring the intricacies of her mind. We can even discern the shadow of Chin's mother in her warm demeanour toward her own daughter, the unconditional love she readily gives, and the profound closeness between them, as if they have merged into one being. This warmth and closeness stand in stark contrast to the love Chin's mother always withheld from her, leaving a lingering regret in her heart.

At one point in the film, Chin mentions that she holds onto her exes because she has no family. But could this act of "holding on" be a consequence of that "being left"? In chasing her mother, Chin and the film transcend borders, taking us on a journey to America, Canada, Germany, and Jamaica. *A Mother Apart* and *Seguridad* serve as exemplary Canadian documentaries, portraying individuals who have ties to Canada but remain connected to their ancestral lands elsewhere, compelling them to explore another country to understand their past, identity, and roots.

In *A Mother Apart*, home videos are effectively utilized to offer poignant insights into the dynamics of the family. One such video, dating back several years, captures a moment where Chin's mother is seen scolding Laura, Chin's half-sister. This footage provides a revealing glimpse into the complex nature of their relationship, particularly the mother's demeanour. What is striking is that the mother's verbal violence is directed toward the camera, as Laura is the one filming her. Consequently, the audience, through the lens of the camera, becomes unwitting participants in this emotional exchange, experiencing the weight of the mother's harshness. In another scene from a home movie, we witness the two sisters seated at the dinner table alongside their mother. Despite their attempts to elicit a kind word from her, the mother, unlike the father in *My Dad's Tapes*, refuses to feign happiness or affection for the camera. There is no pretence or showmanship here—just raw, unfiltered emotion.

During the reunion between Chin and her mother, reminiscent of Abbas

Kiarostami's *Close-Up* (1990), the director chose to capture the moment with a hidden camera. This approach ensured that the mother was unaware of the camera's presence, allowing the meeting to be recorded as naturally as possible. In this special and highly anticipated moment, we observe with a mix of excitement and curiosity that the mother does not insist on hugging her daughter, despite their long separation. Another striking instance occurs when Chin visits her mother's old neighbour during a trip to Jamaica and connects the neighbour and her mother through a phone call. Unexpectedly, we witness the typically stoic and distant mother become emotional and begin to cry. This sentimentality suggests that the neighbour's presence rekindles memories from before the mother had children. However, Chin's tears, shed moments later as she recalls this interaction, are even more poignant. Throughout her journey, Chin speaks with many of her mother's acquaintances, all of whom recall the mother with fondness and speak of her kindness. Yet, strikingly, many are unaware of Chin's existence. Each time she hears about her mother's kindness, one can sense Chin's painful and regretful internal question: where was this kindness in her own life?

The movie *Fragments of a Life Loved* (Chloe Barreau, 2023) shares several similarities with *My Dad's Tapes*. Both films rely heavily on personal video archives and feature people speaking in front of the camera about someone absent from the film—in this case, the director herself. Throughout the film, we catch only glimpses of her in personal videos, and we largely form our image of her based on the descriptions provided by others. This image resembles that of a seductive woman living a bohemian lifestyle filled with weed, alcohol, travel, and sex. She had numerous lovers, both male and female, and many describe her as unfaithful, having betrayed most of them and broken many hearts. Yet, all these former lovers seem to remember their time with her as a unique and memorable experience. Interestingly, it appears that the director was not present during the interviews. She entrusted someone else to conduct them, allowing her former lovers to speak more freely about her without the burden of her presence.

Since her teenage years, she has always had a camera in her hand, capturing moments with her boyfriends and girlfriends. Now, as these relationships have all ended, watching these films takes on a peculiar and poignant quality—they are chronicles of lost youth. Revisiting these intimate moments, captured in amateur yet sensual footage, contrasts sharply with the present-day interviews conducted with her now visibly older ex-lovers. As the director explores the memories and past relationships, the range of emotions expressed is captivating: some become emotional and reflective, others angry; some sigh, some shed tears, and others laugh. It appears that relationships are over for some but not for others. Some individuals still hold a grudge against her and have not been able to forgive her.

Capturing the profound emotions on the faces of the interviewees is truly spectacular on camera, showcasing the bravery of the director. She allowed her ex-lovers' candid words to be openly recorded, even when some of those words were negative and, at times, cruel judgments about her. Despite the film's apparent focus on deeply personal matters, it unfolds with as many narratives as there are characters

in front of the camera. Each story engages the audience, likely evoking memories of similar relationships in their own lives. Another notable aspect, echoing a thematic commonality with *My Dad's Tapes*, is the increasing openness of the participants. Many who once concealed their homosexual relationships now sit before the camera, readily sharing the details of these past connections.

In *The Big Move* (Sarah Grant, 2023), the protagonist grapples with the challenge of confronting her true self and embracing frank expression, utilizing this struggle as a lens to examine the influence of media on body image. Through its portrayal of the body, the film endeavours to critique pop culture and illustrate how media mechanisms can render individuals passive. Director Sarah Grant, who is a plus-size woman, reflects on her lifelong passion for cinema and her struggle to find representation of her own body within it. During the COVID-19 pandemic, while confined to home and engaging in online dance classes, Grant rediscovers her body's capabilities. As she participates in these classes, she gradually gains confidence and ultimately decides to centre her film around the portrayal of herself dancing—an image conspicuously absent from mainstream media: that of a plus-size dancer. Her film takes an intriguing approach, eschewing conventional narratives and instead filling the camera frame with her own body, inviting viewers to scrutinize its details. Even when discussing the weight gain of celebrities like Britney Spears, Grant refrains from displaying images of Spears, rejecting the incorporation of visual references that evoke advertising, stereotypes, and media norms. *The Big Move* serves as a voice for individuals whose images have been marginalized by the dictates of market-driven media. Is this not a kind of “coming out” of the margins?

In *Am I the Skinniest Person You've Ever Seen?* (Isha Marajana, 2024), the main character boldly contrasts her slim physique with an image. She endeavours to conform to the standards championed by the fashion industry, seeking to distinguish herself from her mother, whose body was shaped by a lifetime of household and kitchen responsibilities. However, her obsession with media images leads her to extreme measures in weight reduction, pushing her perilously close to self-destruction. The film serves as a form of self-expression, weaving together home videos, photos, and media advertising images through creative and dynamic editing. It examines themes of identity crisis and the generation gap in an era dominated by media influence. Moreover, the narrative touches upon the immigrant experience in Canada, portraying the conflict between traditional values upheld by Isha's Punjabi mother and the media's narrow definition of “beauty” and “perfection” through the body.

