

**CANADIAN AUDIOVISUAL ARCHIVES:  
THE POLITICS OF PRESERVATION AND ACCESS**

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## **Abstract**

In 2005, in the spirit of Canada's *total archives* philosophy, the Western University Archives in London, Ontario acquired over ninety regional films on 8mm. Archival staff digitized the films in a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) fashion: they were simply repaired, projected, and captured off the wall with a digital camera. The raw files were then processed and given basic titling before being exported onto DVDs for public and institutional sale. While digitization was quite rudimentary, the public has access to a forgotten regional history. This dissertation analyzes the tensions and politics of audiovisual acquisition, preservation, and dissemination by recounting steps taken by DIY archivists to bring films from a personal archive to an institutional archive.

I trace this collection of amateur itinerant films as they move from the filmmaker's home in Dundee, New York, to the Western Archives. Reverend Leroy (Roy) Masecar (1918-2003) was a Baptist Minister and itinerant filmmaker who between 1947-1949 visited over ninety towns throughout Central and Southwestern Ontario, documenting daily life, screening films in these towns as "Stars of the Town – See Yourself and Your Friends on the Screen!" and capturing the fleeting energy of small town rural Ontario.

The dissertation mobilizes what Canadian archivist Terry Cook calls, "archival contextual knowledge," a history from the bottom-up, and uses this case study to highlight larger issues facing Canadian audiovisual collections in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century: the shifting value in antiquated audiovisual formats and marginal film collections; the tension between professional preservation and public access; the hidden labour of audiovisual archivists; and the politics of DIY audiovisual discourse. I make the labour and bureaucracy of traditional archives visible by examining the discourses of the Archive not only within a theoretical space, but also in actual

archive spaces – whether physical or digital. I argue that bringing transparency to the roles and actions of donors, artists, archivists, scholars, and the public will allow for the larger ecology of Canadian audiovisual preservation to be activated, allowing actors in each point of the cycle to collectively move towards a holistic and networked audiovisual preservation strategy.

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## Introduction

Between 1947 and 1949, Reverend Leroy (Roy) Masseur traveled around Central and Southwestern Ontario filming life in nearly one hundred small towns in the region. Shortly after the initial filming, he would return to each town to put on a show, “The Stars of the Town: See Yourself and Your Friends on the Screen!” and sell tickets to the screenings to earn a modest income to support his wife and children. His films were sometimes copied and sold to locals, and came to be considered home movies for the towns they depicted. Masseur and his family moved to Ohio in 1949, eventually settling in Dundee, New York, where the Ontario films laid dormant in a shed for decades. In the early 2000s, Mary Kirkland, one of the former children captured in Masseur’s films, began a search for the man who had brought “Stars of the Town” to her hometown of Dutton, southwest of London, Ontario. Her search for the films eventually led to the collection of more than ninety 8mm films being acquired in 2005 by Western University in London.<sup>1</sup> John H. Lutman, who was the Head of the J.J. Talman Regional Collection at the Western Archives, spearheaded the acquisition of the collection. Upon their arrival, the films were digitized in a DIY (do-it-yourself) fashion: they were simply repaired, projected, and captured off the wall with a Canon GL 2 digital camera onto MiniDV. The raw files were then imported into Final Cut Pro for basic titling and exported for DVDs. One set of “Stars of the Town” remains in house at the Western Archives, while copies of the individual films or sets are available for purchase by the public and regional institutions.

The Masseur Collection is an unorthodox DIY case study to consider the status of audiovisual collections in Canada and the role of the audiovisual archivists in the ecosystem of preservation, dissemination, and access. The Western Archives does not have an audiovisual

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<sup>1</sup> The University of Western Ontario underwent a rebranding in 2012 to become Western

archivist, nor does it specialize in film preservation. At the time of this acquisition, Western did not have standardized audiovisual preservation practices. Nevertheless, this DIY digitization was done with enthusiasm and commitment. The fact that a film collection of this size was processed, digitized, and made accessible to the public is remarkable.



Image 1 – Massecar’s “Stars of the Town” posters.

This dissertation traces the Massecar Collection as it passes from a personal collection to becoming part of official Canadian moving image history.<sup>2</sup> By following a specific case study to map and unpack the nature of Canada’s traditional archives, I critically examine the ways in which culture, history, and memory are created, how documents are valued, and the ways they

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that this collection, while it operates on the margins of traditional cinema and archival collecting, is still privileged as part of the white colonial settler history of Canada. It documents post-war white Canadian settler-colonial towns and villages in central and Southwestern Ontario and does not reflect the history of the original indigenous keepers of these territories.



are deemed worthy of remembrance through the process of acquisition, preservation, digitization, and access. In examining the passage of these films from private to public, larger issues around audiovisual archiving reveal themselves—primarily how we treat audiovisual objects (audiovisual images they contain vs. technological objects), and the important debate regarding preservation vs. access (safeguarding original analog materials and the dissemination of digital facsimiles). The case of the Massecar Collection also reveals the hierarchies of knowledge that operate in archives as institutions, including the separation of traditional archivists and audiovisual archivists, and the hierarchy of primary sources—how traditional institutional paper records of “official history” are valued over alternative historical records like diaries, journals, photographs, and audiovisual records that reflect a social history.

In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, archives began to face the challenge of keeping up with collecting. In the midst of the post-war industrial and technological boom, records and documents – and the formats they proliferated on—expanded exponentially. Archives were pressed to compromise their primary ethical rule of *respect des fonds* and provenance to tackle the issue of no longer being able to store everything acquired by a donor. The ethics of selection and principles of deciding what was of cultural and historical value became a focus of archival theory—and continues to be an ongoing debate today. In a Canadian context, the National Archives (now Library and Archives Canada (LAC)) faced an additional hurdle due to its founding philosophy of being a *total archive*.

Under the *total archive* philosophy, Canadian public archives are responsible for the collection of not only government records, but also private records that are deemed of historical significance in all media formats: art, books/manuscripts, maps, photographs, and audiovisual

media.<sup>3</sup> Since the inception of the Dominion Archives of Canada in 1872, Canadian public archives have been invested in this practice, as it was the belief of the federal government that it was their responsibility to nurture the cultural identity of a young country. The Public Archives Act of 1912 states:

The Public Archives shall consist of all such public records, documents and other historical material of every kind, nature and description as, under this act, or under the authority of any order in council made by virtue thereof, are placed under the care, custody and control of the Dominion Archivist.<sup>4</sup>

This model also made practical sense in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when Canada had not yet established a national art gallery or library. While the concept of total archives has been the philosophy of Canadian public archives since its inception, the term itself did not come into being until the 1970s.

Dominion Archivist Wilfred Smith coined the term *total archive* in 1972 in his introduction to *Archives: Mirror of Canada Past*, a publication celebrating the centennial of the Public Archives of Canada.<sup>5</sup> Yet by the 1970s, the task of collecting records and documents on a wide variety of formats was becoming a burden for federal and provincial archivists. Specialization was needed, but the notion of separating collections by format would disturb the provenance of a fond. The archives needed the help of a network to support collections, yet at the same time, archivists did not want to hand over the responsibility of collecting a wide range of formats to the library or museum systems.<sup>6</sup> In 1978, a “Consultative Group on Canadian Archives” was established to examine the validity of total archives in a shifting political and

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<sup>3</sup> Laura Millar, “Coming Up With Plan B: Considering the Future of Canadian Archives,” *Archivaria* 77 (2014): 110.

<sup>4</sup> *An Act Respecting the Public Archives* (1912), qtd. in Millar, “Coming Up With Plan B,” 110.

<sup>5</sup> Millar, “Coming Up with Plan B,” 117.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

social climate. The growing diversity of community collections revealed that total archives needed to be redefined in order to reflect the changes in the make-up of Canadian society. The Group put forth the notion that total archives “was better applied by decentralizing records care and by helping the creators of records to look after for their own materials, for their own benefit and for the benefit of society.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, by the late 1970s, total archives shifted in definition from public government archives being solely responsible for the preservation of documentary heritage to reflect the increased local, regional, and private sector participation in archival preservation.<sup>8</sup> Total archives in Canada now works within an archival system or network, allowing regional collections to be housed within the communities in which they were the most relevant and meaningful to. Yet, the downfall of this network has been the imbalance in funding and infrastructure for regional, local, and community archives, especially in support for the preservation of unique media such a film.

The Masseur Collection demonstrates total archives in action - but without the expertise in film preservation. It is DIY total archives. Lutman saw the significance of the collection that John and Mary Kirkland brought to his attention, and in the spirit of total archives and its archival system, took it on regardless of whether he possessed the knowledge or expertise to handle film. He turned to Media Assistant Alan Noon and filmmaker Charlie Egleston to support the acquisition through digitization, though it was all DIY. The films were not preserved following audiovisual archival standards, but they are kept in climate-controlled storage. While the films have been digitized, it was done quite crudely. Thus the collection demonstrates how a traditional archive was able to make-do and honour the notion of total archives, while highlighting a lack of infrastructure or support for audiovisual collections to be properly cared

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

for within traditional memory institutions. The Massecar Collection complicates/troubles total archives and reveals the systemic issues, while also offering a story of making-do, which is a challenge that every archive faces.

I contrast the Massecar Collection located at a university archive against larger institutional issues faced by Canada's archival network. Focusing on Library and Archives Canada, I examine the larger political climate that was at play during digitization of the Massecar Collection and also historically consider how LAC has played a pivotal role in the history of audiovisual archiving in Canada. I focus on Library and Archives Canada because the climate within this national institution led to a ripple effect throughout the Canadian archival community during the undertaking of this research project. Budget cuts to the Ministry of Heritage by the Harper Government (February 6, 2006 to November 4, 2015) resulted in major staff cuts, the suspension of frontline public services, and the dismantling of valuable libraries and archives across Canada. The Ministry of Heritage's appointment of economist Daniel Caron as Head of LAC also led to a lack of stability in terms of a ways forward with a national strategy to address how to move Canadian libraries and archives into the digital world. I highlight the top-down political decision-making that through a trickle-down effect framed the bottom-up DIY choices of the Western University Archives. I take up LAC as the comparison institution to the Western Archives due to its national role in leading Canada's memory institutions across the total archive network.

Archives have been in "crisis" since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, a crisis that has only been exacerbated by the digital turn since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The anxiety around cultural memory and the inability to map, save, and remember is what Pierre Nora has called a symptom of the "acceleration of history," in a time when digital networks have revealed the intricacies of

bottom-up meta-histories lying beneath the floorboards of the colonial Grand Historical Narrative.<sup>9</sup>

This upsurge in meta-histories makes it difficult for traditional archives to prioritize in terms of what should be saved. Most government institutions continue to prioritize the records they have the most familiarity with, which are primarily print sources. Audiovisual formats have long been approached with wariness – especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where the demand to migrate these formats for digital accessibility has put overwhelming demands on archival staff, infrastructure, and resources. Nevertheless, this work is being chipped away at within these limitations, and archivists and archival staff are accustomed to operating from a place of making-do.

The archival turn in the mid-1990s separated the archives — the actual spaces, and acts of archiving — from the Archive: a theoretical space, “a metaphoric symbol, as a representation of identity, or as the recorded memory production of some person, or group or culture.”<sup>10</sup> In doing so, Canadian archivist Terry Cook argues that the separation between the theoretical notion of the Archive and the act of archiving overshadowed the historical traces that items are imbued with as they are inscribed into a collection. The preoccupation with the Archive as a site of theoretical exploration or an “archive fever” (in Jacques Derrida’s famous formulation), had quite literally taken over theorists, as the realization of the impossibilities of the total archive, total research, or total knowledge began to sink in. Okwui Enwezor and Hal Foster highlight this

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<sup>9</sup> Pierre Nora, “The Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory,” *Tr@nsit Online* 22 (2002) <http://www.iwm.at/transit/transit-online/the-reasons-for-the-current-upsurge-in-memory/> (accessed April 24, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Terry Cook, “The Archive(s) Is A Foreign Country” *Historians, Archivists and the Changing Archival Landscape*, *The Canadian Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (2009): 198.

as a turning point in the 1990s: the archive was no longer represented as a cohesive entity but as a fragmented and fractured palimpsest.<sup>11</sup>

Hayden White remarked in the late 1990s, “I think the problem now, at the end of the twentieth century, is how we re-imagine history outside of the categories that we inherited from the nineteenth century.”<sup>12</sup> The focus on the archive as a site of this re-imagination by scholars revealed its 19<sup>th</sup> century positivist roots and the urgent need to re-evaluate what archives must become. While Jacques Derrida delved into the Freudian and Laconic realms of memory and retrieval in *Archive Fever*, he reminded scholars that archives are inherently pointed to and concerned with the future.<sup>13</sup>

This dissertation, *Canadian Audiovisual Archives: The Politics of Preservation and Access* aims to explore, through the case study of the Masseur Collection, the ways in which archivists are re-imagining the archive to make room for audiovisual archives, and making-do within the constraints of traditional archives that are still lumbering out of their 19<sup>th</sup> century institutional practices. Archivists face the constraints and tensions that are irresolvable everyday: there will never be enough time, money, and technology to archive everything. It is not possible to save it all, and placing the burden on centralized national institutions is not the answer. This case study exposes the imbalances and constraints while celebrating the archival community that makes-do through DIY practices. This dissertation aims to contribute to the field of Canadian film and media studies by highlighting the importance of audiovisual archivists in the ecosystem

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<sup>11</sup> Okuwui Enwezor, “Photography Between History and the Monument,” in *Archive Fever – Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*. (Steidl: Gottingen, 2008), 11-51; Hal Foster, “An Archival Impulse.” *October* 110 (2004): 3-22.

<sup>12</sup> Hayden White, “Interview with Hayden White,” in *Encounters: Philosophy of History after Postmodernism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 34.

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: a Freudian Impression* trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University Press, 1996), 68.

of preservation and access. I am advocating for the recognition of audiovisual archivists by speaking to the hidden labour they perform that makes historical research by scholars, and the general public possible. This dissertation examines the climate of archival and audiovisual preservation over the past thirty years in order to understand how the landscape of audiovisual collections has changed under rapid transformations in technology, funding structures, and governments. The result is a snapshot of the archival ecosystem in Canada, revealing where particular parts of its lifecycle are depleted and/or failing. In highlighting areas in the lifecycle that are experiencing stress, I aim to reveal the ways in which other actors in the system could participate and advocate for solutions and pool resources to relieve pressure where it is critical. In having a better understanding of the entire archival ecosystem, scholars, artists, and the public could articulate, commiserate, and better understand the conditions under which audiovisual archivists, archival staff, and those who manage collections are trying to safeguard historical records, while also attempting to make them accessible. By tracing this collection as it moves from a personal collection to one housed at the Western University Archives, this dissertation exposes and explores the structural and political problems underpinning moving image archiving in Canada.

My approach to the examination of the audiovisual archival ecosystem is admittedly from the margins. Marginal cinema, for the purposes of this dissertation, is defined as small gauge film (8mm, 28mm, Super 8, 16mm), non-commercial cinema created and disseminated outside of the scope of theatrical commercial productions. These films sit on the periphery of popular moving image culture, while also being predominantly situated on the margins of collections within traditional archives. This includes artisanal film, newsreels, found footage, orphan film, DIY independent film, itinerant film, amateur film (advanced/point-and-shoot), and home

movies. I have chosen the word marginal to describe small gauge film due to the notion of the margins that continuously surfaces within literature on archives, special collections, and more specifically, small gauge archival collections. Marginal is activated to describe labour being done around small gauge film within smaller community, local, or regional archives as opposed to larger institutions, while also acting as a call to traditional archivists in larger institutions to seek out diversity in the types of materials they acquire.<sup>14</sup> Marginal, in the traditional archival use of the word, often refers to the power and privileging of popular or official top-down histories, while marginalizing the records (in whatever format they may be) of those from minority groups based on race, religion, or sexual orientation.<sup>15</sup> Marginal evokes a power relation between the dominant or popular historical narrative in the archive and those who are under represented. Thus I use the term marginal cinema or film to encompass small gauge cinema that has existed on the periphery of film history and archival collections. While small gauge cinema has become a part of the larger scope of the moving image history and an emerging priority in archiving in the last thirty years, it is still spoken about as something very much on the peripheries of these fields.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, while I focus on a collection of amateur itinerant films, the dissertation speaks to the overarching relationship of marginal cinema to traditional archives. I have chosen this way into studying the ecosystem of Canadian audiovisual archives, which I define as the interrelation and the interdependence of materials, technologies, institutions, and labor, in order to understand

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<sup>14</sup> Terry Cook, "Evidence, memory, identity and community: four shifting archival paradigms," *Archival Science* 13 (2013): 110; Rick Prelinger, "Archives and Access in the 21st Century," *Cinema Journal* 46, no. 3 (2007): 115.

