

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

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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).<sup>1</sup> 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).<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> 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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