The pivotal role of smartphones is a recurring theme in many of these films. For instance, in *The Big Move*, the smartphone serves as a tool enabling the director's virtual presence in an online dance class and capturing intimate moments, thereby providing both dramatic material and archival footage for the film. Similarly, in *A Mother Apart*, the smartphone plays a crucial role in Chin's journey, facilitating her connection with distant loved ones and serving as a conduit for her narrative. Beyond these specific instances, the pervasive influence of smartphones signifies a broader societal trend. This powerful audiovisual tool has seamlessly integrated into our lives, almost becoming an extension of our bodies. Consequently, we express

our innermost selves more openly than ever before. While traditional home video cameras, exemplified in *My Dad's Tapes* or *Fragments of a Life Loved*, were primarily used to capture moments of joy, smartphones now archive our daily interactions and conversations, serving as a treasure trove for personal narratives and storytelling.

The movie *My Sextortion Diary* (Patricia Franquesa, 2024) is a testament to the power of creativity in filmmaking, demonstrating that engaging and captivating cinema can be crafted with minimal resources and at a low cost. This film ingeniously utilizes smartphones and laptops as its primary tools, extracting nearly all its material from these everyday devices. The narrative unfolds around a director whose laptop is stolen on the eve of her film screening at the Locarno festival. Subsequently, she receives a call from a hacker intent on extortion, threatening to release her nude photos online. What ensues is a gripping crime and mystery drama, with an elusive antagonist whose identity remains shrouded in mystery, his voice only heard through manipulated voice messages. *My Sextortion Diary* employs elements familiar to our daily lives—SMS, email, Google searches—to weave its intricate plot and deliver its dramatic punches. Few films can be remembered that rely so much on textual elements integrated into the narrative.

While watching, we are constantly immersed in a world of text: the director's SMS messages, emails, Google searches, and the contents of the websites she visits. This experience can be likened to a form of voyeurism rarely encountered in cinema. It is as though we are assuming the role of a hacker, peering into the director's personal information. Moreover, the film's auditory environment is layered with an array of sounds: the rhythmic scrolling, crisp clicks, rapid typing, alerting notification pings, sudden screenshot captures, and the familiar chimes of mobile alarms. Complementing this, the visual presentation of the film reflects the static layout of mobile phone screens, seamlessly transitioning between vertical and horizontal orientations, embellished with playful stickers and dynamic elements. Beyond its captivating narrative and audiovisual elements, thematically, the film also navigates the territory we initially explored in this article: the act of unmasking oneself and embracing transparency. Ultimately, it poses a timely question: Should the director yield to the hacker's demands to evade public scrutiny? Or should she reject the notion of shame associated with nudity, opting instead to challenge societal judgment?

While it is true that the prevalence of films addressing issues such as media, immigration, LGBTQ rights, and other marginalized communities can be partly attributed to the preferences of film festivals—where such themes often attract funding and entry into prestigious festivals and awards ceremonies—there is more to consider. Despite a certain repetitiveness in the themes presented at these festivals, the films discussed here stand out by allowing us to trace intergenerational differences, highlighting a world that increasingly fosters avenues for expression and representation. This, in turn, encourages courage and candour in sharing diverse perspectives. This cultural shift has created a noticeable divide between our generation and those preceding us, who often conformed to societal norms and led double lives. Many of the struggles depicted in these films stem from taboos that were once deeply entrenched but have since become more fragile in our evolving society.

Festival Review

Under the Eyes of the Owl: The 48th Ottawa International Animation Festival

Fernanda Alves Salgado

Looking back at the 48th edition of the Ottawa International Animation Festival (OIAF), which took place in Ottawa from September 20 to 24, 2023, I keep returning to one of Canadian animator Pierre Hébert's reflections on animation: "I am more interested in what animation does to the perception of reality and to the perception of other types of images than in what it does by itself. I am more fascinated by the effects it produces than in the worlds it creates" (Hébert, qtd. in Wells and Hardstaff 2008, 73). Thinking alongside Hébert, I wonder: how does an animation film festival, such as the OIAF, affect the world and the communities within which it exists? What does it do to the world and to the perception of reality of those that it touches?

One part of this question, of course, and perhaps the most immediate one—particularly from the perspective of an independent filmmaker, film scholar, and avid film festival goer such as myself—is how film festivals, in general, provide ample opportunity to showcase (from the filmmaker's perspective), and to see (from the public perspective) a wide range of films which you would not, otherwise, generally speaking, be able to exhibit or watch. Chris Robinson, the OIAF's artistic director, concurs:

Animation festivals are essential because we are putting the spotlight on animators . . . Despite all of the things that have changed over the years—the rise of streaming services and Vimeo and YouTube and whatnot—unless you know what you're looking for, the only place you're going to find a lot of this work is still at animation festivals. (Dart 2022)

Thinking alongside Dina Iordanova and Marijke de Valck (Iordanova 2009, 26), the first layer in thinking through the ramifications and reverberations of the Ottawa International Animation Festival in the world can be its potentiality as an alternative exhibition venue or circuit.

Founded in 1975 by the Canadian Film Institute, with a first edition in 1976, the Ottawa International Animation Festival is, alongside the Annecy International Animation Film Festival in France and the World Festival of Animated Film Zagreb in Croatia, one of the oldest and most prestigious animation film festivals, while also being the first major international animation film festival in North America. Entirely dedicated to animation, and based in Ottawa, a city recognized as an animation hub since the early days of the National Film Board, the OIAF has succeeded in creating a long-lasting animation film festival at the fruitful intersection between independent, commercial, and student animation—striving to maintain its experimental and artistic core, even while embracing industry productions and players.

It is at this intersection that the kernel of the Ottawa International Animation Festival seems to reside. On the one hand, we have one of the most interesting and valuable aspects of film festivals in general, and animation film festivals in particular. Frequently, particularly in terms of independent productions, exhibition and distribution in the film festival circuit is how the film will have a wider circulation. This is even truer considering animation, which, as Robinson pointed out, often gets sidelined in general (which is to say, live-action) film festivals. On the other hand, the presence of commissioned pieces and more established animated works, either being exhibited or a topic of conversation at one of the talks, conferences, or workshops, as well as the student works and their lively presence, bridge the gap between the many facets of the animation world and its inhabitants and community.