<sup>15</sup> Cook, "The Archive is a Foreign Country," 513.

<sup>16</sup> Rick Prelinger, "Points of Origin: Discovering Ourselves through Access," *The Moving Image* 9, no.2 (2009): 172; Alexandra Schneider, "Time travel with Pathé Baby: The small-gauge film collection as historical archive," *Film History* 19 (2007): 353.



the traditional, hierarchical, and inherently national and colonial archival system that operates in Canadian archives. In studying the system from the margins, one can see how the system treats the most vulnerable and precarious records of history.

Since Patricia Zimmermann's book *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* was published in 1995, there has been much more attention paid to the role of amateur or marginal film in cinema and media studies. This dissertation will add to the budding new histories of Canada's film culture, modes of exhibition, and film practices outside of the well-researched realms of the National Film Board, experimental, documentary, and independent art cinema. Approaching history from a bottom-up perspective does not necessarily give a conclusive or over-arching impression of Canadian film history; rather, it creates constellations of knowledge to which we must continue to add in order for the research and the historiographies to reflect the living and active collections communities are creating.

By studying the Roy Masseur Collection, my hope is to contribute to the local histories of these communities, and in so doing to understand how archivists have become pivotal creators and animators of public networks—linking individuals to new forms of genealogy and history through moving images. My intervention into these networks is to link this fond of itinerant amateur cinema to larger cinema and media studies communities in order to promote the alternative histories that can be gleaned from this collection, in addition to modeling how amateur film culture and its modes of practice and exhibition can intersect with other amateur and local collections.

### **The Masseur Collection**

The Masseur Collection was acquired by Western University in 2005. The collection of more than ninety 8mm films were then digitized in-house and released on DVDs in 2008. Shot

between 1947-49, the collection depicts postwar life in towns located in Central and Southwestern Ontario. Reverend Leroy (Roy) Masecar (1918-2003) was a Baptist Minister who turned to amateur itinerant filmmaking to supplement his income in order to support his wife Marion and two children. Over the course of three years, Masecar visited over ninety towns, shooting main streets, local industry, events, and daily life. Before visiting a town, Masecar would contact the local mayor, minister, or school master to let them know about his interest in visiting and shooting the activities of the town. As an entrepreneur, Masecar was interested in capturing as many people as he could in order to fill the theatre, town hall, or library with spectators upon his return. Before leaving town, Masecar would advertise his date of return to the town with posters stating, "The Stars of the Town: See Yourself and Your Friends on the Screen!" Taking the footage home, he would send it away for developing, and splice the returned film footage together on reels. The admission fee for screenings was 45 cents for adults and 25 cents for children. Copies of the films could be purchased for 35 dollars. The reaction from these communities was positive: people would come to see the shows and would often stay for the second screening. Sometimes Masecar would rewind the reel through the gate to garner laughs.

He shot the films on 8mm Bolex in black and white, often making his own reels for projection out of cardboard apple boxes, which were also often used to document the date and place of the screening, venue costs, attendance and door sales. These films came to be considered home movies for the towns they depicted. Archivist John H. Lutman who spearheaded the acquisition of the collection on behalf of Western writes,

The Stars of the Town encapsulates and preserves an era frozen in time, depicting the way and pace of life that epitomized small town 'old Ontario' in the immediate post World War II era. Indeed, in terms of societal life and structure, the small towns depicted in the films have not

changed since the later decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For this reason, the films are of particular archival and historical interest as primary source documents. The films provide a unique opportunity to view the everyday, unrehearsed lives of ordinary people residing in the [S]outhwestern Ontario region. They depict a time when small towns, tied symbiotically to their immediate agricultural hinterland, were prosperous and self-sufficient and formed the backbone of society. People worked and played in the towns where they lived. The films capture busy and active main streets bustling with commerce; people shopping at the corner grocery store or butcher shop; office and factory workers typing at their desks or operating machinery; clothing fashions of the era; the various means of transport – horse drawn milk wagons and buckboards alongside farm tractors, vintage cars and trucks, and recent models; trains powered by steam locomotives pulling freight and passenger cars; farmers [ploughing], tilling and harvesting in the nearby fields; children playing baseball on the school grounds, engaging in a game of hockey on a frozen pond or diving into the water at the local swimming hole; people attending fall fairs and community hall dances or engaging in amateur theatricals and minstrel shows; and most other activities associated with small town life.<sup>17</sup>

“Stars of the Town” came to an abrupt ending in 1949, when the Masecars relocated to Ohio, and later to Dundee, New York in the late 1950s. While in Ohio, he attempted a new iteration of “Stars of the Town,” but without much success.

These films lay dormant in the Masecar home until 2001 when Mary Kirkland, a resident of London, Ontario, recalled attending a Stars of the Town screening as a young woman, while working on the planning committee for her high school reunion in Dutton, Ontario. She began her search for Masecar to see if it was possible to screen the film he made in Dutton for the reunion. After a search full of serendipity, she finally connected with Marion and Roy in Dundee. They agreed to find the film and ship it to her. Masecar passed away in 2003, though the Kirklands had kept in touch with his wife Marion. In their correspondence, it was revealed that there were other towns that he shot in his amateur filmmaking days. When Mary and her

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<sup>17</sup> John Lutman, “Stars of the Town: A Visual Archive Frozen in Time,” Unpublished Article, 2011, London, ON.

husband John received the list containing all the towns Masseur has visited between 1947-49, they brought it to the attention of John H. Lutman, an archivist at Western University, to see if there was any interest in acquiring the films. Lutman contacted Marion Masseur in the spring of 2005 to officially request the collection on behalf of the Western Archives. With the support of the Kirklands and Marion, the collection was officially acquired in September of that year.

Upon their arrival, the films were digitized in a DIY (do-it-yourself) fashion: they were simply repaired, projected, and captured off the wall with a Canon GL 2 digital camera onto MiniDV. The raw files were then imported into Final Cut Pro for basic titling and exported for DVDs. As previously mentioned, one set of “Stars of the Town” remains in house at the Western Archives, while the individual films or sets are available for purchase by the public and institutions.

The Masseur Collection is an unorthodox DIY case study to consider the status of audiovisual collections in Canada, and the role of the audiovisual archivists in the ecosystem of preservation, dissemination and access. Unlike most film collections, the original 8mm prints are stored in archival boxes used for paper record storage, on their original reels, and some still in their original film cans. After the films had been digitized, the archive treated the prints similar to physical artifacts that could be physically viewed and handled by researchers rather than as audiovisual elements that contained moving images. The digital masters for the “Stars of the Town” DVDs are MiniDV tapes – a now obsolete digital format that produces a resolution well below the quality of today’s digitization standards. MiniDV is infamous for having a short shelf life due to its cheap tape bindings that can easily separate, rendering information irretrievable. Digital migration of the raw QuickTime files made from the digital masters will be crucial in order to be able to access these images decades from now. Nevertheless, while this DIY

digitization was done precariously, the fact that a film collection of this size has been processed, digitized, and is accessible to the public is remarkable.

In this way, I see the Massecar Collection as DIY in every sense – from its creation, to exhibition, ad hoc preservation, and digital dissemination. Massecar’s original amateur films were raw footage that was rarely edited. The films were simply captured on a three-minute cartridge of film, and spliced together chronologically to create a sequence of events. His mode of exhibition and distribution was also completely DIY in that he operated autonomously from commercial modes of cinematic, production, distribution, or exhibition.<sup>18</sup> The acquisition of the collection by Western was unorthodox in that the university predominantly collects paper records, and does not have experience handling or preserving film. The DIY approach to the preservation and digitization of Massecar Collection embodies the complications and contradictions in how audiovisual collections are cared for currently in Canadian memory institutions.

### **Making Do: Do-It-Yourself**

Do-It-Yourself (DIY) culture can be traced back to several different movements. Its earliest iterations are linked to women’s handicrafts and home-making, which situates DIY as an inherently domestic practice, and is seen to be an amateur and self-directed pursuit. DIY is synonymous with the notion of the “passion project” or leisure hobby – something taken up beside or in addition to professional labour.<sup>19</sup> Its 18<sup>th</sup> century industrial roots highlight the

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<sup>18</sup> It should be noted, however, that this mode of itinerant filmmaking had been popular in the U.S. and Canada decades earlier, which is where he likely got the idea to tour. For a comprehensive list of tours see Caroline Frick’s article “Itinerant Filmography, North America,” *The Moving Image* 10, no. 1 (2010): 170-181.

<sup>19</sup> Clive Edwards, “Home Is Where the Art Is: Women, Handicrafts and Home Improvements 1750-1900,” *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 1 (2006): 11.

division of work and leisure wherein “the ideology of the workplace infiltrated the home in the form of productive leisure.”<sup>20</sup> It is this bifurcation of professional and amateur that makes DIY culture contradictory, as it bumps up against, lends itself to, and bleeds into the professional in the ways in which it may mimic or strive for a professional aesthetic.

“Essential DIY,” as Paul Atkinson calls it, came about as part of the war effort, specifically in the U.K.<sup>21</sup> The working class were encouraged to “Make Do and Mend,” promoting re-use and thriftiness in light of war rationing. DIY came to signify that you were socially doing your part to keep up morale. In the United States, the term came to signify social aspirations: “The war provided men and women with technical skills, confidence and a predisposition toward using their resourcefulness.”<sup>22</sup> In a post-war era this translated into gendered domestic roles of the “handy-man,” and feminine homemaker instilling a sense of responsibility in the American middle-class to care for themselves and their families. Yet this form of DIY culture was subsumed under a mid-century culture of consumption, which emphasized ready-mades and replacement rather than repair.

In opposition to this consumer culture emerges a DIY culture of democracy that celebrates independence, self-reliance, and freedom from (or the absence of) professional help. This iteration of DIY culture celebrates the democratization of the work process, “allowing decision-making and freedom from supervision at levels unlikely to be available at work itself.”<sup>23</sup> This links to the punk-political evocation of DIY wherein DIY culture undermines capitalism and consumer culture, overturning the need to purchase or the desire to engage in a

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Atkinson, “Introduction: Do It Yourself: Democracy and Design,” *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 1 (2006): 3.

<sup>21</sup> Atkinson, “Democracy and Design,” 4.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 6.

monetary exchange. Always in opposition to an established order, political or radical DIY politics explores and organizes organically to suit the needs of a cause or project – gathering like-minded people with specialized skills sets to achieve an end goal collectively. In doing so, a network is created through the collective “passion project” that melds creative labour with a sense of place-making or belonging, outside of the patriarchal notion of homemaking, domesticity and family.

DIY culture or (non-)organization cultures of resistance emerged in the 1990s in response to frustration with government inaction. These were calls to action – doing and demonstrating in the midst of political standstill.<sup>24</sup> AIDS/HIV activism, animal rights issues, and environmental movements were at the forefront in the early 1990s. The “here-and-now” character of these DIY movements was responding to urgent situations on the ground. “Here-and-Now” DIY politics involves liberatory practices that seek to create alternative social and cultural spaces, which allow for democratic engagement and community-building approaches. As Benjamin Shepard writes, DIY is a “form of activity that creates value outside of capitalism” and in turn, creates a public commons.<sup>25</sup>

Creating a public commons, especially in the digital world, is something that Furtherfield, a U.K. based art, technology and social change organization is attempting to propel forward with their campaign DIWO: Do It With Others. Their slogan reads, “Don’t Just Do It Yourself, Do It With Others!” According to their website [furtherfield.org](http://furtherfield.org), DIWO “is a distributed campaign for emancipatory, networked art practices instigated by Furtherfield since

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<sup>24</sup> Keith Halfacree, “‘Anarchy Doesn’t Work Unless You Think About It:’ Intellectual Interpretation and DIY Culture,” Manuscript February 23 1999. Dept of Geography, University of Wales Swansea, Singleton Park, Swansea SAZ, 209.

<sup>25</sup> Benjamin Shepard, “Play as World Making the Germs, Gay Liberation to DIY Community Building,” in *The Hidden 70s: Histories of Radicalism*, ed. Dan Berger (Rutgers: New Brunswick, 2010), 186.

2006.”<sup>26</sup> Furtherfield began in 1996 with artists Ruth Catlow and Marc Garrett bringing together specialists, amateur artists, activists, thinkers, and technologists, to create open, critical contexts for art and technology projects/spaces that exist online or in the physical world. Garrett writes on the success of DIWO stating:

Peer critique and shared ownership of ideas have enabled small groups and communities to learn and initiate projects together. These networks have worked as doorways to connect people with other cultures, outside of their own nation states, museums, institutions and government focused ideologies. A constant dialogue and the swapping of knowledge, files, and projects, peer collaboration, all nurtured by curiosity, generosity and shared interest. This has loosened the hard-edged fabric of centralization.

Moving toward this notion of networks and knowledge sharing is precisely the type of shared DIWO initiative that is reflected in the Masecar Collection in the ways in which citizens, archivists, and specialized practitioners came together on the ground to make-do and get the collection digitized. Instead of turning to a centralized, professional film archive, the Kirklands and Lutman agreed that it was important for the collection to remain regional and local. The Masecar Collection evokes the many iterations of DIY described here: a personal passion project, taken on with limited financial resources or previous professional experience, acquired, repaired, and transferred through the collective help and specialized expertise of peers in order to share it with the public.

This evokes what Terry Cook is calling the new archival “‘community paradigm,’ based on the concept of a democratized archive that embraces new methods of participatory and collaborative archival work.”<sup>27</sup> Cook argues that the role of the archivist is in the midst of

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<sup>26</sup> Furtherfield, “DIWO: Do-It-With-Others Resource” <http://furtherfield.org/projects/diwo-do-it-others-resource> (accessed June 7, 2017).

<sup>27</sup> Susan Aasman, “Saving Private Reels: Archival Practices and Digital Memories (Formerly Known as Home Movies) in the Digital Age,” in *Amateur filmmaking: the home movie, the*



shifting from a passive role of gatekeeper to an “active appraiser to societal mediator to community facilitator.”<sup>28</sup> From this perspective, citizens are given agency to engage with archives and communities to autonomously create archives, allowing for a new fluidity in the roles of citizen, archivist, and researcher. In doing so, archivists are reconnected to communities and vice versa, rather than being separated in their behind-the-scenes labour. Moving past the 19<sup>th</sup> century tradition of archives being sites of memory, evidence, and “Truth,” Cook proposes that postmodern archives are lived, experiential, and shared – addressing the complications of how history and memory are ever-evolving and mediated through *context* – which lies at the centre of archival provenance. Shifting away from a centralized official archive to a network of libraries and collections would allow community archives to remain autonomous, rather than having to pass through the official gates of larger memory institutions. Cook exclaims that traditional archivists have much to learn from the work being done on–the-ground: “These changes challenge us to stop seeing community archiving as something local, amateur, and of limited value to the broader society and to start recognizing that community-based archiving is often a long-standing and well-established praxis from which we can learn much.”<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the DIY digitization of the Masecar Collection, while fraught, and not actually done to preserve or properly archive the film prints, is a test case to explore the collective archive paradigm in practice. It demonstrates what is possible when the archival network is activated, and what potentials and imbalances exist as this new paradigm of archiving takes shape.

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*archive, the web*, ed. Laura Rascaroli, Barry Monahan and Gwenda Young (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 255.

<sup>28</sup> Cook, “Four shifting archival paradigms,” 95.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

## Methodology

I retrace the steps that the Massecar Collection took in becoming part of the Western Archives – moving from a private collection and the steps that it underwent to become part of official public history. This methodology echoes what Canadian archivist Terry Cook calls “archival contextual knowledge” stating that, “Archival research in this mode, by archivists, explore the history, evolving functions, ever-changing structures, legal frameworks, devolved or regional character and organizational cultures of institutions that create records.”<sup>30</sup> This methodology of tracing the history of archival record is based on the work of Canadian archivist Tom Nesmith who in the early 1980s wrote about the need for archivists to take up the “history from the bottom-up” being utilized by social historians to examine their own cultural practices.<sup>31</sup> Cook writes,

But in that daily practice in the real world of actual archives, once these standards, databases, templates, and models are created – and let no one misunderstand me, it is good that they be created and much praise is due to those who have done this difficult work – the complex research-based knowledge of the archivist needed to fill these empty shells will always, by definition, be subjective and interpretive. And it will always be historical. It will and should be other things too – drawing (as archival studies graduate curricula do) on sociology, organizational theory, psychology, political science, anthropology, geography, philosophy, cultural and media studies, and much more – but archivists are, in the core substance of their work, researching to contextualize over time (that is, historically) records creators, recording media and processes, and the resultant records. By doing so, archivists create new knowledge through history – not history as historians do from the record’s content, but history as archivists do about the record’s context.<sup>32</sup>

The methodology that Nesmith and Cook suggest is to be taken up by archivists, not academics.