And it is quite a community, in and of itself. The growth and expansion of the festival through the years can be measured in numbers: once biannual, as much as every animation film festival at the time, the festival began having annual editions from the mid-1990s onward. Submissions have increased from around 750 films every couple of years to the current 2,500 per year, from 85 countries. New categories have also been added, as the festival evolved with the industry's practices, tendencies, and concerns. Finally, the festival offers spaces for the larger community to congregate within its many venues throughout the city.

In its 48th edition, the festival had seven competitive sections—feature films, short films, VR, animated series, young audiences, teen audiences, and Canadian student competitions—in addition to the non-competitive Panoramas and special screenings. Of nearly 1,000 submissions received from Canada and elsewhere, 25 Canadian student films were selected for the Canadian student competition. Amongst these, seven films were directed by Concordia students: *A Body Transgressive* (2023), by Charlie Galea McClure; *Abby* (2023), by Fanny Lord-Bourcier; *An Ego and I* (2023), by Jesu Medina; *Ruins of Equinox* (2023), by Philippe Shewchenko; *Synodic* (2023), by Rebecca Devitt; *The Clock Is Ticking* (2023), by Thibault Picquoin, and *سَلْدَنَ الِأَنْدَلُسِ* (*Lament of Andalusia*) (2023), by Anas M'birkou. The NBC Universal Award for Best Canadian Student Animation went to *Between You and Me*, direct-

ed by Cameron Kletke, from the Emily Carr University of Art + Design, and two honourable mentions were bestowed to Shewchenko's *Ruins of Equinox*, and *Bliss*, directed by Nadya Aubrey, from Université du Québec à Montréal.

Complementing the experience of the student crowd—and at this point, I am keenly reminded of my festival-going days as a communications undergraduate and animation-lover, and can completely and giddily relate—the 48th OIAF also instituted The Animation Exposé, which is a mix of industry and general public events that offer glimpses of the behind-the-scenes work of several current animated shows and artists' processes, including an event with Luke Pearson, creator of *Hilda*; a presentation by *Nimona*'s directors, Nick Bruno and Troy Quane; a talk by Masaaki Yuasa about his body of work and creative process; and sketching activities, recruiting opportunities, and career workshops.

On the industry side of OIAF, The Animation Conference (TAC), established in 2004, is a networking and business forum, and operates much as a film festival market, in which animation industry professionals (screenwriters, producers, directors, distributors, sales agents) have one-on-one meetings and present pitches of their current projects and screenings. The festival points out how TAC, and the space it provides for industry networking, impacts the public (and our world) at large, in the sense that it represents the first step in bringing to life animated works that will be part of our lives and imaginaries. It brings me back, momentarily, to the questions tentatively formulated at the beginning of this review, and how the reflection on how animation, and the animation film festival, affect the perception of reality, actually begins here, too. What will we watch three or four years from now, and how will it transform our realities? Furthermore, as an underlying current to this entire thought and discussion: where are we on the urgent and necessary work of having more diverse voices creating worlds and telling stories?

One of the few films already on my to-watch list when I went to the festival was *Nayola* (2022), one of the seven feature films selected for OIAF's 2023 official competition. Directed by José Miguel Ribeiro, the film is a Portugal, France, Belgium, and Netherlands co-production, and tells the story of three generations of women, Lelena, Nayola, and Yara, whose lives are shaped by the 25-year-long Angolan civil war. Beautiful and poignant in its narrative and aesthetic experimentations, the film traverses times and spaces, fantasy and reality, in telling the lives of these women and the rising country around them. I selected *Nayola* specifically because I was intrigued by its use of different animation techniques and visual registers, and because it was the only film present in the festival's lineup whose protagonists were Black (even though the director is not Black). As a matter of fact, locating films in OIAF's program directed by Black or Indigenous people, or those in which the protagonists were Black or Indigenous, or those which were produced in Afro-diasporic countries, yielded few results, much to my disappointment, particularly within an animation film festival with the stature and longevity of Ottawa's. Much as Janet Harbord indicates, "Festivals act as turnstiles in the largely invisible flow of trade in cultural goods, throwing into relief border crossings and, less visibly, marking out certain blockades and omissions in trade routes" (Harbord 2009, 40). What are these

omissions, how exactly do they affect us all, and how do we set about undoing them?

The film that utterly caught me by surprise was *Linda veut du poulet! (Chicken for Linda!)* (2023), directed by Chiara Malta and Sébastien Laudenbach. A France and Italy co-production, this coming-of-age film is enchanting in its colourful aesthetics and in telling the story of Linda, a girl who wants a chicken for dinner, as payment for a mistake and wrongdoing of her mother's. Which should be simple enough, if it was not for the complex and delicate mother-daughter relationship, and if the situation was not even more aggravated by a general strike, and a children's revolution, all at once. Funny, heartrending, and very touching, *Linda veut du poulet!* won the Annecy Cristal in the 2023 Annecy International Animation Film Festival, as well as the Gan Foundation Award for Distribution, and the Best Animated Feature at France's César Awards, this year. This is the film I later took my seven-year-old daughter to the cinema to watch with me, and it was a joy to share with her its beauty and the delicate emotions that Linda goes through as she remembers her late father through his chicken and peppers recipe.

Interestingly enough, another one of the bright spots for me at OIAF was the young audiences 7+ competition. Perhaps I am biased, as I have a little one myself, and we do love to watch films together, particularly these odd and beautiful films that we find in animation film festivals and independent cinemas. But to be completely honest, this program felt like one of the most coherent and cohesive selections of short films from those I watched at the festival, with each work complementing and dialoguing with the others. The eight films in the program were *Aaaah!* (2023), by Osman Cerfon; *Ciranda Feiticeira* (2023), by Lula Gonzaga and Tiago Delácio; *Entre deux sœurs (To Be Sisters, 2023)*, by Clément Céard and Anne-Sophie Gousset; *Harvey* (2023), by Janice Nadeau; *Indlela Yokuphila: The Soul's Journey* (2023), by Dylan McGarry and Marc Moynihan; *Swimming with Wings* (2023), by Daphna Awadish Golan; *The Goose* (2023), by Jan Mika; and *Va-t'en, Alfred! (Go Away, Alfred!, 2023)*, by Célia Tisserant and Arnaud Demuynck. The films in this program brought forward several different, interlinked facets of childhood, ranging from all its chaos and playfulness to the discovery of the world, friendship, and difficult feelings of loss, adriftness, helplessness, and grief. The films in this program were judged by the OIAF 2023 kids jury, a team of eight- to twelve-year-old jurors, coordinated by New York-based animator and OIAF 2022 jury member, Pilar Newton-Katz. *The Goose*, by Jan Mika, received the competition award, with honourable mentions going to Awadish Golan's *Swimming with Wings* and McGarry and Moynihan's *Indlela Yokuphila: The Soul's Journey*.

The very interesting work being done by the Ottawa International Animation Festival in regards to young audiences—which encompass both children and teenagers (who are represented by the teen audiences 13+ competition)—is complemented by the festival's function as a window to a broader spectrum of animation filmmaking, but with a very directed scope around themes pertinent to these ages and this audience's particular interests. Moreover, the festival cultivates the exercise of critical thinking and creation through the many workshops available for children and teens. Returning to our initial questions, these are all modalities of the affective

possibilities not only of animation, but of an animation film festival of the scope of OIAF, and one with the vision of maintaining the several communities that it locates at the centre of its activities and programs.

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Festival Review

2024 Fantasia International Film Festival

Samuel Thomson

The 28th edition of the Fantasia International Film Festival took place in and around Concordia University's downtown Sir George Williams Campus between July 18 and August 4, 2024. The festival continues to dominate the Montreal film scene, touting itself as the largest genre festival in North America, and attracts a dedicated community of filmgoers to its quirky and eclectic global programming. The attendance at this year's edition—and the buzz that the Fantasia name still carries—proves that the appetite for a venue which takes seriously the work of oft-maligned, so-called lowbrow fare is as large as ever.

The festival has found a secure footing inside a cluttered cinema culture which now looks to be increasingly dominated by niche streaming platforms and social networks dedicated to film. And several works at this year's festival reflected this ongoing shift—from the physical to the digital. As our lives move, piece by piece, app by app, into the screen-based realm, filmmakers are confronted with the challenges inherent to representing the vast and ephemeral landscape of the digital. It is principally a challenge of making the invisible visible—rendering images of the hidden electrical impulses that drive our communications technology—or of *re-representing* the platforms and interfaces we use to engage with such media. But these digital spaces now represent the dominant site of most moving-image consumption and an increasing share of social interaction. Although we may shun social platforms as inherently uncinematic, they drive our culture and politics much like television did before them. And filmmakers need to face them, and work with (or against) their concurrent aesthetic, moral, and political modes.

In Lucía Puenzo's *Electrophilia* (*Los Impactados*, 2023), which had its North American premiere at the festival, the central character is electrified by a lightning

strike, marking and transforming her body and leading her to a group of fellow strike survivors. Here, the moment of electrocution—of *electrification*, maybe—instantly destabilizes Ada's (Mariana Di Girólamo) life. This process of transformation by technologies of energy and of communication winds its way through several of this year's Fantasia highlights. But the change they reckon with is much more subtle: the slow, but persistent, production of a new social and political order driven by screen-based media technologies.

This concern is taken up most directly, and certainly most playfully, in *The Code* (2024). Loosely inspired by the diaristic form of Jun'ichirō Tanizaki's 1956 novel *The Key*, this satirical feature is a caper of surveillance, paranoia, and obsessive self-documentation. In a post-screening discussion, American director Eugene Kotlyarenko said he wanted to play with our "new forms of voyeurism," like those brief glimpses we get of someone's phone over their shoulder. He deploys the ironic disposition and cloying, hyperactive aesthetics of TikTok in his comedy; the film is composed entirely of footage from spy cams, webcams, phones, and social media content. Millennial couple Celine (Dasha Nekrasova) and Jay (Peter Vack) decamp to the California desert in a last-ditch attempt to resuscitate their sexless, mistrustful relationship. Along the way, Celine takes up their trip, and floundering love life, as the subject for her nonfiction film project. Upon arrival they meet zany property manager Parthik (Vishwam Velandy) and are later joined by Celine's unhinged friend, Colette (Ivy Wolk). Through escape rooms, jacuzzi tussles, and covert Viagra drugging, the film echoes the random, restless comedy that propels algorithmically-driven social media content. This is TikTok as cinema. The film, much like its characters, seems too disinterested in the morality of its action to mount anything like a critique. In spite of a few anti-vaxx gags and cancel culture jibes, the messed-up fun-and-games of it all seem too enjoyable to insist on explaining or justifying itself. Yet it takes on the Contemporary Moment with a welcome ironic distance, clearly set on satirizing the frantic digital culture as much as it embraces it. It is the rare pandemic film to be shot a few years after lockdown was lifted and, as a result, it does not treat the moment like a gimmick, but rather a reasonable *framing device*. In recognizing the role the health crisis played in supercharging the platform economy, the film is able to embrace the restless aesthetic in a way that feels natural.

Kotlyarenko has long played with our landscape of new imaging technologies to advance a novel, contemporary aesthetic. His 2020 feature *Spree*, starring *Stranger Things*' Joe Keery, was composed almost entirely of dashcam footage from inside the vehicle of a reckless rideshare driver. Through his willingness to use the oft-neglected mundane, practical moving image technologies, like the spy cam or dashcam, Kotlyarenko's work starts to construct a new cinematic language of our digital age. But it is more than just a novel aesthetic: new narrative shapes emerge from this, too. *The Code* culminates in a twisty, overwrought codebreaking sequence designed by Celine, as genius as it is deranged. In doing so, the film's narrative gestures toward the internet's information surplus and obsession with investigation, spiralling like a compulsive content rabbit hole. The film wears its narrative thread loosely but, like most popular web content, does not need a neat story structure to keep its audi-

ence engaged: when images flow this fast, we do not dare look away.