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<sup>30</sup> Terry Cook, “The Archive(s) Is A Foreign Country: Historians, Archivists and the Changing Archival Landscape,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (2009): 519.

<sup>31</sup> Tom Nesmith, “Archives from the Bottom Up: Social History and Archival Scholarship,” *Archivaria* 14 (1982): 5–26.

<sup>32</sup> Cook, “Archive(s) Is A Foreign Country,” 518.

However, this dissertation solely looks at the case study of the Massecar Collection as an archival collection and not for the content contained within it. Following in the spirit of Cook and Nesmith, I am interested in the contexts that this collection evokes regarding the nature of Canadian film collections in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Both Cook and Nesmith point to the validation of archivists as historians, and the tensions between archivists and academic historians regarding who speaks or carries the authority to write history. This dissertation sits at this intersection as a means to make the historical work archivists do more visible, and to demonstrate that archivists, and more specifically audiovisual archivists, occupy different roles simultaneously. I am tracing the meta-history and context of how the Massecar Collection became a historical collection at Western University Archives to reveal how this process is a valuable resource to researchers, yet is often hidden. Archival contextual knowledge frames what is researched and deemed historical. Tracing the story of acquisition adds an additional and meaningful layer to the history of the collection, and allows for an analysis of how archives, archivists, researchers, artists and the public come to engage with a collection. Thus institutional history and context of a fond can be integrated into its larger historical value.

This dissertation has been a process of praxis. I come to this project as an academic, but also as someone who has been actively caring for a film and media collection for over 10 years at the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre (CFMDC). My former role as Distribution and Collections Manager at the CFMDC complements my research in that I engaged with a unique, historical, yet actively growing Canadian audiovisual collection, bringing a hands-on practice to my research. It has been integral in a dissertation about the role of the archivist and the future of Canadian audiovisual collections to work with a collection that faces large challenges in its safeguarding. Working with an active distribution collection, I upheld a mandate of access while

also taking on a stewardship role for an aging collection. I was responsible for the ongoing maintenance of the collection, which involves managing the in-house database and inventory, and monitoring print conditions, filmmaker files which contain rare photographs and ephemera, and most importantly, the centre's large digital migration project. Actively considering questions of archival value and selection in this digital migration project has been an invaluable experience that has informed the way in which I think about the digitization of the Massecar Collection at the Western Archives.

Throughout my studies at York University I have had the opportunity to work on projects that have allowed me to gain practical experience engaging with audiovisual archives by organizing, creating, handling, and working in them. In 2007 I joined the Expo '67 Project, a SSHRC Project Grant between York and Concordia University to research the Canadian films that were exhibited at Expo '67. As the Project Coordinator and Archival Researcher, I worked with archivists and archival staff at the University of Toronto Media Commons, the University of Waterloo, Cinémathèque québécoise, and Library and Archives Canada. In addition to these official archives, I worked with the personal collections of the filmmakers and scholars involved in the project including Colin Low, Graeme Ferguson, Christopher Chapman, and Gerald O'Grady. By working with collections at a variety of archival levels I gained invaluable knowledge regarding the integral role of the archivist in offline, uncatalogued searches for materials, and the careful negotiation that is needed to gain access and copyright to collections for reproduction.

Through the Expo '67 project I had the opportunity to examine the processes of access, speak to archivists and artists about their involvement in the creation of these archival records (media, ephemera, or otherwise) and what it has been like to negotiate these invaluable histories

from within their respective institutions. Through caring for a collection, accessing collections, and being a part of the creation of collections throughout my Masters and Doctoral work has given me the ability to contextualize the Massecar Collection from a perspective that considers the artist, archivist, academic, and the public.

It is important to stress that each archive and audiovisual collection comes with its particular conditions and contexts that are perpetually shifting and changing. This dissertation is a snapshot of the conditions under which this particular collection entered the archive in the mid-2000s. While these conditions and circumstances can speak to larger systemic issues, it cannot lend itself to the nature of all audiovisual collections. Evoking the methodology “archival contextual knowledge,” this dissertation traces the cultural and socio-political tensions that inform how this collection came to be acquired, preserved (ad-hoc), digitized, and disseminated in order to understand the ways in which each actor in the archival ecosystem activated their role in order to bring this collection to light.

### **Tracing the Collection**

Through an examination of archival theory, audiovisual archival history, and film and media studies scholarship, Chapter One, “In Discussion With the Field(s),” gives an overview of the historical and theoretical frameworks that intersect within the Massecar case study. I present key texts and moments of intervention that have shaped the discourses of each field rather than present a traditional literature review. The texts and historical movements explored act as signposts that situate the changing value of film as a cultural and historical document, the hidden role of audiovisual archivists, and what is at stake for the safeguarding of audiovisual collections in Canada. In tracing these three frameworks, I aim to highlight the conditions under which the Massecar Collection entered the Western Archives.

My focus on archival theory traces the roots of the traditional modern archive through a discussion of the fundamental archival rule of *respect des fonds* or provenance, and the tensions regarding the role of archival selection in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. As archival selection became increasingly necessary during the acquisition of a fond, the role of the archivist as an “objective” participant in the appraisal of historical documents became a point of contention. I trace the key ethical debates around the position of the archivist as objective or subjective participant within Western archival theory. I then situate archival theory within the specific context of Canadian archival practices, highlighting the importance of *total archives* and the evolution of the Canadian archival system. Finally, I examine the sparse overlap that traditional archivists have with audiovisual archivists in Canada. The lack of dialogue between traditional archivists and audiovisual archivists highlights the barriers within our supposedly networked total archive system.

I then turn to the evolution of audiovisual archives and collections within North America, as the history of Canadian audiovisual collections are inherently intertwined and are in dialogue with U.S. archivists and institutions. I focus on the pivotal role of The Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) founded in 1991 as the signpost that marks a significant shift in audiovisual culture internationally: instead of a focus on national institutional holdings, AMIA sought to bring together archivists from a wide variety of collections into conversation with one another from both the public and private sectors. Additionally, AMIA invited lab technicians, scholars, amateur collectors and film curators into the membership. The result has been a powerful cross-pollination of expertise, which only grew stronger with the publication of AMIA’s journal *The Moving Image*, beginning in 2001. The climate of inclusivity created through the momentum of AMIA also opened up a place for marginal film to become an area of

interest through the Orphan Film Movement, Home Movie Day, and the acquisition of the Prelinger Archives by Library of Congress.

The activity within the audiovisual archival community in North America informs my discussion of the fields of film and media studies. Beginning with the infamous International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) conference in Brighton, England in 1978, I trace the rise of New Film Historians and film scholars entering the archive. During the 1990s, New Film Historians returned to the archive to re-examine film history and early cinema practices, which also coincided with the rise of theoretical interests in the Archive as a site of memory, loss, and trauma. Patricia Zimmermann published *Reel Families*, her book on amateur cinema in 1995—the same year that Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever* was released. Both look to the personal collection or family collection as sites of “complicated social, historical, national, and psychic discourses.”<sup>33</sup>

In the midst of a re-working of cinematic history through the archive as both a site of research and a theoretical space, film and media studies, along with audiovisual archives, underwent the digital turn. The supposed “Death of Cinema” as coined by audiovisual archivist, Paolo Cherchi Usai, reinvigorated anxieties around the ontology of cinema as the technological shift from celluloid film to digital occurred in mainstream commercial cinema. As David Rodowick suggests, in *The Virtual Life of Film* (2007) this revealed that cinema studies never really had a stable object in the first place. As he, Dudley Andrew and Thomas Elsaesser highlighted, cinema is a “threshold” or “in-between” art form that incorporates other arts at varying degrees, and therefore cannot be considered as a singular Cinema – it is more fruitful to examine the intersections and diversify our notion of cinema. Thus this shift in cinema and

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<sup>33</sup> Patricia Zimmermann, “Morphing History Into Histories: From Amateur Film to the Archive of the Future,” *The Moving Image* 1 no. 1 (2001): 112.

media studies over the past thirty years coincides with the archival shifts taking place within theoretical and audiovisual preservation circles. This move towards a re-examination of early cinema in the midst of the digital turn has opened up space for marginal cinema to be recognized for its historical, cultural, and theoretical value within these three fields.

The chapter then turns to examine the inherently DIY nature of audiovisual archives, which evolved from amateur cinephilic collecting, to an organic apprenticeship model, to the more recent professionalization of the practice. The DIY roots of audiovisual archives, along with the rising interest in marginal or amateur film by archivists and scholars have created the conditions under which marginal film becomes a valued document of history and a field of study. Returning to the creation of AMIA, I discuss how this association created a climate for marginal film by fostering a community that blurred the boundaries of professional fields. Finally, in order to set up the Masecar Collection, I examine the definition of amateur or marginal cinema and unpack the ways in which film and media scholars have engaged with amateur cinema as a new field of study, which is still being defined.

Chapter Two, “Acquisition: Questions of Value” traces the Masecar Collection as it shifts from an unknown private collection to an accessible public collection. This chapter traces the rediscovery of the Masecar films through the context of citizen participation within the archival “community paradigm” – demonstrating how integral the support of Mary and John Kirkland was to the collection being acquired by Western University. Mary Kirkland activates her role as a citizen-archivist in initially seeking out the film Masecar shot in Dutton, Ontario for her high school reunion, but then also takes on the labour of creating trust and fostering the acquisition of the entire Masecar collection between Marion Masecar and the Western Archives. This section of the chapter maps the serendipitous, intuitive, and gendered labour that



Mary Kirkland and Marion Masseur take on in bringing a private collection into the public sphere.

This initial aspect of the acquisition – the participation of a citizen in the reemergence of a historical collection/artifact/document – is often overlooked in the narrative of rediscovery/discovery. Even before the archivist or audiovisual archivist is brought in, there is the individual or group that identifies the historical importance of something. In extending the reach of the archival narrative to include the citizen's contribution, the ecosystem of the “community paradigm” is activated. Their involvement completes the cycle of archival objects moving from the personal or private realm out into a public sphere, which in turn allows historical documents to be disseminated and taken back and reworked into personal histories again. This labour works in tandem with the labour that archivists have to negotiate between the donor and the institutional archive.

While the Kirklands supported the Masseur Collection acquisition through discovery, relationship-building with the donor, and aiding in physically retrieving the collection, John H. Lutman negotiated with the Western Archives to convince the Head Archivist and administration the value this acquisition would bring to the archive. In doing so, Lutman was acting as an Outsider Archivist—a term created by archivist Rick Prelinger referring to archivists who work outside of traditional archival practices, specifically in relationship to acquisition, public access, and digital dissemination.<sup>34</sup> Lutman could see the historical value of the films to the region, and used this to justify the acquisition even though the archive did not have the expertise to properly care for a film collection. Western Archives took a risk acquiring a sight-unseen collection of

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<sup>34</sup> Rick Prelinger, "We Are the New Archivists: Artisans, Activists, Citizens," International Federation of Television Archivists Media Management Seminar, Ryerson University Toronto, May 2011. Prelinger is referring to archivists who work outside of traditional archival practices, specifically in relationship to acquisition, public access, and digital dissemination.

this size, but could justify it by the amount of information that was provided by the Kirklands prior to the acquisition. The Head Archivist and administration could justify the acquisition by monetizing the value of the collection by creating and selling DVDs. The archive leveraged the crude digitization of the films to justify accessibility of a rare historical collection. Moreover, this chapter maps the social, cultural, and economic trajectories that have affected the changing values of cinema as an archival document, art form, and technology. Through this context, I present a more complete understanding of the conditions under which the Masecar Collection entered an archive – particularly an archive without film preservation experience.

Chapter Three, “Cataloguing, Digitization & Access,” examines the cataloguing and digitization process that the Masecar Collection underwent in order to become accessible to the public. Key areas that are examined include rapidly changing audiovisual digitization and storage standards, accessibility of online and offline archival materials, and the archival preservation versus access debate. The digital turn in audiovisual technology has brought into question the ontology of analogue formats, particularly film and video, as the unique characteristics of these specific formats and mediums are transformed into digital code and remediated. The value of these analogue formats in this era of rapidly changing digital technology evokes nostalgia for obsolete modes of art-making. This chapter asks, what is lost, and what is gained when media translates from one format to another? How has the economy of digestible digital information changed the ways in which scholars do research? What are the differences between accessing information versus knowledge? What are the misleading myths that the digital age of information presents to archival administrators, researchers, and the public? How has the era of mass digitization changed the role of archivists, and more specifically, audiovisual archivists? How has this shift towards digitization changed the archival

profession – and more specifically, the audiovisual archival profession?

The Massecar Collection is an interesting case study to consider these questions, specifically in the preservation versus access debate. The Massecar Collection is crudely digitized by being projected and shot off the wall onto MiniDV, and made into DVDs. Yet this rare collection was made accessible in one of the most challenging and difficult eras to access audiovisual archives in Canada. While the digitization is DIY and not up to any archival digitization standards, the “good enough” transfers support what Outsider Archivists like Rick Prelinger of Archive.org argues needs to be the main priority of archives moving forward. In order to thrive in the world of YouTube and Google, Prelinger argues that access needs to become the number one priority of archives, shifting the focus to serving the digital user, rather than getting caught up in quality or the provenance of the traditional archives.

Yet, the Massecar Collection is not only accessible digitally, but also physically. Unlike most film collections, the Massecar Collection is available to be seen and handled by scholars as archival objects. In most established film archives, film and media scholars can only access reference copies of films, and are rarely in the presence of their actual objects of study. As with the Massecar Collection, the quality of reference copies are usually transfers (and sometimes transfers of transfers) that are just “good enough” for review. The low-quality transfers of the Massecar films are normal as access trumps quality. Nevertheless, professional archival digitization continues to increase in quality as we are in the era of high-definition 2K, 4K, and 8K film scans that allow digital copies of some films be seen with a fidelity currently impossible for the Massecar Collection. Yet the Massecar Collection can be accessed as a physical collection, as researchers can examine technological objects and their ephemera, and gain information about the artistic practice, modes of exhibition and distribution that restrictions in

established film archives prevent. The collection challenges the notion of accessibility that places its value not only in the images that are digitally accessible, but also its materiality, linking the two in a unique way.

This chapter also unpacks the pitfalls and myths of the digital era, exploring three key myths: that everything can be archived or saved; that digitizing something means it will always be accessible; and finally, that the ability to digitize archival materials now removes the issue of archival selection, relieving archivists from the task of having to evaluate the contents of fonds during the acquisition process. Examining the myth that everything can be archived or saved uncovers the impossibility for archivists and archival staff to undertake the labour of digitizing massive archival holdings for access, and issues surrounding copyright. Examining the myth of digitization granting permanent access to archival materials looks at the issues of media migration, storage, and the precarity of access without standardized digital hardware or software. Finally, examining the myth of the digital relieving archivists from archival selection explores the ways in which the digital actually creates another layer of selection when moving collections online. Moreover, each of these myths of the digital highlights the ways in which audiovisual archives are being digitized in order to be commodified, sometimes creating false cinematic canons and historical hierarchies.

To look at the ways in which these myths have been operating within a Canadian archival context, I examine the short-lived “Modernization Project” that Library and Archives Canada launched in 2009 under Head Archivist (and trained economist) Daniel Caron. The failed initiative speaks to the lack of transparency within the institution under the Harper Government, and the lack of a feasible media migration and storage plan. This initiative came in the wake of the Audio Visual Preservation Trust having its funding completely cut, and quietly disbanding

with little to no trace. The lack of transparency and quiet closures to memory institutions throughout Canada became a persistent tactic of the Harper Government. Under this government, libraries and archives at a variety of different institutional levels were dismantled, downsized, and closed.

Moreover, this chapter seeks to unpack the overarching issues surrounding the digitization of film, highlighting that digitization cannot and should not be conflated with preservation. The Massecar Collection helps to tease out the contradictions and restrictions so many audiovisual collections face surrounding preservation, digitization, media migration, storage, and access – specifically during an era of strained resources and staffing. The irony is that as archives seek ways to stay relevant in the digital age and monetize their holdings, they turn to their often overlooked and under staffed audiovisual departments to provide audiovisual content to animate their public facing online portals.