Fantasia has long maintained its status as a jewel amongst North American festivals for its programming of Asian cinema. This year's edition saw the Canadian Premiere of Filipino animation *The Missing* (*Iti Mapukpukaw*, 2023), written and directed by Carl Joseph Papa and submitted as the Philippines' entry to this year's Academy Awards. Combining digital rotoscope animation with crayon-sketched sequences, the film introduces us to Eric (Carlo Aquino), himself an animator, and his work-crush Carlo (Gio Gahol). Eric is asked by his concerned mother to check on his uncle and, upon discovering his deceased body, is flooded with a wave of memories of abuse at his hand. The film's visual design captures the nuances of its difficult subject: Eric's survival of child sexual abuse and the ensuing trauma. Through rotoscoping, Papa is able to centre the film with a grounded, realist aesthetic upon which surrealist components are mapped. His animation makes visible the physical manifestations of Eric's trauma: his mouth is visibly absent from his face, materializing his inability to speak; later, limbs and other parts literally fall from his body and scurry away as his shame prevents their use. Flashbacks in the film, which explore the horrific source of Eric's trauma, employ an innocent, drawing-like animation style which flickers like a faded memory in contrast to the clean visual schema of the digital rotoscoped image. The film's structure allows this resurfacing of abuse to unfold to us as it does in Eric's head, continually reframing earlier events in the light of later memories. These cartoon sequences amplify, of course, the innocence of young Eric, but also introduce the motif of alien abduction, a visual metaphor which functions to underline the limits of comprehending and coping with such abuse as a child.

The horrors of the film are handled with a deft sensitivity, in large part due to the tender love story at its core. Carlo and Eric's queer romance brims with the awkward gentleness of new love, and a mutual care made all the more profound as Eric's memories continue to resurface. Like *The Code*, it deals, albeit with much more subtlety, with the role of digital technologies on relationships. Its rotoscoped animation style makes the integration of digital screens and text bubbles onto the screen feel seamless and natural. Likewise, Eric's inability to communicate verbally foregrounds these technologies as a necessary tool for fostering connection. Whereas *The Code* presents digital media as technologies of excess—overstimulating and absurd—*The Missing* brings to the foreground their capacity to retain the human voice, even when it might be literally absent.

As usual, the festival effortlessly balanced the harrowing with the jovial. Japanese director Hiroaki Matsuyama has produced a slick and funny whodunnit based on Yumi Tamura's popular manga *Don't Call It Mystery* (2023), which played to an exuberant audience at the festival. The manga now stretches over a dozen volumes, and the story has been taken up as the basis for a television series starring Masaki Suda. Suda reprises his role as detective Totonō Kunō for this film, which positions itself as a standalone from the series. Reminiscent of the *Knives Out* mystery series, the film drops Kunō in the middle of a family feud concerning the inheritance of a large fortune, which can only be obtained by one person after completing a puzzle box-like challenge. As a standalone tale, we are spared any flabby backstory or tire-

some set-up. The film is spare and operates with a charming, steady pace, keeping the stakes of the drama low (where they ought to be).

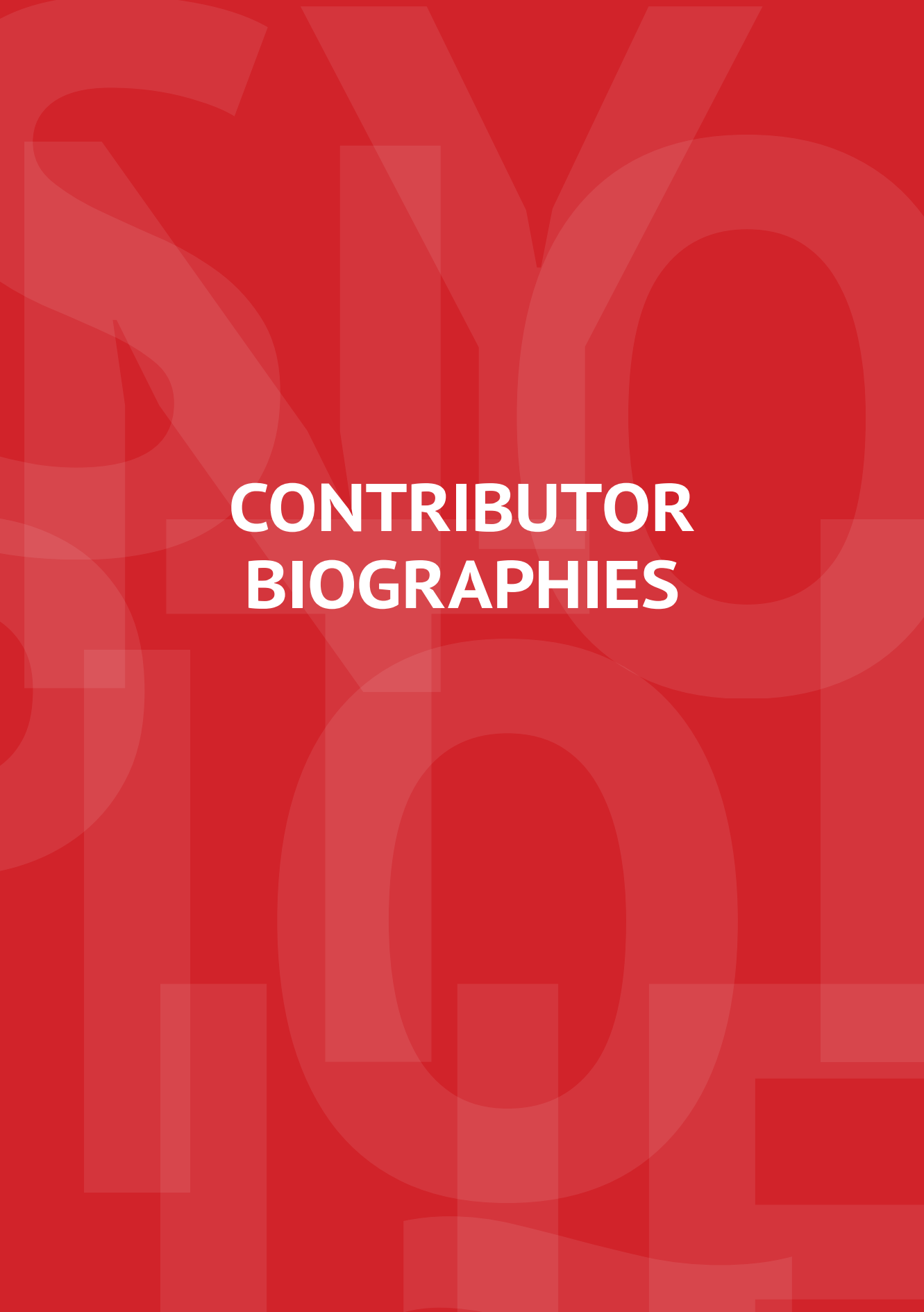
The presentation of the film at this year's Fantasia demonstrates the importance of cross-media work in the streaming age. The film was commissioned by the same television station, Fuji, which launched its counterpart series, and the show became popular in this part of the world after its introduction on streamer Viki. Clearly, building a mini-cinematic universe, bridging graphic novels with moving image media, has fostered a wider international audience. In spite of the film's televisual roots, it remains dazzlingly cinematic. The film's crisp, sharp aesthetic aligns itself closely with popular prestige crime cinema, which plays nicely with its quirky and heterodox characters.