The fourth and final chapter of the dissertation, “Hierarchies and Displaced Histories,” historically frames the contemporary situation audiovisual collections are facing in regards to the future of safeguarding collections and making Canadian moving image history accessible. I trace the historical trajectories that have led to collections like the Massecar Collection being underrepresented not only in audiovisual collections, but traditional archives as a whole. I argue that audiovisual archives and collections have been implicated in a variety of hierarchies that have impeded their visibility, legibility, and value as a primary historical resource. These hierarchies include:

1. The superiority of the paper record as the primary document of historical truth over other material records: photographs, audiovisual materials, audio recordings, objects, etc.

2. Traditional archivists versus audiovisual archivists: long standing professionalized practices versus the organic development of DIY common practices
3. Film archivists versus academic scholarship: the disparity between the practical labour of archivists and the theorizing of “the Archive” by the academic community

Through an historical examination of these hierarchies and ways of knowledge-making I examine how the treatment of film in archives, by archivists, librarians, scholars, and artists has heavily influenced the ways in which we speak, imagine, and construct contemporary discourses about the status of moving images archives.

The chapter begins with an historical examination of the ways in which traditional archives treat audiovisual holdings differently than “official” paper documents of history. As highlighted in earlier chapters, audiovisual holdings have challenged the notion of historical truth for traditional archives due to their ability to democratically document historical events as easily as everyday life. I trace early Canadian memory institutions that were primarily run by amateur historians, which used complimentary modes of knowledge that combined the functions of the museum, library, and archive into one. Yet as modes of knowledge became professionalized and institutionalized, these approaches to knowledge were separated, with libraries, or textual knowledge becoming the primary mode of public knowledge.

The notion of professional versus amateur, or official versus unofficial history is highlighted through the historical examination of early still and moving image documentation. The slow recognition of film as an indexical historical document was the first challenge to overcome in institutional collections. I trace the history of Canada’s national moving image collection from its haphazard inception to its present situation to understand the political and cultural patterns that have influenced the rise and fall in the value of Canada’s moving image

history. The trajectory of Canadian film preservation is a prime example of how the push between the hierarchy of amateur and professional has shaped the cycle of false starts on preservation strategies and later on, digitization.

In the final portion of the chapter, I unpack the conflicting notions and assumptions about archives, and specifically audiovisual archives, in order to bring to light the hidden labour and functions of frontline staff and archivists. By acknowledging and bringing transparency to the issues and systems of memory institutions, archivists, academics, artists, and the general public can begin to align their knowledge bases and research, dispel misconceptions, and activate their roles within the archival ecosystem – thus flattening the hierarchies and silos of knowledge that have been created.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, in the spirit of Cook’s “community paradigm” I argue that navigating the way forward towards a preservation and access strategy for Canada’s audiovisual holdings will need to be a collaborative effort which flattens hierarchies of knowledge and recognizes the unique contexts, meta-histories, and expertise each participant in the archival ecosystem has to offer. Transparency is key in order to understand the hidden labour and barriers that archivists face internally, and also to recognize how these memory institutions need to dismantle and decolonize their infrastructures and mandates in order to address the barriers they face externally. Knowledge-sharing will also be key in order to not reinvent the wheel when compiling best practices, sourcing materials, and taking stock of what institutions have already done work to either safeguard or make audiovisual materials accessible.

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<sup>35</sup> Transparency refers to the accessibility and understanding of archive protocols and day-to-day practices rather than the political sense of transparency in order to counteract misleading or deceptive practices.

## **Chapter One - In Discussion With the Field(s)**

The preservation of the Massecar Collection of local Ontario films lies at the intersection of archival theory, audiovisual collection practices and film and media studies scholarship. More specifically, the case intersects these frameworks from within a Canadian perspective and focus, while speaking to the larger international practices and key debates in the field of audiovisual preservation and archival practice. These frameworks—archival theory, audiovisual collection practices, film and media studies scholarship—can be imagined cinematically: like a frame, within a frame, within a frame. One envelops the next and creates a dialectical framework building upon and informing one another.

Archival theory acts as the outer framing device in this dissertation as a result of most Canadian audiovisual collections being a part of larger archival institutions rather than autonomous audiovisual archives. In turn, the history and theory regarding traditional archives informs how these collections have been historically situated and treated within larger hierarchical and organizational structures or memory institutions in Canada. The second framework, audiovisual collection practices, has organically developed within larger Canadian archival institutions, and is directly informed by the status or amount of resources allotted to the preservation of audiovisual materials within these institutions. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will be primarily focusing on the audiovisual collection practices of the Western Archives and Library and Archives Canada (LAC) to comparatively examine the politics and practices within audiovisual collections and in turn how they are managed, preserved, disseminated and accessed by the public. Finally, these two frameworks then inform the context for film and media studies scholarship that these previous frameworks negotiate, and directly



shape what Canadian audiovisual heritage can be accessed and studied by amateur cinema scholars.

The intersection at which these frameworks cross one another is fraught with contradictions as each approach audiovisual objects from varying perspectives and purposes, imbuing these objects or records with fluctuating degrees of value. This dissertation will primarily focus on the status of film within Canada's audiovisual archives, though the challenges and politics this particular media faces does have overlap with other formats, including but not limited to photography, audio recordings, and analog video. This is important to consider as the digitization of these unique audiovisual formats flattens and compresses analogue media into digital formats through media migration initiatives.

By comparing the changing value of film as a cultural object within various levels of archives, this dissertation examines what is at stake for the safeguarding of audiovisual collections in Canada. My case study highlights the political and cultural climate surrounding audiovisual collections and examines the contributions of those who, I argue, are central to the continued life of archives: the archivist, academic, collector, artist, and public citizen. Crucially, I foreground the labour of the audiovisual archivist as the key in facilitating these intersecting roles to think about new possibilities for vital audiovisual preservation and access in Canada. My case study highlights from its different institutional positions (local and national, DIY and institutional) the constraints and liberties audiovisual archiving presents - at once revealing that, while collections share common archival issues, each is unique and cannot stand in for the field as a whole.

As the methodology of this dissertation historically traces the discourses of my primary frameworks from a Canadian perspective, I would like to present key texts and moments of

intervention that have shaped the discourses of each field rather than present a traditional literature review. The texts and historical movements explored here act as signposts that situate the changing value of film as a cultural object, the hidden role of audiovisual archivists, and foreground what is at stake for the safeguarding of audiovisual collections in Canada.

### **Archival Theory**

The “handbook” of modern archival theory can be traced back to the “Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives” written by the Dutch trio, Samuel Muller, Johan Feith, and Robert Fruin in 1898. While the usefulness of this manual over a century later is debated in archival communities, it nevertheless articulates the longstanding principles of archives regarding acquisition, appraisal, and provenance (arrangement).<sup>36</sup> While archives and the official act of collecting records of the state occurred prior to the publication, the details pre-French Revolution remain, ironically, undocumented. The Dutch manual describes which documents, drawings, and printed matter of official or administrative capacity that archives must keep. These records reside under one roof - a physical, singular place wherein the state can safeguard and control access to its contents.

Provenance, or the concept *respect des fonds* was the primary focus of the Dutch manual, stressing the importance of keeping the original order of documents and records in which they were received. This order reveals the particular context into how each document was created, and situates its intrinsic value. Value in the context of appraisal or selection was less of a focus of the manual due to the fact that archives at that time had the capacity to keep everything created.

Canada’s Dominion Archives were formed in 1872 under the Department of Agriculture

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<sup>36</sup> Terry Cook, “Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift,” *Archivaria* 43 (1997): 21.

and forty years later, became the autonomous Public Archives of Canada in 1912. Canadian archives since their inception have embraced the notion of *total archives*. While most traditional archives solely focus on the collection of state documents, Canadian archives have been invested in the collection of public and private artifacts ranging beyond the traditional paper record. This practice was rooted in the federal government's belief that it was their responsibility to nurture the cultural identity of a young country. As previously mentioned in the introduction, this total archives model made practical sense in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when Canada had not yet established a national art gallery or library.<sup>37</sup>

The first International Congress of Archivists and Librarians took place in 1910, in which archivists and librarians from Europe, Canada, and the United States came together to report and share best practices, conditions of labour, and governance.<sup>38</sup> By the mid-1930s, best practices in archives were facing a crisis in terms of keeping up with the collection of papers, especially with the accumulation of internal government documents regarding the impending Second World War. The rapidly rising number of internal state documents, memos, and communications were affecting the physical capacity of archives, specifically in countries involved directly in the war. The Dutch manual, while foundational, lacked guidance around selection and appraisal.

British archivist Sir Hilary Jenkinson led the historical ethical debates on archival selection and description in the mid-twentieth century. Jenkinson's publication *A Manual of Archive Administration* (1937) addressed the crisis of collecting from the angle of provenance, stressing the importance of archivists remaining impartial observers of the documents they cared for. If provenance was to be honoured, archivists could not interfere with the order of things. In

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<sup>37</sup> Laura Millar, "Coming Up With Plan B: Considering the Future of Canadian Archives," *Archiviaria* 77 (2014): 110.

<sup>38</sup> A copy of the proceedings in multiple languages can be found on [archive.org](https://archive.org/details/BrusselsCongress1910): <https://archive.org/details/BrusselsCongress1910> (accessed April 16, 2017).

order for archivists to remain impartial stewards, Jenkinson proposed that selection become the responsibility of the creators. Under this archival model, creators would cull documents and assess their value and order prior to their receipt by the archive.<sup>39</sup> The danger of this approach to selection was in giving the state departments the ability to skew what entered archives, colouring the facts of history with a particular hue. Jenkinson's vehement interest in keeping archivists impartial or observational in their relationship to the contents of archives spoke to his personal position within the archival hierarchy. When he joined the Public Record Office in London in 1906, he was focused on the fonds of medieval and early nation-states rather than contemporary state archives, which were being faced with problems of selection and appraisal. Terry Cook argues that Jenkinson's obsession with provenance echoed his relationship to the pre-war British Civil Services, reflecting "his faith in the government 'Administrator; being an honourable, educated, and civilized person capable of exercising disinterested judgments in terms of record preservation [... In] his notions that 'Truth' was revealed through archival documents or that the archivist was an unbiased 'keeper' of records and a 'selfless devotee of Truth,' Jenkinson was simply mirroring the empirical Positivism common to the historiography with which he was deeply familiar and schooled."<sup>40</sup> Jenkinson's views on appraisal could not possibly support modern archives, though his emphasis on the ethics that archivists must bring to the task of appraisal, selection, and description of fonds was a valuable reminder moving forward in an era where selection was inevitable.

American archivist Theodore Schellenberg brought forth an archival theory of appraisal in the mid-1950s summing the practices and observations of his colleagues. The United States was facing the rapid growth of modern archives in light of the post-war boom and archivists

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<sup>39</sup> Cook, "Archival Ideas Since 1898," 23.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

were addressing the impossibility of keeping all records created. Schellenberg proposed that archival records have primary and secondary values, the primary being the value of record to the creator in its operational purpose, and the secondary being its evidential and informational value to researchers.<sup>41</sup> The task of selecting what would enter an archive was the job of archivists who must be trained historians in specialized fields in order to have the expertise to determine what should enter the halls of official history. Schellenberg was invested in the secondary value of archival fonds and how they would be utilized in research. As Cook states, “Unlike Jenkinson, he anticipated the future rather than defended the past, and he joined management techniques to historical scholarship in archives.”<sup>42</sup>

The relationship between archivists and historians in terms of who are the keepers and storytellers of history is a fraught one. It is an ongoing tension that is continually being managed. Scholars adopted the concept of the “use-designed archive” in the 1960s and 1970s, when archivists attempted to anticipate the use of collections in order to help them determine value. In this sense archivists were acting as “representatives to the research community,” bridging their training as historians with their archival administrative role.<sup>43</sup> Yet, in allowing research to lead selection, acquisitions were in danger of becoming fragmented and narrow. Archivist Gerald Ham critiqued this use-designed archive approach stating, “... The archivist will remain at best nothing more than a weathervane moved by the changing winds of historiography.”<sup>44</sup> He cautioned against this approach, along with many other archivists, due to the fact that this swayed archival ethics away from the principles of provenance, and in turn, the contextual values

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>43</sup> Maynard J. Brichford, *Archives and Manuscripts: Appraisal & Accessioning* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1977), 13.

<sup>44</sup> Cook, “Archival Ideas Since 1889,” 29.

of archival fonds.

Archivists were seeking to articulate their place between administrators and historians – trying to honour the creators of records, while also looking to how future researchers would engage with them. In the 1980s and 1990s archivists shifted selection to consider a social holistic approach to archival appraisal and selection. German archivist Hans Boom in the early 1990s advocated for archives to frame archival fonds within a larger societal context to reveal how citizens and organizations interact.<sup>45</sup> In doing so, provenance could be reinforced as the foundation of appraisal, while also framing the context or description of records in relation to engagement. Canadian archivist Terry Cook explains in his article, “Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift,” that this strategy had been discussed at length in archival communities in Canada in the 1980s and was officially implemented in 1991. Under the former strategy, the focus of a fond was on the contents of the records and how it would reflect the public, users, and historical trends. In the new strategy, a larger macro perspective was taken up, bringing context and the process of the record’s creation in relationship to the public and its societal function. Cook argues that this shift made sense in the late 1980s and early 1990s as the rise of electronic records and the decentralized model of organizations became commonplace. Archives were no longer singular physical places as databases and documents became digital. Digital documentation needed this new macro-contextual approach to provenance to bring an order to things, as the amount of fonds and their contents continued to grow at rates that archivists could not feasibly manage or describe at item level.

This macro-contextual approach echoes what Head Archivist Hugh Taylor of the National Archives of Canada envisioned in the mid-sixties. Taylor is internationally best known

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 30.

for reviving and improving on Canada's *total archives* approach, which encompasses the role of archives not just as a depository of state and its corporate records, but also its cultural function as a keeper of societal and historical memory—in *all media formats*. Heavily influenced by the work of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan, Taylor was interested in harnessing the power of electronic and audiovisual recordings. Cook writes, “Taylor discerned, in our new world of interactive electronics, transactions and communications, ‘a return to conceptual orality,’ that is to say, a return to the medieval framework where words or documents gained meaning only as they were ‘closely related to their context and to actions arising from that context.’”<sup>46</sup> Taylor was interested in social historiography to make clear how and why historical records were collected, rather than describing individual records in a series. Taking a macro approach, he argued, would allow for form and patterns of knowledge to appear, “by which we will transcend the morass of information and data into which we will otherwise fall.”<sup>47</sup>

Yet this iteration of total archives was no longer sustainable by a centralized institution by the late 1970s. The institutional demand for federal and provincial records management continued to increase, while researchers and the public began to advocate for materials to remain closer to their place of origin. Total archives could no longer sustain both the administrative and cultural responsibilities without creating a network of local and regional archives. In the mid-1980s the “comprehensive system of archives” overseen by the Canadian Council on Archives (CCA) created a cooperative network of archives. Laura Millar writes, “Under the direction of the CCA, this archival system would reduce centrality of national and provincial repositories, increase the involvement of local communities and associations, and encourage the establishment

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>47</sup> Hugh A. Taylor, “Transformation in the Archives: Technological Adjustment or Paradigm Shift,” *Archivaria* 25 (1987-88): 24.

of more corporate and institutional repositories, acknowledging the distinction between agency archives and collected archives, but encouraging the continuation of integrated institutional/private records care as appropriate to sustain the ‘spirit’ of total archives.”<sup>48</sup> In 2004, the National Archives and the National Library of Canada amalgamated to create Library and Archives Canada (LAC). This amalgamation collapsed two very different systems of collection, yet it remained very much in spirit of total archives. LAC now houses the national archival collection, federal government deposits, legal publication deposits, and other published and unpublished resources.

In 2006, the CCA began to oversee the National Archival Development Program (NADP), which was funded by LAC to develop programs to support archival work across the cooperative network of archives. The NADP was helping to fulfill LAC’s mandate to support the development of library and archival communities across Canada. Yet this funding was completely cut in 2012 under the Harper Government, which was met with much criticism from the CCA and its participating members.<sup>49</sup> In 2015, under the new Liberal government, a new iteration of the Documentary Heritage Communities Program was launched by LAC. The project aims to “increase the capacity of local documentary heritage institutions to better sustain and preserve Canada’s documentary heritage.”<sup>50</sup> This fund has allotted \$1.5 million a year, for the next five years to support archives, museums, libraries, professional, genealogical, and historical associations. By funding archival projects happening across a network, LAC is working within a spirit of total archives and the “community paradigm” - giving memory institutions the ability to

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<sup>48</sup> Millar, “Coming Up With Plan B,” 111-12.

<sup>49</sup> For information of the National Archival Development Program and its termination visit: [http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/BriefingNote\\_NADPJune2012\\_EN.pdf](http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/BriefingNote_NADPJune2012_EN.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> LAC, “Documentary Film Heritage Communities Program,” Libraries and Archives Canada, <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/services/documentary-heritage-communities-program/Pages/guidelines.aspx> (accessed April 24, 2017).



remain autonomous in the spirit of DIY/DIWO.

### **Traditional Archival / Audiovisual Intersections**

I would like to turn to an overview of Canadian archival culture in relationship to audiovisual collections to give the reader a sense of where discussions around audiovisual holdings and archival theory and practice intersect. The Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA) was founded in 1975, though the journal *The Canadian Archivist* began in 1963. Prior to establishing in 1975, an iteration of the ACA existed as a subsidiary of the Canadian Historical Association, which published an “Archives bulletin” from 1971-79. In conjunction with the break off from the Canadian Historical Association, the ACA changed their journal name to *Archivaria*. The journal prioritizes advocacy, communications, governance, outreach, and professional development.<sup>51</sup> In surveying the journal, it is clear that it is a very active place of debate amongst Canadian archivists making contributions to the field. Very active voices and contributions from figures like Hugh Taylor, Terry Cook, Tom Nesmith, Sam Kula, and Terry Eastwood can be found there, volleying theory and opinion. In the journal’s early days, many of the articles focus on the professionalization of the field: relationships between historians and archivists, archival management, practical labour issues, and the emergence of professional training degrees. Most of the field reports focus on special fond case studies or the documentation of oral histories. Much of the journal is preoccupied with paper-based fonds.

The first article written specifically about film collections appeared in 1978 by Ken M. Larose entitled, “Preserving the Past on Film: Problems for the Archivist,” which focused on film and television collections that are primarily held by private producers, and identifying that

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<sup>51</sup> Association of Canadian Archivists, “Our Priorities,” <http://www.archivists.ca/content/about-us> (accessed April 17, 2017).

access to collections at the National Archives for historians were rare. It is the first time within the archival community since the official founding of the ACA that an archivist addressed the research gap, let alone the issues of preservation. Yet the article reveals the separation between the work of audiovisual archivists and traditional practitioners in the rudimentary exclamations regarding the state of audiovisual archives, which overlooked the work of the Director of the National Film Archives Sam Kula, film conservationist William O'Farrell, and their colleagues at the National Archives. Larose spends most of the article discussing issues of acquisition, appraisal, and selection due to there being no official film deposit system in Canada at the time. From a very traditional perspective, Larose gets caught up in defining what deems a production "Canadian," and how to select "good" or useful films because unlike other modes of documents in the archive, cinema involves artifice. He is seeking criteria to evaluate films for archivists, arguing that this is something historians should provide and side stepping audiovisual archivists and film scholars entirely.<sup>52</sup> The following year, Sam Kula's infamous article, "Rescued from the Permafrost: The Dawson Collection of Motion Pictures" appears, recounting the discovery of over 400 salvageable nitrate prints buried in Dawson, which were then acquired by the National Archives of Canada, helping to repatriate some of the lost British-Canadian and American early film. Kula regales readers in the adventures of this unique acquisition, tracing the history of film exhibition to Dawson, the negotiations to have the works salvaged and transported, and the repatriation of films that had been deemed lost prior to this "goldmine" discovery. Kula speaks from a place of great authority and enthusiasm about the collection quite literally unearthing aspects of early Canadian cinema.

Yet it is another ten years before another article specifically about film appears in the

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<sup>52</sup> K.M. Larose, "Preserving the Past on Film: Problems for the Archivist," *Archivaria* 6 (1978): 150.

journal. In 1989, Ernest J. Dick writes, “Through the Rearview Mirror: Moving Image and Sound Archives in the 1990s,” in which he advocates for archivists, in the spirit of Hugh Taylor, to learn the history of audiovisual technology in order to unlock the invaluable historical records hidden there. He advocates for the hidden histories in home movies and the need to continue the Canadian archival tradition of documenting oral histories, but in tandem with audiovisual technology. He takes stock of the barriers to accessing older audiovisual media, the deterioration of video formats, and the red tape of copyright. But what he unpacks is very much directed towards a traditional archivist’s engagement with audiovisual collections. Dick ends the article naively forecasting that the 1990s will bring more paper into archives as audio formats will be transcribed, and facsimiles of film and video will be scanned and printed. He overlooks the phenomenon of media migration (paper included) into digital formats.

*Archivaria* in the 1990s charts the digital turn – something that is on the horizon in articles written in the 1980s, but is now fleshed out regarding how this shift will effect workflows, archival provenance, description, and the ways researchers will engage with collections. The importance of archival theory was also being taken up and reframed in light of Derrida’s *Archive Fever*. Audiovisual archives become slightly more prominent in articles, but mostly regarding photography and television. The 1990s is void of articles about film archives with the exception of two reviews: one by Sam Kula of recent publications regarding film called, “Film Archives at the Centenary of Film” (primarily about Henri Langlois and the Federation of International Film Archives), and the second, a review of the Society of Cinema Studies conference in Ottawa in 1997. The co-authors candidly exclaimed they were excited to see film scholars beginning to explore “unconventional or alternative” sources: microfilm, theatre and corporate archives, and metropolitan collections. They write, “the conference opened new doors

for consideration by archivists engaged in the construction of film history as gatekeepers in selection, preservation, and provision of access... we see archivists playing a greater role in future SCS discussions regarding the 'afterlife' of film, video and sound productions, and the advocate for more inclusivity in the discussions of interpretation and preservation."<sup>53</sup>

Thus, audiovisual archivists slip through gaps while seeking inclusivity in traditional archival forums and in the academic film community. It is no surprise then that the next article on film archiving that appears in *Archivaria* is an article announcing the inaugural issue of *The Moving Image* published by the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) in 2001. Sam Kula, sitting AMIA president writes,

This first issue of *The Moving Image* represents a giant leap forward for AMIA in its tenth year of service to the men and women around the world who are protecting our moving image heritage. ... Those of us who have helped launch *The Moving Image* have recognized that the level of discourse among moving image archivists on such diverse topics as the ethics of restoration, the validation of "home movies" as historical evidence, the reconstitution of the twentieth-century "movie-going experience" in the twenty-first century, the aesthetics of analog versus digital moving image presentations, the role of the archivist in establishing and/or altering the perceived canon of "great films," and a dozen other such issues, along with all the enduring and frustrating technological issues that are trying the patience and beggaring the budgets of archives everywhere, have reached the point where a forum for the exchange of considered (and peer-reviewed) views was not a luxury but a necessity.<sup>54</sup>

Some of these issues come to the forefront in *Archivaria*'s special section in 2009 called "Taking A Stand!: Activism in Canadian Cultural Archives." Michele Wonzy's important article, "National Audiovisual Preservation Initiatives and The Independent Media Arts in Canada," addresses head on the crisis facing Canadian audiovisual collections and archives. She recounts

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<sup>53</sup> Steve Moore, William O'Farrell, and Melissa K. Rombout, "The Society For Cinema Studies Conference Special Focus: Cinema(s) In Canada," *Archivaria* 44 (1997): 187.

<sup>54</sup> Sam Kula, "President's Foreward," *The Moving Image* 1, no. 1 (2001): vi-vi.

the systemic issues that Canadian audiovisual collections have faced regarding government policy concerning preservation and access since the creation of the Motion Picture Bureau in the early 1920s. It is one of the very few times that issues effecting audiovisual archives are plainly traced in the Canadian archival journal. As of 2017, *Archivaria* has yet to publish an issue solely dedicated to audiovisual archives.

Moreover, while Canada's archival community has been integral in shaping archival practices internationally, its actual practice of the total archive is fraught. The separation of traditional archivists and audiovisual archivists is apparent in the uneven representation of archival issues even though audiovisual collections and visual literacy have been at the forefront of discussions of how to reframe a need for archives in an online world. Canadian archivists separated themselves from historians in order to establish themselves and professionalize their craft beyond their historical training. The irony is that Canadian audiovisual archivists, in order to have their issues heard, have had to separate from their community to be legitimized. Yet the collections and fonds they care for operate within the traditional archival systems that remain divided in their interests. This separation creates barriers internally, but externally for the public and researchers as well.

### **Audiovisual Archival Practice**

The Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) was established in 1991, but its history reaches back to the late 1960s, with its roots residing in the American Film Institute (AFI). The AFI was created in 1967 by the National Endowment for the Arts in response to the need to safeguard American motion picture artistic culture and history. While film archives existed throughout the U.S. in public and private institutions and corporations, there was not an overarching institution to oversee or identify important projects and initiatives. The AFI's

mandate was to promote American cinema, support training for filmmakers, and lead preservation initiatives.<sup>55</sup> In 1968, Sam Kula arrived from the British Film Institute to join the archival staff and began to identify the ways in which the AFI would operate. Unlike the BFI, the American Film Institute was to facilitate the operations of other organizations already involved in film preservation. These included the Library of Congress, the National Archives, the Museum of Modern Art, and George Eastman House. Representatives from these organizations made up the Archives Advisory Committee, which would later be renamed as the Film Archives Advisory Committee. This committee later expanded to include television archives, creating a network of audiovisual archives nationwide. Yet the reach of the Film & Television Archives Advisory Committee (F/TAAC) extended further than this into Canadian archives. This was a practical next step as Kula left the AFI in 1973 to become the Director of the National Film Archives (NFA) at the Public Archives of Canada, extending the network of knowledge-sharing for audiovisual best practices around acquisition, selection, and preservation. It also helped to raise awareness of the issues affecting audiovisual preservation regardless of political borders. While the larger archives were represented on the F/TAAC, individual archivists from smaller archives were also becoming members. As the number of members grew over the next two decades, so did the international network. The F/TAAC became AMIA in 1990, formalizing its individual-based professional association, and thus becoming the largest association of its kind.<sup>56</sup> While the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAPF) had been in existence since 1938, its membership primarily consisted of national governmentally funded institutions. AMIA, on the other hand, allowed for individual archivists to become members as representatives from large

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<sup>55</sup> Sarah Ziebell Mann, "The Evolution of American Moving Image Preservation: Defining the Preservation Landscape," *The Moving Image* 1 no. 2 (2001): 2.

<sup>56</sup> AMIA, "History," The Association of Moving Image Archivist Website, <http://www.amianet.org/about/history> (accessed April 20, 2017).

and small, public, or private institutions. AMIA also opened membership up to scholars, lab technicians, curators, and private collectors. In this way AMIA served a more inclusive notion of the audiovisual archival community, whereas FIAF sought membership from established institutional entities that would have to undergo a rigorous vetting.<sup>57</sup>

In the summer of 1967, the same year that the AFI is established, the National Film Board of Canada's (NFB) nitrate fire in Beaconsfield resulted in the loss of over ninety-thousand films, and brought the urgency of film preservation in Canada to the forefront once again. While the NFB and the Canadian Film Institute (CFI) were to be sharing the responsibility for preserving Canada's moving image collection, they did not have the resources or the proper storage facilities for nitrate. The NFB's reputation for carelessness was spreading, and by the late 1960s the Public Archives of Canada (PAC) was already in the midst of positioning itself as a depository that could care for not only film, but also other audiovisual formats. The PAC began to collect unstable nitrate in 1969 as a result of worries around safely storing the flammable format, and began to transfer it to safety film in 1972. PAC was also repatriating more newsreel collections from England and the Library of Congress in the United States.<sup>58</sup>

Kula returned to Canada in 1973 to become Director of the National Film, Television and Sound Archives (late to be named the National Film Archives) thus marking a sea change in audiovisual preservation in Canada. By 1974 the PAC once again became the primary holder of

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<sup>57</sup> Archives or moving image collections that would like to apply to become a Member of FIAF must undergo a vetting process carried out by the Executive Committee. In order to become an Associate, a recommendation needs to be put forward by the Executive, which then must be ratified by the General Assembly. For more information visit: FIAF, "Affiliation Categories," International Federation of Film Archives, <http://www.fiafnet.org/pages/Community/Affiliation-Categories.html?PHPSESSID=micmaoj0t20otnsf85sgc64m11> (accessed July 2, 2017).

<sup>58</sup> Michele L. Wonzy, "National Audiovisual Preservation Initiatives and Independent Media Arts in Canada," *Archivaria* 67 (2009): 98.

Canada's moving image archive with over twenty-million feet of film in the collection. The National Film Archive (NFA) at PAC was officially established in 1976, and given full federal funding to carry out the incoming acquisitions, with the expectation that expansion would need to happen in order to accommodate future collections. The late 1970s was a time of expansion and investment for the NFTSA as a whole. NFTSA was collecting an average of 6,250 titles a year in the 1970s, which ballooned to 19,397 per year in the 1980s.<sup>59</sup> Members of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) saw NFTSA as leaders in audiovisual preservation, specifically for the mass transfers of rare nitrate film gauges to safety film.

In 1982, UNESCO released the “Recommendation for the safeguarding and preservation of moving images” study, authored by Kula, who was an established authority and pivotal player in the international audiovisual archival field. Audiovisual preservation was on the upswing with the momentum of UNESCO granting film entry into the halls of world heritage and the general public becoming more aware of the need for film preservation. American archivist and scholar Caroline Frick has called the period between 1983-1993 the “decade of preservation.”<sup>60</sup>

Kula recounts a story of attending a FIAF conference in the early 1980s wearing a button that he and his colleagues at the NFTSA were wearing with the phrase, “Nitrate Can’t Wait.”<sup>61</sup> Kula, helped by the expertise of Head Lab Technician William O’Farrell, was part of the team migrating nitrate to safety stock at the Public Archives during that time. The AFI adopted and modified the slogan for their “Nitrate Won’t Wait” campaign to raise public awareness around the need to properly store nitrate prints in cold, stable temperatures in order to extend the life of

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<sup>59</sup> David Lemieux, “A Film Archive for Canada,” *The Moving Image* 2, no. 1 (2004): 17.

<sup>60</sup> Caroline Frick, *Saving Cinema: The Politics of Preservation* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2010), 79.

<sup>61</sup> Sam Kula, “Mea Culpa: How I Abused the Nitrate in My Life,” *The Moving Image* 1 (2001): 202.



the print, and avoid combustion. This campaign then disseminated internationally through the national archival institutions. The campaign exploited the volatile and flammable characteristics of the stock in order to create an urgency for donors to deposit collections at national archives, while also appealing to the public in order to “loosen the purse strings of funding sources.”<sup>62</sup> Yet as Frick points out, “the popular rallying cry of “nitrate won’t wait” that had mobilized many within FIAF’s ranks had virtually petered out by the late 1980s. To a certain degree, the slogan had functioned, both rhetorically and pragmatically, to restrict the film preservation movement to those national archives that were best positioned, better funded, and legally sanctioned to cope with significant amounts of nitrate material.”<sup>63</sup> The model of centralization around national archives that had founded FIAF in 1938 was no longer serving the audiovisual archival community. The community network that had surfaced from the support of the F/TAAC across Canada and the U.S. acted as a signpost. Canada was already in the midst of shifting to a comprehensive system of archives under the CCA to support work happening outside of the purview of the Public Archives. The other significant shift within the film archival community was the need to preserve all film stocks, not just nitrate. The shelf life of acetate film stock was beginning to reveal itself, thus creating the need to re-examine film preservation strategies.

The F/TAAC network by the end of the 1980s included individuals working with collections and archives from a wide range of backgrounds including archivists from film and television production companies, footage libraries, film labs, small local or regional collections, private collectors, and academics. The founding of AMIA in 1990 was unique in that it recognized individual membership, unlike FIAF, which was set up for established internationally recognized and vetted archives. AMIA was a reflection of what was actually

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Frick, *Saving Cinema*, 120.

happening on the ground with the audiovisual archivists, collectors, and researchers doing the actual hands-on work of preserving audiovisual collections, regardless of whether they had been granted the status of being worthy of being saved by the national audiovisual mandates. AMIA aimed at creating a network of library and archival collections, moving away from the emphasis on national cultural and artistic heritage emphasized by FIAF and UNESCO.<sup>64</sup> The monetary value of keeping films within corporate or privately owned archives was also beginning to become more important for the purposes of sales of stock footage for film, television, and advertising.