The prevalence of films dealing directly and tangibly with the problems of the digital becomes most apparent when confronted with such technologies' absence. Watching the Kazakhstani thriller *Steppenwolf* (2024), we sense we might not find a screen for several hundred miles. Set in the Kazakh desert, the absence of any media technologies suspends the film in a kind of atemporal state, reinforcing the timelessness of its genre. Adilkhon Yerzhanov's film is sparse in its visuals, characters, and narrative, but this minimalism serves to heighten the inhumanity of its context. Tamara (Anna Starchenko) is mute and despondent after her young son has been taken by organ traffickers. Soon, the "Steppenwolf" (Berik Aytzhanov) appears, without much fanfare, and travels with Tamara across a war-torn landscape to find her boy. The mission is bloody, and the film relishes in its powerful action sequences and vengeful brutality. Both central performances shine in a feature light on dialogue but heavy on affect.

The film drips with a cool, detached machismo produced in part by its crisp landscape visuals and slow rhythm, reminiscent of classic U.S. westerns. But here there are no cowboys, though maybe that is for the best if the merciless *Steppenwolf* is floating around. Yerzhanov separates his film from the often-polemical moralism that drives the earliest entries into the western genre canon. His film, like *The Code*, does not care to dwell on the righteousness of its characters. Despite its vast, vacant desert setting, *Steppenwolf* feels crowded by inhumanity, by the cruelty of the violent state within which its action unfolds. This effect is amplified by the film's almost fetishistic deployment of wide shots, which also help capture the bodily nuances of Aytzhanov and Starchenko's performances as an unlikely pair, sutured together by past trauma and the promise of retribution. Starchenko's performance in particular is remarkable for its subtlety. The excess of violence and action within the film is grounded by her quiet, sincere presence. Her character utters nothing more than the name of her son under her breath, often seemingly mentally adrift from her physical environment, but this serves to anchor the film in its humanity, the sensitive core that keeps it from drifting too far toward mere gore-porn.

As usual, it is Fantasia's versatility—its capacity to combine the high with the lowbrow, the meditative with the destructive—that reinforces its place at the heart of Montreal's film culture. This year's selection brought several of the underlying cultural shifts which threaten its very existence to the surface. Moving image

media will continue their migration toward web-based platforms, under the totemic march of the attention economy. But this year's edition demonstrated it is cinema itself that might offer the best tools with which to counter this advance. Its power lies not just in the bodies on screen and their complicated relationship with the black boxes of glass and circuitry in their pockets, but in the bodies *before* the screen: a community of passionate, weird, and dedicated festivalgoers who drive Fantasia year after year and make it all worth it.



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Camila Garcia Cabrera is a recent graduate of the Cinema & Television Studies Bachelor of Arts from SUNY Purchase College and an advocate for institutional accessibility across physical and digital platforms. During her time there, she co-founded the Purchase Film Archive, an opportunity for students to gain hands-on experience with film material, utilizing the neglected 16mm film collection in the Purchase Library. In doubling the size of the archive, experimentation on multi-media pro-

jects and screenings, including reels ranging from film program screening copies to original editing material from Purchase alumni became possible. Simultaneously running Purchase's student-run radio station WPSR, she expanded the history of the college's vast music scene and founded the archive there, compiling a collection of past documents, analog media, and press materials. Her appreciation for audiovisual material as an art form and educational tool led her to work at Vinegar Syndrome's film archive and multiple live and theatrical venues throughout NYC.

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Lucas Larriera is an audiovisual director, sound designer, and archivist from Argentina. He holds a Master's in Audiovisual Archiving and Preservation and is a founding member of the Argentine Association of Audiovisual Sound Designers. He has worked on the sound department of over 100 films and currently focuses on his work as a researcher and educator. His research projects include „The Transition from Silent to Sound Film in Argentina“ and „Challenges of Restoring Feature Films Produced by Universidad del Cine.“ Larriera is the creator of the community archive on Ningunismo and the pedagogical preservation project Arteleku NOGUI. He is currently leading the restoration of Sebastián Lingiardi's 2010 film, *Las Pistas*, which is set to be re-released in 2026. His work has been recognized with multiple awards for Best Sound at festivals such as Mar del Plata and BAFICI.

Hugo Ljungbäck is a Swedish filmmaker, archivist, curator, and media scholar. His research focuses on queer cinema, experimental film and video, media archaeology, and archival practice, and has appeared in *Found Footage Magazine*, *Cinéma & Cie*,

and *Media, War & Conflict*. His films explore queer history, representation, identity, and sexuality through an autobiographical lens, and have screened at festivals, art galleries, and museums internationally. He is a PhD Candidate in Cinema and Media Studies at the University of Chicago and holds an MFA in Studio Art from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a BFA in Film from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee.

Dr. **Michael Marlatt** is a disabled film archivist, archival producer, and archival accessibility consultant. He received his PhD from York University's Communication and Culture Program where he examined accessibility gaps in moving image archival education. Michael hosts archival accessibility workshops with higher education, broadcast archives, government archives, non-profits, and archival professional organizations. He has worked on projects for documentary filmmakers, TIFF, CFMDC, Archive/Counter-Archive, the Disability Screen Office, and York University. Michael's work on archival accessibility has been included in such journals as *The Moving Image*, *Journal of Film Preservation* and, *Archival Outlook* with chapters in books like *Preserving Disability: Disability and the Archival Profession* and *The Screen Censorship Companion: Critical Explorations in the Control of Film and Screen Media*.

Brian Meacham is the Managing Archivist at the Yale Film Archive, where he has overseen the film collection since 2013. He is responsible for acquisition, inspection, cataloging, and preservation of the Archive's collection. He has overseen the preservation of more than 25 films in the collection and helped launch and program the archive's ongoing 35mm screening series, "Treasures from the Yale Film Archive." He led the Yale Film Archive's application for membership in the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) and is a member of the Board of Directors of the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA). He received a Certificate in Film Preservation from the L. Jeffery Selznick School of Film Preservation and has worked at the Harvard Film Archive and the Academy Film Archive. He teaches a course on the film archive in the Yale Film & Media Studies graduate program, and has published articles in *Film Quarterly*, *The Journal of Film Preservation*, and *The Moving Image*. His current projects include ongoing research into the cultural and technological history of the analog photobooth, as well as the ways in which filmmakers and cinephiles document their movie-going histories.

Lindsay Erin Miller is a media archivist, writer and artist. Originally from North Carolina, her work reflects her archival education, Southern roots, and love of DIY-ethos. When she's not working at Vinegar Syndrome, she can be found making zines, hanging with her cat, and reminding others that pornography is never a substitute for sex education.

Felix Mittelberger studied art history and philosophy at the FAU | Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nuremberg, art science and media theory at the HfG | Hochschule für Gestaltung [University of Art and Design] Karlsruhe and archival

science at the Fachhochschule [University of Applied Science] Potsdam. Responsible for the Institutional Archives and the Archives of Artists and Theorists, he has been working as the chief archivist at the ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe since 2018. His ongoing efforts to make the ZKM archives more visible and accessible also play a decisive role in his academic work since 2020.

Tyisha Murphy is a curator, researcher, and archivist who is currently located in Tiohtià:ke (Montréal) in pursuit of their PhD in Film Studies. Their work prioritizes access to audiovisual objects as essential historical representations for queer communities. Previous research projects have been featured at the AGQ (Archives Gaie du Québec), Mark S. Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies and CFMDC (Canadian Filmmakers' Distribution Centre).

Maria Natalyuk is a Ph.D. student in the combined Slavic and Film and Media Studies program at the University of Pittsburgh. Their research interests include contemporary Russian cinema, youth cultures, transnational cinemas, and cultural exchange between Siberia and Japan. They received their BA in Film Studies and English Literature and an MA in Film and Moving Image Studies from Concordia University in Montreal, Canada.

Madhavi Reddy is Professor and Head of the Department of Media and Communication Studies at Savitribai Phule Pune University and Director In-Charge of the Educational Multimedia Research Centre, Pune. With over two decades of experience in media pedagogy, research, and academic leadership, she was appointed as ICCR Chair Professor at the University of Tübingen, Germany, in 2013. Currently, she is also Director of the School of Communication and Information Sciences at SPPU. Her research encompasses media and cultural studies, representations, digital humanities, Indian cinema and archiving practices supported by grants from the TATA, ICSSR, UGC-DAAD, and the European Union. She received the National Film Award ('Rajat Kamal') for Best Short Documentary as Producer and an Erasmus+ Faculty Mobility Fellowship to Greece in 2023. Widely published in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes, she has convened numerous national and international conferences and, since 2012, serves as Festival Director of the DMCS National Short Film Festival.

Agustín Rugiero Bader is a PhD candidate in the Department of Film and Moving Image Studies at Concordia University, Montreal, Canada. He has a Master's degree from Universitat Pompeu Fabra. His lines of study are militant cinema, global art cinema, and the representation of state-sponsored mass murders in Latin America and Southeast Asia, especially in connection with United States interference. His work has been published in *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos* (n. 39) and *Comparative Cinema*, and he has a chapter on Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Memoria* (2021) in the forthcoming book by the research collective CORERISC. He is currently the recipient of a provincial government grant from the Fonds de Recherche

du Québec: Société et Culture (FRQSC).

Fernanda Alves Salgado is a researcher and creator from Brazil. She is currently working on her PhD in Film Studies at Concordia University, in which she investigates contemporary Black female experimental animation as sites and strategies of decolonial counternarratives, within an intersectional theoretical framework. Co-founder of the Apiário Estudio Criativo, she works as a scriptwriter and creative director, and is currently in production with the animated feature film *Ana, en passant*, set to be released in 2026.

Amir Hossein Siadat is a film researcher, teacher, and critic, currently pursuing a PhD in Film and Moving Image Studies at Concordia University in Montreal. A member of the Association of Iranian Film Critics, he has contributed film articles for over 15 years, writing for Iranian magazines such as *Film*, *Chāhār*, *Filmkhāneh*, and *Cinema va Adabiāt*, as well as international publications including *Senses of Cinema*. He served as Director of the Cinematheque at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art for more than five years, where he curated a number of international film weeks in Iran. His publications include *Yek Daricheh*, *Yek Cherāgh* (*Hatch & Light: A Collection of Cinematic Articles*) and, co-authored with Sahar Khoshnam, a study of *Shatranj-e Bad* (*The Chess of the Wind*, Mohammad Reza Aslani, 1976).

Aparna Subramanian is a Fulbright Fellow and alumnus of NYU's Moving Image Archiving and Preservation program. She has over a decade of experience in audiovisual and film archiving across India, Southeast Asia, and the United States. She is serving on the Board of Directors (2024-2026) at the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA). Aparna specializes in aligning best practices with innovative strategies to navigate the complex intersections of policy, education, and archival practice—particularly in media formats, preservation, collection management, and archival administration. She has worked as technical expert for the National Film Heritage Mission at National Film Archive of India, and as consultant for Southeast Asian archives through Monolith Technologies. Aparna also has experience of working with the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, Weill Cornell Medicine, and New York University. She currently works as Film Research Officer at the Film and Television Institute of India.