The National Film Registry (NFA) was created in 1988 in the U.S. as a result of the continued decentralization of film collections, paired with the rising interest in the monetary value of copyright. In taking stock of the nation's film archival holdings, a new gap in collections began to surface: films that appeared to have no copyright holder or owner. In Frick's words, the NFA inadvertently "necessitated and hastened the rise of a new, powerful metaphor during the 1990s that remains central to film preservation discourse: the 'orphan film.'"<sup>65</sup> As defined by the Library of Congress, an orphan film is "a motion picture forsaken or discarded by its owner, caretaker, or copyright owner as is embodied in works such as home movies, industrial films, educational movies, outtake material, medical and training films, etc."<sup>66</sup> While the orphan film was initially an American concept, archivists, collectors, and academics quickly took it up worldwide. It was the platform upon which new preservation awareness campaigns were launched, and allowed for the loosening of what archives would deem worthy of collecting. The Orphan Film Movement in the 1990s culminated in the inaugural Orphan

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 96-97.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

Film Symposium in 1999 at the University of South Carolina where “Orphanistas” gathered to discuss specific collections, and the preservation initiatives needed to safeguard orphaned films. The momentum of the Orphan Movement propelled the celebration of amateur and non-commercial moving image culture.

Home movies, orphan films, and amateur cinema have helped to push towards a decentralized notion of film archiving away from a national canonical focus towards more sub-national interest groups, not always of a specific region, but of specific interests. Frick argues that this is a turning point in preservation: instead of focusing our justification of value on a national heritage level, researchers in the United States and Canada are now leaning more towards specific niche interests not necessarily connected to the traditional archival rationale or mandates for preservation. But this is still where we are finding major conflicts in the acquisition of marginal cinema: while attitudes have shifted, mandates have yet to follow.

In 2002, a group of American archivists including Snowden Becker, Brian Graney, Chad Hunter, Dwight Swanson, and Katie Trainor established Home Movie Day, an annual international event focused on community screenings of home movies. The first event took place in August 2003, with screenings predominately across the United States but also Canada, Japan, and Mexico.<sup>67</sup> Since then, Home Movie Day has spread considerably with the support of the Centre for Home Movies (CHM), which was established in 2005. Home Movie Day has been a successful way to raise awareness to the public about the historical and cultural value of their home movies, and encourage them to invest in their care and safekeeping. CHM is teaching the public how preserve their own film, and in turn, allowing the process and labour of film preservation to become transparent and accessible. The Centre acts as a resource centre helping

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<sup>67</sup> For a complete list of Home Movie Day locations that have participated each year, visit: <http://www.centerforhomemovies.org/2003-hmd-locations/> (accessed April 21, 2017).

to connect potential film donors to regional archives in the U.S. that specifically care for small gauge cinema. Preservation of the original film is stressed throughout the website with the phrase “Save your originals!” appearing again and again: “The first rule in film preservation is *Save the Originals!* The original photographic material will always provide the “truest” visual record of events, even if digitally enhanced copies may “look better” in some ways. Fortunately, films do not require elaborate storage solutions to remain viable for many years.”<sup>68</sup> CHM identifies the issues regarding the digitization of film, stressing that while a digital access or screening copy is useful, the future of media migration and rapidly changing formats does not guarantee future accessibility.

Media migration, preservation, and access – and the conflation of these terms – has become the pivotal archival debate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Film archivist and scholar Rick Prelinger has been at the centre of these debates promoting online accessibility to audiovisual collections and the need for a shift in how traditional archives approach access. Prelinger began collecting “orphaned” prints before the word or the trend began. In 1983, he founded the Prelinger Archives in New York City and began collecting what he termed “ephemeral films,” which include advertisements, industrial instructional films, educational PSAs, and amateur film.<sup>69</sup> The same year that Home Movie Day was founded, the Library of Congress acquired Prelinger’s collection of sixty-thousand films. The collection continues to grow, focusing primarily on home movies and amateur films acquired from “US corporations, nonprofit organizations, trade associations, community and interest groups, and educational institutions.”<sup>70</sup> A subset of the

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<sup>68</sup> Centre for Home Movies, “Caring for Originals,” Centre for Home Movies Website, <http://www.centerforhomemovies.org/caring-for-originals/> (accessed April 22, 2017).

<sup>69</sup> Archive.org “Prelinger Archives,” The Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/prelinger&tab=about> (accessed April 22, 2017).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

larger collection has been digitized and is accessible online via Archive.org. Not only are they accessible for streaming, but many of the films are downloadable under the Creative Commons Public Domain license. Prelinger welcomes users to explore, download, and appropriate footage:

Rick Prelinger and The Internet Archive hereby offer public domain films from Prelinger Archives to all for free downloading and reuse. You are warmly encouraged to download, use and reproduce these films in whole or in part, in any medium or market throughout the world. You are also warmly encouraged to share, exchange, redistribute, transfer and copy these films, and especially encouraged to do so for free. Any derivative works that you produce using these films are yours to perform, publish, reproduce, sell, or distribute in any way you wish without any limitations.<sup>71</sup>

Prelinger advocates for film preservation efforts like Home Movie Day in that he encourages the public to engage with archives. However, the contemporary demand for access has given way to a tendency for institutions to prioritize digitization over preservation projects and initiatives.

The situation regarding digitization, access, and proper film preservation is dramatically different in Canada where infrastructure, resources, and cultural investment in audiovisual collections are lacking. The emergence of digital moving image technologies has challenged traditional institutions with audiovisual holdings to re-examine their long-term strategies; they have responded with a shift towards access-based, public facing initiatives but a re-examination of acquisition, selection, and preservation efforts has become secondary. Yet as audiovisual collections move online, there is another level of selection and provenance to consider: often films that appear online are based on popularity, rather than representative sampling of an archive's holdings. Once again, key issues of archival theory are challenged regarding provenance and selection, and how archivists place value on fonds or collections. The decisions surrounding selection for online portals will affect what researchers and the public will consume,

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

and will dictate what will be seen and what will remain hidden. Rapidly evolving digital technologies make it difficult to forecast what future platforms and storage systems will look like, and yet collections must enter the online world to stay relevant in an online-research world.

### **Cinema, Media Studies, and The Archive**

In 1978, the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) held a symposium during their annual congress entitled, “Cinema 1900-1906,” bringing together film archivists and film historians to screen and discuss nearly six-hundred pre-1907 films.<sup>72</sup> Archivist Paolo Cherchi Usai writes, “For the first time, archivists and scholars would sit at the same table for the common purpose of redefining film history and rediscovering some of its unknown territories.”<sup>73</sup>

It is seen as the watershed moment where film scholars began to enter film archives to re-examine the trajectory of film history. The New Social History movement, or “history from below” that began in the 1960s and 1970s with writings by Eric Hobsbawm, Michel Foucault and the Annales School initiated critiques of the notion of a singular official “top down” notion of history.<sup>74</sup> Rather than looking to official sources of history, new social history sought out micro-histories through unofficial historical documents such as diaries, songs, manifestos, folk art, oral history, and film, to trace alternative histories from a pluralistic standpoint. Film scholars entering the archive sought after alternative notions of cinema that would help to open up preconceived notions of the origins of cinema and its early functions in order to fracture the

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<sup>72</sup> FIAF, “FIAF Timeline,” International Federation of Film Archives,

<http://www.fiafnet.org/pages/History/FIAF-Timeline.html?PHPSESSID=0qrs22pmkl0gg0m8dm4r33da61> (accessed April 26, 2017).

<sup>73</sup> Paolo Cherchi Usai, “Film Preservation and Film Scholarship,” *Film History* 7, no. 3 (1995): 243.

<sup>74</sup> Georges Duby and Robert Mandrou, *A History of French Civilization* (New York: Random House, 1964); Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* trans. A M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

singular Grand Theory approach to cinema.<sup>75</sup> The 1980s and 1990s are seen as a period of historical revisionism, with a shift away from psychoanalytic and Apparatus Theory of the 1970s.<sup>76</sup> Instead of examining the experience of cinema through a psychoanalytic lens of spectatorship, scholars were rethinking their understanding of cinematic language and the origins of film as a technology and artistic practice.

Noel Burch's book *Life to Those Shadows*, published in 1990, was one of the first to re-examine the institutional mode of representation embodied by Hollywood cinema. In looking to early cinema, he sought after alternative approaches. He is best known for coining the term, "primitive" mode of representation to describe the unfamiliar modes of filmmaking he was encountering in early cinema (a lack of narrative or linearity, awkward framing, and spatial composition). While Burch describes these modes of representation as alternatives to dominant narrative form, for Tom Gunning and others, his research shed light on the notion of cinema's natural or inherent language being perhaps a causal fallacy in film history's linear approach.

The same year Charles Musser released *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907*, contributing to this rewriting of early film history to include the role of the exhibitor as early film producer or curator, being responsible for staging the experience of early film. Musser's research aided in derailing the dominance of narrative over film history, and the

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<sup>75</sup> David Bordwell, "Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory," in *Post-Theory: reconstructing film studies*, ed. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 3-36.

<sup>76</sup> Psychoanalytic and Apparatus Theory became the dominant mode of film analysis in the late 1960s and early 1970s. These theories developed out of semiotic film analysis, utilizing Marxist critique, linguistics, and psychoanalysis. Cinema was interpreted by theorists to be a visual semiotic language of signifiers that needed to be deciphered in order to understand the underlying ideologies at play on the spectator. For an overview see: Barbara Creed, "Film and psychoanalysis," *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, ed. John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 77-90.

connection to vaudeville, World's Fairs, and the circus had scholars thinking about film exhibition in a new way – exhibition outside of the standardized mode of theatrical viewing space. Musser's work raised questions regarding the rise of the nickelodeons out of these various forms of exhibition. Debates about who made up the public that were in attendance brought up debates about whether these were bourgeois, middle class, or working class public spaces. Who watched these films? Where were these attractions located? Who could afford the time and money to attend? Was the content of these films catered towards a specific class or demographic?

New Film Historians were citing the Frankfurt School's Marxist approach to historiography to unpack the rise of modernity and mass culture by activating the work of Jürgen Habermas, Walter Benjamin, and Siegfried Kracauer.<sup>77</sup> Scholars were interested in understanding the conditions under which cinema came into being, and how the rise of modernity, industrialization, urban life, and mass culture created the scene for early cinema to unfold. Miriam Hansen's work on the public sphere in regards to the nickelodeon argued that these early cinemas had created an "ideal public sphere" where an array of classes could co-exist. Her notion of the public sphere is based on Jürgen Habermas's research on the rise of bourgeois democracy that created publics (newspapers, coffee-houses, public squares) where free discussion and public debate could occur.<sup>78</sup> Habermas's public sphere was also tied to the rise of capitalism and the institutionalization and commercialization of these spaces. Yet for Hansen, the

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<sup>77</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989); Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of film: the redemption of physical reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960).

<sup>78</sup> Miriam Hansen, "Early cinema, late cinema: permutations of the public sphere," *Screen* 34 no. 3 (1993): 197-210.



nickelodeon was a place for alternative or marginalized publics to emerge. Here she focuses on the immigrant working class and female spectators (which is then taken up extensively by Anne Friedberg in her book *Window Shopping*).<sup>79</sup> Hansen also discusses the overlapping spheres that cinema co-exists in (theoretical, historical, and with other forms of media) and states that this is where formalist and psychoanalytic theory and modes of reception can be salvaged.

The notion of spectatorship continued to be taken up by New Film Historians, with a shift in the relationship of spectator to screen. The context of varying publics and exhibition styles led Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault to coin the term “the cinema of attractions” to describe the relationship early cinema had with its viewers.<sup>80</sup> Rather than interpolating viewers through narrative (the focus of psychoanalysis and Apparatus Theory that dominated the 1970s), cinema was shocking spectators through illusions to gain their attention. Gunning highlights that these early exhibitions were about the astonishment of the illusion, rather than an acceptance of the image as an iteration of reality.<sup>81</sup>

New Film Historians were delving into the archives to re-examine film history and discover its plurality through a wide variety of film practices, technologies, publics, modes of exhibition, and distribution. The budding interests and current increase in the value of archives, and more specifically, film archives as a theoretical object over the past thirty years can be linked to several theoretical or cultural events. Andreas Huyssen has linked it to both the past and the future: the Holocaust, the most haunting trauma of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for Europeans, and

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<sup>79</sup> Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>80</sup> Tom Gunning, “The *Cinema of Attractions* Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde,” in *Early Cinema: Space Frame Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 56-62.

<sup>81</sup> Tom Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator,” in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 114-133.

the Y2K phenomena which sent global networks into a frenzy in order to backup and protect the world's data systems from the turn of 1999 to 2000. In this example, our desire to both remember and never forget coupled with our anxiety about preserving for the future sparked interest in a wide range of academic disciplines. Derrida's *Archive Fever*, translated and published in English in 1996, became the seminal text in this new area of study, focusing on a Freudian-Foucaultian reading of the archive as the site of memory, trauma and the politics of what we deem historically worthy of remembrance.<sup>82</sup> The Archive was being unpacked as a fractured concept rich with meta-histories and cultural memory gaps.

Patricia Zimmermann's book *Reel Families* was published in 1995, which was integral in bringing amateur film, a previously marginal object of study, to the attention of cinema studies. Following a similar methodology of the New Film Scholars, Zimmermann employed Habermas and Foucault to understand the public/private intersection that amateur film occupies as a tool of social, political, and artistic action.<sup>83</sup> *Reel Families* examines the ideological and socioeconomic discourses around amateur cinema as it shifted from an artistic practice to being relegated to a domestic practice via home movies by the early 1960s. What Zimmermann's watershed book highlights are the relationships between "maker and subject, between film and history, between representation and history, between international and the local... Amateur films are *records* of marginal practices, but they are also *registers* of complicated social, historical, national, and psychic discourses."<sup>84</sup> Thus, these initial critical writings pointed to the need for new historical

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<sup>82</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 90-91.

<sup>83</sup> Patricia Zimmermann, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), ix-xi.

<sup>84</sup> Patricia Zimmermann, "Morphing History Into Histories: From Amateur Film to the Archive of the Future," *The Moving Image* 1 no. 1 (2001): 112.

research and a broadening in objects of study when considering the role of images in history. Each in some way made space to include marginal cinema in this reworking of cinematic history.

This return to the archive and the interrogation of Grand Film Theory was also occurring in the midst of what would be called “The Death of Cinema” debates in response to the digital turn in commercial film exhibition. Scholars argued this was the death of a particular type of spectatorship, directly connected to the death of the theatrical, publicly shared, cinematic experience. Cinema studies as a discipline responded with a return to Bazinian questions around the ontology of the film, revisiting the materiality of cinema, its indexical nature, and its aura. Catherine Russell complicates the tensions around medium specificity, new media and aura, writing:

Is it still cinema without celluloid? ... Is there an original object of study if film history has entered such a state of flux? In Benjamin’s terms, we may be said to be working with ‘allegories of cinema.’ Translated into the digital language of new media, torn from its original theatrical context, cinema recedes to something awaiting redemption. This is the task of today’s historian and archivist, whose work is of course aided by those very technologies that threaten the existence of the object.<sup>85</sup>

The object of study for film scholars who were now becoming media scholars was in transition. As David Rodowick suggests in *The Virtual Life of Film* (2007) this revealed that cinema studies never really had a stable object in the first place.<sup>86</sup> As he, Dudley Andrew, and Thomas Elsaesser highlighted, cinema is a “threshold” or “in-between” art form that incorporates other arts at varying degrees, and therefore cannot be considered as a singular Cinema—it is more fruitful to examine the intersections and diversify our notion of cinema. As Ann Kaplan notes, cinema

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<sup>85</sup> Catherine Russell, “New Media and Film History: Walter Benjamin and the Awakening of Cinema,” *Cinema Journal* 43 no. 3 (2004): 83.

<sup>86</sup> David Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

studies had its roots in other disciplines, stressing that it is this hybridity that should be celebrated and built upon.<sup>87</sup> Philip Rosen's 2001 book, *Change Mummified*, reminded scholars of Bazin's important contribution to the field evoking his essay, "The Myth of Total Cinema," in which he states: "Every new development added to the cinema must, paradoxically, take it nearer and nearer to its origins. In short, cinema has not yet been invented."<sup>88</sup> Thus the digital turn could be interpreted not as a death, but a technological shift bringing it closer to its true artistic nature.

But the most useful contribution in regards to this dissertation is Thomas Elsaesser's essay, "The New Film History as Media Archaeology," which argued for a much more inclusive notion of media history. He turns to early cinema studies as a methodology because of the way that it was encompassing a constellation of viewpoints when considering cinema—exhibition, distribution, subject positioning, and technological advancement. He argued that new media is asking scholars to consider similar questions regarding "techniques of information, and a process of inscription, storage and circulation."<sup>89</sup> Early cinema scholars had successfully begun to disrupt the linearity of film history; Elsaesser's idea of media archaeology would build on the methodologies of early cinema but also include a "family tree" or "family relations" of medias that are linked or share commonalities in order to examine how these histories influenced one another or push against one another.<sup>90</sup> This media constellation would not only highlight their connections or influences, but also the gaps in research, and in doing so, consider the

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<sup>87</sup> Ann Kaplan, "The State of the Field: Notes Toward an Article," *Cinema Journal* 43, no. 3 (2004): 85-88.

<sup>88</sup> André Bazin, "The Myth of Total Cinema" in *What Is Cinema?* trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, Berkeley, 1967), 21.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, "The New Film History as Media Archaeology," *Cinemas* 14, no. 2-3 (2005): 75.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

overlooked, non-commercial histories of film and its intersections with other moving image media. This inclusive way of thinking about media could then provide a map for scholars and archivists to reference in terms of coming up with a plan of action in order to archive not only audiovisual materials, but the technologies they were created with and made for. As Elsaesser points out, this would allow more than simply the classics to be preserved and more research to occur around marginal histories.

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, this longstanding debate regarding the cultural and artistic functions and values of film brought about new perspectives on a previously uncontested history of cinema. Film, the very reproducible object that had once threatened the aura and authenticity of the Arts, had gained aura and authenticity through the medium specificity debate in the wake of its supposed death. As Tess Takahashi has noted in her essay, “After the Death of Film: Writing in the Natural World in the Digital Age,” film’s physicality in the digital age is what imbues it with value: “What makes film a specific medium at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is its material physical nature: its transparent or opaque film, its capacity for chemical development, its relationship to the projector and its ability to be cut, often within the frame... Today, film’s base signifies as a body that can be touched by the hand and whose image can be observed when held up to the light.”<sup>91</sup> Film’s physicality as Takahashi describes also implicates the physical movement of prints through the world, their handling, and their decay.

Film in the digital age has been infused with the aura, authenticity, and cult value. Whereas before film depleted aura through its ability to copy and duplicate itself and other works of art, film is now being considered on a singular print level. Film elements are now considered the origin of film in an art form that was previously seen to have none. The cult value of cinema

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<sup>91</sup> Tess Takahashi, “After the Death of Film: Writing in the Natural World in the Digital Age,” *Visible Language* 42, no. 1 (2008): 44.

comes from the reification of the medium, supported by its exhibition value, because of the closeness we desire to feel to the physicality of film, or specific prints. What Takahashi describes speaks specifically to avant-garde cinema, but I would argue that this is a notion shared strongly amongst audiovisual archivists caring for any film based collection.

Thus this shift in cinema and media studies over the past thirty years coincides with the archival shifts happening within theoretical and audiovisual preservation circles. This move towards a re-examination of early cinema in the midst of the digital turn has opened up space for marginal cinema to be recognized for its historical, cultural, and theoretical value within these three fields.

### **DIY, Amateur Cinema & The Archive**

I want to turn now to examine how DIY has been central to audiovisual archiving. The origins of audiovisual archiving are inherently DIY in nature. The first audiovisual archivists were cinephiles—collectors and enthusiasts of cinema. Henri Langlois, the most regaled pioneer in film preservation, infamously collected and saved films while France was under Nazis occupation. Audiovisual archiving came out of the amateur enthusiasm and passion to see film enter the archive. American film preservationist Paul Spehr was trained on-the-ground at the Library of Congress (LoC) in this brand new profession in the late 1950s. He began as an attendant at LoC to make ends meet, and was asked to join the new motion picture section as a typist in 1958.<sup>92</sup> This new section was created by Archibald MacLeish, who was appointed to LoC with no formal training in archiving or library science, as Spehr recounts, “He was a poet-

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<sup>92</sup> Paul Spehr, “The Education of an Archivist: Keeping Movies at the Library of Congress,” *The Moving Image* 13 no. 1 (2013): 151.

scholar with a comprehensive view of what a modern library should be.”<sup>93</sup> The profession had to grow and adapt alongside the development of audiovisual technology. Spehr writes, “Keeping motion pictures was too recent an activity for there to be any formal training, so this was on-the-job, learn-as-you-go activity.”<sup>94</sup> This meant learning from mistakes on how to handle films and understand their nature. Canadian archivist Sam Kula recounts this throughout his career, writing that as cinematic technology began to proliferate, a new network of amateur-professionals were stumbling to learn how to handle, project, exhibit, and care for film. Many audiovisual archivists came to the profession through backgrounds as historians and academics, but also as trained cameramen and engineers after World War Two. Spehr writes, “There was no training in film archive work, but we were able to assemble a group of dedicated and talented people. Some were professionals with degree as librarians, film historians, and film production specialists; then there were others who had the necessary practical skills in mechanics and maintenance necessary to keep the work flowing.”<sup>95</sup> The learning curve for audiovisual archivists has developed alongside technology: as film stocks aged, they began to understand the effects of colour-fading, film shrinkage, vinegar syndrome, and other forms of film deterioration.

In a Canadian context, Klaus Hendricks, a trained engineer, has been working at Library and Archives Canada since the late 1970s modifying machines in order to safely transfer a variety of antiquated film gauges onto safety stock. His expertise led him to create the film shrinkage gauge to measure the severity of shrunken prints. He is the sole maker of the gauge, which is used by film preservationists worldwide. He makes each gauge by hand, to order. Hendricks, an eccentric film specialist, was also a part of the team archivists and archival staff at

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 157.

the National Film Archive in Canada to diligently research film humidity regulations and cold storage in the late 1970s in order to bring about new regulations on how to safely store film.

Moreover, audiovisual archiving developed out of a DIY spirit of collecting, learning how to care for the medium along the way, in a collaborative setting of individuals with specialized skillsets. This came out of a necessity to make-do, as film preservation came as an afterthought to the production and exhibition of cinema. By the time film was given attention in the 1930s and 1940s, “the damage had already been done” and a large percentage of film history had already been lost.<sup>96</sup> The technical on-site training of audiovisual archivists came organically to the new field, but it lacked the ethical and theoretical archival theory needed to ensure that missteps did not happen. For example, it was common practice until the late 1970s to destroy original nitrate prints after they were transferred to paper prints or safety stock at Library of Congress. Spehr writes, “The success of the preservation program was measured in footage copied and pounds destroyed.”<sup>97</sup> The DIY development of the field exposes these missteps in hindsight. While the Federation of International Film Archives (FIAF) had existed since the late 1930s, and UNESCO had released their “Recommendation for the safeguarding and preservation of moving images” (RAMP) study in 1982, there was still a lack of professionalization. The field still needed standards and a code of ethics by the early 1990s. Film archivist Ray Edmunson, attempted to address the elephant in the room with his paper, “Is Film Archiving a Profession?” calling for university level training, a field-wide code of ethics, a formal professional association, and a “base of theory which served to define the profession, its principles and worldview.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Gregory Lukow, “Beyond ‘On-the-Job:’ The Education of Moving Image Archivists,” *Film History* 12 no. 2 (2000): 134.

<sup>97</sup> Spehr, “Education of an Archivist,” 164.

<sup>98</sup> Ray Edmunson, “Is Film Archiving A Profession?” *Film History* 7, no. 3 (1995): 135.



The Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) formed in the early 1990s, which brought together for the first time audiovisual preservationists from both public and private sectors, academics, not-for-profit collections, lab technicians, and collectors. Lukow writes, “This was a new departure for a field that has been dominated for nearly six decades by dynamic though often idiosyncratic and secretive collectors, or by large state-funded and national-level archives whose relations in the international scene were dictated by rigorous institutional based protocols.”<sup>99</sup> The demand for professionalization, transparency, and knowledge-sharing resulted in FIAF publishing a code of ethics in 1998, along with UNESCO updating their RAMP study. Yet these documents were still top-down and institutionally focused. At the same time, certified technical training began to appear with the film preservation degrees and certificates in North America at the Moving Image Archive Studies Program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), the Selznick School of Film and Media Preservation at the George Eastman House, along with FIAF and AMIA certificate training. New York University, and most recently, Ryerson University’s Film + Photography Preservation and Collections Management program have also appeared. Each program or certification offers unique and specific curricula that are not necessarily designed from “a base theory” that Edmunson called for. While there are standards, recommendations, and reports, putting them into actual practice has been a major hurdle.

Thus audiovisual preservation and practice still sits somewhere between DIY and professional as the demands of collections and the nature of professionalization shifts from archive to archive and country to country. In the midst of this desire to officially professionalize in the 1990s comes the digital turn where once again archivists have to develop practices on-the-

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<sup>99</sup> Lukow, “Beyond ‘On-the-Job’,” 135.

ground in a DIY manner, without a standardized professional practice as technology and media migration rapidly shifts. Nevertheless, the DIY slippages in audiovisual preservation practice and ethics has allowed archivists like Lutman to take on acquisitions like the Masecar Collection. The lack of a standardized audiovisual strategy in Canada is a double-edged sword, which will be explored throughout this dissertation.

The intersection where DIY, audiovisual practices and amateur cinema meet is important to make note of as it occurs in the late 1990s during a flurry of activity as discussed above: the formation of AMIA, the theorization of the Archive by scholars, the publication of Patricia Zimmermann's *Reel Families*, and the birth of the Orphan Film Movement—all in the midst of the digital turn.<sup>100</sup> AMIA, as noted earlier, was the first association to allow archivists from public and private sectors to co-mingle with the added contributions of film lab technicians, scholars, and collectors. In doing so, a dialogue opened up across fields: knowledge-sharing occurred and smaller regional archival networks opened up across in North America.<sup>101</sup> The historiographical shift within the Humanities laid the groundwork for New Film Historians to revisit the history of cinema and fracture its own grand narratives around the history of the field and its origin stories. The combination of AMIA creating a forum for cross-pollination of fields, expertise, and practice alongside the history-from-below movement created a space that allowed amateur cinema, previously overlooked as a part of cinematic history, to enter into critical discussions within the fields of audiovisual archiving and film history. Zimmermann's 1995 book *Reel Families* was one of the first signposts that amateur cinema has found a seat at the

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<sup>100</sup> It should also be mentioned that FIAF's "Out of the Attic: Archiving Amateur Film" Symposium in 1997 also played a pivotal part in amateur film being taken more seriously within the fields of audiovisual archiving and film and media studies.

<sup>101</sup> For an overview of activities see: AMIA Amateur Film Timeline, "Amateur film preservation in the context of the Association of Moving Image Archivists," Northeast Historic Film <http://www.oldfilm.org/files/file/Amateurtimeline.pdf> (accessed July 3, 2017).

table.

As noted in the above overview of trends in audiovisual archiving, the momentum of the Orphan Film Movement played an integral role in creating a forum to explore marginal cinema. The Symposium, along with the creation of AMIA's Small Gauge Film Task Force, fostered an intersection where archivists, curators, collectors, and academics were coming together. Dan Strieble writes, "Among the lessons that may be taken from the symposia: 1) the orphan film concept has international resonance, 2) the professional boundaries between academic, archivist, and artist are best blurred, and 3) the terms attracts both mainstream and outside uses."<sup>102</sup>

Strieble stresses the importance of blurring boundaries again stating:

The blurring of professional boundaries is evident in everyday practice. In ideal cases, an orphanista such as Rocha bring found footage, a scholar's knowledge, an archivist's understanding of the material, and the interpretive vision of the artist... Media scholars have much to learn from the working archivists who advocate for their collections, who have become historians by virtue of their immersion in the material. Lab technicians have historical insights as well, particularly those experienced hands who have seen celluloid in its many gauges and stocks, or videotape in its myriad of formats. When such professionals collaborate on an obscure piece, their mutual insights can bring about new knowledge and give access to works previously on one's research agenda.<sup>103</sup>

Before Cook articulated the archival "community paradigm," the marginal film community was already in the midst of formulating it. Archivist and scholar Rich Prelinger exclaims that if you are looking for frameworks to propel a field forward, look to the margins: "For many on the periphery, DIY ('do-it-yourself') functions as both ethic and survival strategy, and the periphery itself adds a needed element of decentralism to America's archival culture."<sup>104</sup> Moreover, it is

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<sup>102</sup> Dan Strieble, "The Role of Orphan Films in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Archive," *Cinema Journal* 43, no. 3 (2007): 125.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Prelinger, "Archives and Access in the 21st Century," 115.

this turn towards marginal cinema and a specialized forum that has allowed regional archives to champion marginal cinema and reach scholars and the public in order to activate their contributions to the archives. One key component of the AMIA conferences and the Orphan Film Symposium is that both have screenings at their gatherings. They have a tradition of not just preserving rare work but giving it a chance to be seen, researched, and kept alive by running works through projectors. It echoes the similar mandate of the Centre for Home Movies, and the Nitrate Picture Show held annually at the George Eastman Museum in Rochester, New York. It demonstrates the active ecology of an archival-preservation-access system wherein each actor is able to contribute and advance the proliferation of moving image culture in a peer-to-peer DIWO type fashion.

### **What Is Amateur/Marginal Cinema? Evolving definitions in a new field of study**

The definition of what amateur cinema encompasses is still being parsed out, and is in a state of becoming. Marginal cinema, as I defined earlier, includes small gauge (8mm, 28mm, Super 8, 16mm) non-commercial cinema created and disseminated outside of the scope of theatrical commercial productions. This includes artisanal film, newsreels, found footage, orphan film, DIY independent film, itinerant film, amateur (advanced/point-and-shoot) film, and home movies. Yet the ways in which these individual terms or genres are delineated is slippery. Charles Tepperman in his book, *Amateur Cinema: The Rise of North American Moviemaking, 1923-1960* (2014), has made this distinction between advanced amateur cinema and unpolished works in order to distinguish the history of artisanal amateur filmmaking from that of “the aesthetic simplicity of home movies.”<sup>105</sup> For example, Masseur’s films could be considered amateur and itinerant films; they also have a newsreel quality to them. While they are amateur,

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<sup>105</sup> Charles Tepperman, *Amateur Cinema: The Rise of North American Moviemaking, 1923-1960* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 6.

they also encapsulate some of the qualities of home movies: point-and-shoot, plotless, and unedited, yet they capture a public rather than private sphere. While the films are non-commercial, they were made with the end goal of making a small profit, unlike most amateur films. Masseur's films sit in a murky itinerant-liminal space. Thus, it is best to think of the characteristics of marginal or amateur film on a spectrum rather than a fixed definition. Like most archival collections, and cinematic genres, there are always slippages and overlaps.

When first discussed by Zimmermann in *Reel Families*, there was a conflation between amateur film as a polished DIY artisanal practice created with the support of amateur film leagues and trade journals versus the aesthetic “decline” of the practice into the domestic pursuit of home movies. Understanding this contentious divide within the field is important in understanding how this marginal field is defined, described, and taken up by scholars. Liz Czach offers up this useful breakdown to distinguish two of the most conflated genres within marginal cinema:

<b>Amateur</b>	<b>Home Movies</b>
Serious leisure	Casual leisure
Aesthetically ambitious	Home mode
Carefully constructed	Unedited (point-and-shoot aesthetic)
Identifiable genre: narrative, travelogue, experimental	Apparently genreless, seemingly plotless
Authored (title cards)	Difficult to attribute (no titles)
Potential aesthetic significance	Potential cultural or historical significance <sup>106</sup>

Czach stresses that the chart is a tool that offers a spectrum that a film can fall on rather than it being a rigid definition. Here we can see similarities arising with early DIY culture through the notion of “serious leisure,” evoking the professional versus amateur binary. This binary of

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<sup>106</sup> Liz Czach, “Home Movies and Amateur Film as National Cinema,” in *Amateur filmmaking: the home movie, the archive, the web*, ed. Laura Rascaroli, Barry Monahan and Gwenda Young (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 30.

professional versus amateur is what has traditionally been used as a jumping off point to describe, categorize, and theorize amateur film.