Kimberly Tarr is a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Martin Scorsese Department of Cinema Studies at NYU, where she also serves as Associate Director of the Moving Image Archiving and Preservation (MIAP) program. She previously managed NYU's media preservation operations, overseeing digitization labs and developing long-term preservation strategies for audiovisual collections in NYU Libraries and Special Collections. Prior to her work at NYU, Tarr held positions at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History and the New York Public Library. She has played a central role in the preservation and restoration of numerous significant works, including *The Grim Game* (1919), the first feature film to star

Harry Houdini, and *Fresh Kill* (1994), an eco-feminist feature by Shu Lea Cheang. She earned a B.A. in American Studies from UC Berkeley and an M.A. from NYU's MIAP program.

Samuel Thomson is a doctoral student in Film and Moving Image Studies at Concordia University. His research focuses on nonfiction and artists' cinemas within digital culture and the attention economy.

Petra Totten (BA '18, MFA '21) is a Vanier Scholar and PhD Candidate at the University of Toronto working in nonfiction film and video. Her work has won awards at the Emmys and InsideOut, and has been presented in film festivals, academic journals, and zines across North America, Asia, and Europe. In writing and film, her work is grounded in lived experience: She formulates arguments for trans+ life and advocates for widening the boundaries of artistic expression in nonfiction film.

Merve Ünsal is an artist who lives and works in Istanbul and Santa Cruz. She works around methods of tuning in. She thinks through the media of photography, video, radio, sound, performance, and site-specific installations. She has shown her work in a variety of contexts across the world, most often through artist-driven initiatives in Beirut, Berlin, Cairo, New Delhi, Toronto; she has been supported by the Delfina Foundation (London), Praksis (Oslo), Fogo Island Arts, Art Metropole (Toronto), and University of Delaware (Lewes) to participate in artist residencies. She took part in the learning program at Ashkal Alwan (Beirut), Homework Space in 2014-2015. Merve is the founding editor of the artist-centred platform m-est.org. She co-facilitated the Arter Research Programme, 2019-2021. Merve is a PhD candidate in Film and Digital Media Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz, with a designated emphasis in History of Consciousness.

Patricia Ledesma Villon is a curator, moving image archivist, and researcher. She is Assistant Curator of Moving Image at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Since 2019, she has been a member and co-organizer of Light Field, an annual exhibition of recent and historical moving image art on film in the San Francisco Bay Area, and is a former member of Black Hole Collective Film Lab in Oakland, California. Her writing appears in *Cinergie — Il Cinema e le altre Arti* and *The Moving Image*. She serves on the Board of Directors of Canyon Cinema Foundation, a historic distributor of experimental, avant-garde, and artist-made films, and holds an MLIS with a specialization in Media Archival Studies from UCLA.

Travis L. Wagner is an assistant professor in the School of Information Sciences at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Wagner's research interests include critical information studies, queer archives, and LGBTQIA+ advocacy in sociotechnical systems. Their work investigates how LGBTQIA+ communities create identity in opposition to sociotechnical systems that characterize and limit those identities. Multiple projects within the classroom and with community organizations have led

to Wagner exploring and publishing the unique relationships between obsolete archival mediums and queer counter-historical work across archival contexts. Their recent publications include articles in the *Journal of Information Science*, *Journal of Documentation* and *Artifact & Apparatus*. Wagner previously served as a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Archival Futures (CAFe) and the Recovery and Reuse of Archival Data Lab (RRAD) within UMD's College of Information. They are the co-creator of the Queer Cola Oral History and Digital Archive.

Yung-Lin Wang is an art critic and curator based between Taipei and Toronto. She is a PhD candidate in Cinema Studies at the University of Toronto. Her research focuses on Taiwanese gallery-based films, national identity in the post-Cold War era, and the cinematic migration into museum spaces. She previously served on the board of Pleasure Dome (2019–2020), was a lecturer at the National Taiwan University of Arts, and director of Polymer Art Factory. She has curated internationally for museums and art spaces, including the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Tina Keng Gallery, and ARKO Art Museum. Her writing centers on video art, art/science, and avant-garde movements across Asia, Africa, and South America. Yung-Lin is a columnist for *Fountain* and *The Art Press Asia* and contributes widely to art publications. Her work has received multiple awards and grants from institutions in Taiwan, Korea, and Canada.

Thomas Waugh is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the School of Cinema, Concordia University. He was born in 1948 in London, Ontario. He graduated from Guelph Collegiate, Western University, and Columbia University. He is a teacher, programmer, writer, critic, activist, swimmer, cyclist, cook, pianist, and sauna aficionado. He retired in 2017 after 41 years of teaching film studies and sexuality/queer studies at Concordia. He is the author, compiler, and editor of 15 books, the most recent being *Writing in the Flesh: Essays on My Lives, My Bodies, My Families, My Places, My Movies* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2026). He is the co-editor, with Matthew Hays, of the 30+-book series *Queer Film Classics* (Arsenal Pulp, Vancouver; MQUP). He is the winner of the Katherine Singer Kovács Book Award (Society for Cinema and Media Studies, 2017) for the monograph *The Conscience of Cinema: The Work of Joris Ivens, 1912–1989* (Amsterdam University Press). He is also the founder of the Concordia AIDS Project/Community Lecture Series on HIV/AIDS (1993–2017), and of the Queer Media Database Canada/Quebec (2006–present). He was also a visiting professor in Film Studies at the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad (2018–19).

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Thank you to Sandra Gibson and Luis Recoder for allowing us to use their artwork on the front and back cover of this issue.

Front cover: Gibson + Recoder, *Light Spill* (2005), 16mm film, modified 16mm projector, screen, dimensions variable. Installation view, *Celluloid: Tática Dean, João Maria Gusmão & Pedro Paiva, Rosa Barba, Sandra Gibson & Luis Recoder*, EYE Film Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, September 17, 2016–January 8, 2017. Photo: Studio Hans Wilschut. Courtesy of the artists and EYE Film Museum.

Back cover: Gibson + Recoder, *VHS (Dropout)* (2019), VHS videotape, steel trash-can, hardware, 88 x 48 x 54 inches. Installation view, *VHS (T.)A.P.E.: Gibson + Recoder*, A.P.E. Ltd., Northampton, MA, March 5–April 30, 2020. Photo: Gibson + Recoder. Courtesy of the artists.

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