Ryan Shand has defined this mode as the “oppositional approach” to amateur film, juxtaposing amateur/professional, public/private, and commercial/non-commercial. It follows in the footsteps of New Film Historians and the study of early cinema through the ways in which it traces the modes of production, exhibition/audience, and spectatorship; however, Zimmermann in hindsight has argued that this oppositional approach is too restrictive and simplistic. Rather than defining amateur cinema against “normative” cinematic practices and culture, she suggests scholars “begin to define amateur film itself as a range and plurality of practices... Amateur film then operates as a disruption of the very construct of film history.”<sup>107</sup> Amateur cinema rejects what Zimmermann calls “the binaries of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” by complicating and blurring them. By moving past the binary of professional/amateur, marginal cinema goes beyond its use as democratic technology, and allows citizens, archivists, and scholars to reclaim moving image history beyond commercial cinema. After all, as *Amateur Movie Maker* proclaimed in the late 1920s, amateur cinema sought a way for film to be an art form, in order to save it from mindless commercial productions.<sup>108</sup>

Shand identifies the second mode through which amateur cinema has been taken up by scholars as the ethnographic approach, where societal and symbolic rites of passage, specifically through the lens of domesticity and family life are taken up. The home movie has been a dominant object of study in this approach as it is rich in its candid and raw depictions of childhood firsts, family celebrations, travelogues, and civic cultural events. The home movie encapsulates “the history of self-representation, where the camera mediates between self and

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<sup>107</sup> Zimmermann, “Morphing History,” 110.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

fantasy, between self and others.”<sup>109</sup> Here amateur film is often studied as “an index, marker, and trace of trauma ... repressed objects, practices and discourses.”<sup>110</sup> In this context amateur film and specifically home movies have been defined as a “cinema of recovery,” whereby history is being excavated, mined, and unearthed.<sup>111</sup> This notion of saving, reclaiming and unearthing is echoed in how orphan films are discussed as these subversive, and “resistant” cinematic texts.<sup>112</sup> Amateur cinema is inherently a difficult object of study due to its repetitious and mundane everydayness. Yet it is the ephemeral, personal and marginal nature that makes these films important; they are time capsules of cinematic practices and historical indexes previously overlooked.

The third and final mode through which amateur cinema has been defined, categorized, and theorized is the “evidential mode” where amateur cinema is situated within a larger historical trajectory. But Shand argues this is often “mobilized to understand the film itself, with the historical account subservient to the analysis of film.”<sup>113</sup> Here amateur cinema is studied as a resource of visual evidence to compare and contrast styles (echoing back to an oppositional mode) while pairing it with historical knowledge. I would also include under this mode the ways in which scholars and archivists trace the origins of specific films or tell the story of film acquisition. This mode evades engaging with the content of the films head on, instead becoming referential or an object lesson to a larger issue (this dissertation included). Shand’s article laments the lack of a theoretical framework to help move amateur cinema beyond the three

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>110</sup> Patricia Zimmermann, “Introduction: The Home Movie Movement: Excavations, Artifacts, Minings,” in *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories*, ed. Karen Ishizuka and Patricia R. Zimmermann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 1.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>112</sup> Czach, “Amateur Film as National Cinema,” 35.

<sup>113</sup> Ryan Shand, “Theorizing Amateur Cinema: Limitations and Possibilities,” *The Moving Image* 8, no. 2 (2008): 36-60.

approaches arguing that it comes from a lack of differentiation on different modes of amateur cinema.

Yet this is precisely what Zimmermann celebrates about amateur filmmaking: that it is resistant to dominant or popular theoretical frameworks. Amateur film is inherently fragmented and unsettles linear historical trajectories. As Paula Amad suggests, marginal cinema is the “counter-archive” which rejects the historicist-positivist conception of the archive.<sup>114</sup> This is precisely why using the Masecar Collection to interrogate the current climate in Canadian audiovisual archives is a rich case study—it is an example of marginal cinema entering the traditional archive during a time where there is a significant paradigm shift happening. As Zimmermann points out in *Mining the Home Movie*, the focus on “amateur film artifacts parallels similar moves in historiography to interrogate the function of the archive itself as a machine of selection and privileging of discourses that requires expansion into new territories.”<sup>115</sup>

This also parallels the trajectory of audiovisual archives coming into its professional practice in the midst of traditional archives addressing the need to shift their perceptions of what their profession encompasses and needs to make room for. To evoke Terry Cook’s community paradigm once more, now is the time to reconsider a shift away from “stable hierarchical organizations to situating records within fluid horizontal networks of work-flow functionality. For archivists, the paradigm shift requires moving away from identifying themselves as passive guardians of an inherited legacy to celebrating their role in actively shaping collective (or social)

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<sup>114</sup> Paula Amad, *Counter-Archive: Film, the Everyday, and Albert Kahn’s Archives de la Planète* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>115</sup> Zimmermann, “Introduction,” 1.



memory.”<sup>116</sup> Cook’s insights into a way forward come at a time when Canadian archivists struggle to maintain the philosophy of total archives across the archival network. In the acquisition of the Masecar Collection, archivist John H. Lutman enacts DIY total archives through a community oriented, fluid horizontal workflow. This acquisition reveals the possibilities and the setbacks of an archivist activating the community network.

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<sup>116</sup> Terry Cook, “Archival science and postmodernism: new formulations for old concepts,” *Archival Science* 1 (2001): 4.

## Chapter Two – Acquisition: Questions of Value

Roy Masseur's "Stars of the Town" itinerant films follow in the footsteps of "local views." Since the beginnings of commercial cinema, in Canada as elsewhere, film producers have sent camera operators out into cities and towns to make "local views" to exhibit back to townsfolk to "See Yourself as Others See You."<sup>117</sup> Initially attempted for profit by early mainstream producers, the gimmick was progressively marginalized as Hollywood feature movies gained their hegemonic place in cultural importance. By 1947, when Masseur took up the idea with 8mm amateur film equipment and supplies, making local views was a largely-orphaned practice of what has since become defined as "orphan films," which includes almost any form of cinema outside the commercial mainstream.<sup>118</sup> In Canada, however, that definition is complicated by the dominance of the National Film Board of Canada as a non-commercial film producer with nonetheless hegemonic centrality. Like other forms of amateur film and local film, the Masseur Collection's importance for archiving comes entirely from the accidental properties of being a systematic documentation of small town life in rural, Southwestern Ontario, quietly kept for decades until they resurfaced and were acquired by Western University Archives.

In archival practice, the process of acquisition is the literal act of acquiring or taking over the responsibility of housing and preserving physical (and now digital) materials that are deemed of historical, national, or cultural significance. There is a threshold of assessment that all materials must pass through in their transition from personal or private property into a collection

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<sup>117</sup> Paul S. Moore, "Ephemera as Medium: The Afterlife of Lost Films," *The Moving Image* 16, no. 1, (2016): 134-139; Martin L. Johnson, "The Places You'll Know: From Self-Recognition to Place Recognition in the Local Film," *The Moving Image* 10, no. 1 (2010): 24-50; Vanessa Toulmin and Martin Loiperdinger, "Is it you? Recognition, representation and response in relation to the local film," *Film History* 17, no. 1 (2005): 7-18.

<sup>118</sup> Devin Orgeron, "Conference Report: Orphans Take Manhattan, 6th Annual Orphan forum 139 Film Symposium, 2008," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 2 (2009): 114.

of public domain.<sup>119</sup> It is the bureaucratic process that assesses the value of a fond, down to the level of each item, choosing what will be accepted into an archive and what will be omitted. In the corporate world, acquisition often refers to one company taking over another, hostile or otherwise. While acquisition in an archival context is different, there are sets of careful negotiations that come with the process that could be said to be the institutional equivalent. In this chapter, I will trace Masseur's films from their personal dwelling place in his home in Dundee, New York to their status as a constructed fond at the Western Archives in order to examine the larger concept of value in the archival process. The evolution of value (a negotiation that takes place infinitely) is a delicate task between the donor, the archivist, and the institution in the conception of a fond. Fulfilling the wishes and requirements of each partner in this process can often be delicate, and the approaches to personal, economic, and technical persuasion range widely. In the case of moving images, additional concerns arise around questions of cold storage space and maintenance facilities, condition of the materials, and supporting information (author, documents, and who holds copyright, etc.). The archive that acquires materials—moving image or otherwise—*should* be the optimal one to serve and preserve the material in a variety of ways that will be explored in this chapter. But in the historical world, there is no such thing as a perfect archive. As Library and Archives Canada's information booklet reads, "First, remember, not all archives are created equal."<sup>120</sup> The acquisition of the Masseur films by Western University is an interesting case study to explore in terms of why this particular archive—an archive with no moving image experience—was the one to acquire over ninety small gauge amateur films, and how their value evolved over the course of the acquisition process.

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<sup>119</sup> Although there are different types of restrictions placed on these now "public" materials in terms of access, use, duplication, etc. once they have entered an archive.

<sup>120</sup> *Using Archives: A Practical Guide for Researchers* (National Archives of Canada. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1993), 21.

Questions of how value is defined, justified, and constructed are the primary keys to understand acquisition. Roy C. Schaffer describes appraisal, or the application of value onto archival fonds, as the single most important function of an archive.<sup>121</sup> Appraisal determines, as he writes, “the fate of our documentary heritage and thereby contains perhaps the only socially significant element of archival power.”<sup>122</sup> While intangible, the power of value acts like a container that can be filled and depleted over time: influenced by the sociopolitical and cultural climate of a nation, in addition to the economic and financial archival mandates of specific head archivists and the federal government. These sociopolitical shifts and their changing mandates affect the future of heritage for Canada.

Temporality is the cornerstone of the archive’s structure insofar as provenance in an acquisition is the arduous task of putting a chronological order to things: how a history of an institution, corporation, or person’s work unfolds.<sup>123</sup> Provenance allows historiography to reimagine the contents of a fond and recreate events. Its role is integral in the reconstruction of history, of culture, and of the archive. The notion of provenance, the passage of time, and the power of choice, is what archivists draw from to help decide what becomes history and what fades.

Marginal film has faced difficulty in justifying itself as culturally significant enough to enter traditional archives. Contemporary film archival culture provides a context for marginality quite literally through space and time—the documentation of specific local histories and cultural

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<sup>121</sup> Roy C. Schaffer, “Transcendent Concepts: Power, Appraisal, and the Archivist as ‘Social Outcast,’” *The American Archivist* 55 (1992): 609.

<sup>122</sup> Schaffer, “Transcendent Concepts,” 609.

<sup>123</sup> Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 19.

practices that are significant to a smaller group of people.<sup>124</sup> The shifts in historiography to meta-histories, away from the top down authoritative, “one History fits all,” specifically in smaller local archives, has allowed for marginal film and marginal film culture to be considered in a new context.

As Ryan Shand has highlighted, it has been difficult for scholars and archivists to articulate the value of marginal film due to its often repetitious everydayness, or the lack of contextual knowledge to frame its content.<sup>125</sup> Kracauer states in his essay about photography that images without a context fade in meaning over time as those who can identify them disappear, and the image as signifier disconnects from its signified. While the photograph or the moving image is indexical, it becomes something without a centre. It merely becomes an index of and for itself.<sup>126</sup> In order to keep the marginal film relevant, citizens along with historians, scholars, artists, and archivists are imbuing marginal film with meaning through a recontextualization of meta-histories and creative re-workings of marginal film. This has led to the emergence of a new area of film and archival scholarship alongside artistic interventions. The Massecar Collection is an example of how grassroots history from the bottom-up can lead to fruitful, yet sometimes problematic conversations around the definition of value, preservation, and public access in a contemporary light.

One of the ways in which the Massecar Collection, and other smaller itinerant film fonds are being reinvigorated and acquired by archives is through citizen engagement during the process of acquisition. In the spirit of Cook’s community paradigm, archivists and individuals

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<sup>124</sup> Karan Sheldon, “Meeting the Movie Queen: An Itinerant Film Anchored in Place,” *The Moving Image* 10, no. 1 (2010): 82.

<sup>125</sup> Shand, “Theorizing Amateur Cinema,” 50.

<sup>126</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, “Photography,” trans. Thomas Y. Levin *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 3 (1993): 429.

are combining efforts in reconstructing history; in turn, communities are taking ownership over their stories, and archivists are able to engage and raise the profile and value of film archiving. The labour of taking an acquisition is distributed amongst all involved parties. In sharing the work, the task of creating a new fond is feasible for an archivist who otherwise may have not been able to process the materials due to workload and funding.

### **Citizen Archivist**

Often times it is the archivist, the representative of an institution, who pursues donors to deposit their papers, documents, or other forms of media in an archive. These potential donors often hold a certain level of prestige—cultural, national, political or otherwise—that creates a coveted historical weight to their papers, manuscripts, or drafts of completed works. This type of acquisition gives insight and context into the mind of the creator and helps scholars to sketch out the context through which important historical, cultural, or political works or events have emerged. Even before the documents enter an archive, there is already a sense of value formed by a donor's public image and success.

Another type of acquisition I will be focusing on generally, are acquisitions made by public citizens engaged in civic acts of socio-cultural duty. These are materials that make their way to the archive via a citizen independently identifying value in some form of material and bringing it to the attention of someone in a position of cultural authority such as an archivist, a librarian, a curator, or historian to assess its importance.

In the case of the Massecar films, it was Mary Kirkland of London, Ontario who set the future acquisition in motion by the simple act of recollection. In 2001, while planning for her Dutton High School reunion, she recalled a man in the late 1940s coming to town to first make, then later screen, a film capturing the townsfolk. The act of planning for a high school reunion, a

community coming together to look back and remember, recalled these events indexed away in her mind: the organic retrieval system of relations, the original archive, the intangible place of memory.<sup>127</sup> It was this memory that sent her searching in archived newspapers for any mention of the man and the film he made. Without much focus to her search, she came up with nothing.

Researchers and archivists alike can relate to the frustration of a failed search: a researcher often begins on little information, and casts a net wide. The archivist meets this broadness with their own frustration in the sense that they cannot direct researchers to fruitful places to search unless there is something specific they are looking for. Unlike a library, the act of browsing, wandering, and discovering what we are looking for is disabled. This tangential form of research that we all engage with on some level or another does not coincide with the nature of the traditional archive. We can consider how the internet, the rival research tool to the archive, operates on this tangential wandering, and archivists are struggling to figure out how they can improve search databases to better serve the researcher—those who do not “speak” the language of archival cataloguing—an issue that will be highlighted in Chapter Three. To gain access to the contents of an archive, one must play by its governing rules that are not always user friendly.

When Kirkland's search failed, she reevaluated her approach. Instead of searching in the official records of history, she turned to a more personal and discursive methodology. She discussed her inquiry with a former classmate Yvonne, who in turn volunteered to look through her old diaries for any related information. Sure enough, her entry for January 6, 1949 stated, “Went to see a movie in Dutton tonight,” which helped to significantly narrow the microfiche

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<sup>127</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 14.

search.<sup>128</sup> From here, Kirkland's former classmate found two references to the film in the *Dutton Advance* that also gave the name of the filmmaker, Rev. Roy Massecar.<sup>129</sup> What is interesting to note here, is that the traditional or official channels of searching initially did not produce the information that Kirkland was after. She had to go "off the grid" of official documentation, and into a personal or counter-archive in order to locate what was sitting and waiting for her and other researchers to recall from the microfiche.

The use of the diary as a primary source of information speaks to the line drawn by official history in terms of the exclusion of amateur or personal history and more specifically, a female voice from archival history. Yet women are often the keepers of memory for the family in terms of the telling and re-telling of stories through various forms: oral history, journaling, letter writing, quilting, or documenting through photographs (which may involve organizing photos, archiving them in albums making note of the date, the place, and the ages of those in the photo). These acts fall under the responsibility of the homemaker in the private dwelling place of the family archive.<sup>130</sup> In terms of photography and the moving image, Kodak, for example, promoted their 8mm Brownie still camera and 8mm home movie camera with advertisements featuring women behind the camera capturing everyday life with an emphasis on beauty and pictorialism. Zimmermann writes,

Photography magazines considered women 'natural' photographers because of their cultural association as cultivators of nature... women photographers photographed their children, nature, interiors, or portraits of their husbands and friends... This congruence of women with photography is significant for a definition of amateur film, because while it legitimated artistry, it sunk it even further into the

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<sup>128</sup> Lutman, "Stars of the Town," 1.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Zimmermann, *Reel Families*, 133.



isolated sanctuary of the home.<sup>131</sup>

While this naturalization gave upper middle class women agency to enter into professional photography, the amateur cinema leagues and clubs of the 1920s and 1930s, which were in pursuit of a more refined and “artistic” aesthetic, were predominantly male.

Zimmermann remarks that home movie cameras by the 1950s encompassed a patriarchal dominance: “The woman and her children are immobilized by the camera, yet blissfully and almost self-reflectively participate in its representation.”<sup>132</sup> Zimmermann notes that home movie making, while being a private domesticated activity, fell into the hierarchy of the nuclear family.<sup>133</sup> According to *American Cinematographer’s* 1961 report, fathers produced twice the amount of home movies than mothers did.<sup>134</sup>

Massecar’s own film practice speaks to this divide as well. His passion for filmmaking coincided with the births of his children, who he became enchanted in capturing on film. Whether it was bedtime, or special occasions, Massecar was there to capture it, often structuring the scene and asking the family to pause while he brought out his light meter and framed an aesthetically pleasing scene.<sup>135</sup> Marion recalls, “Roy was not the ordinary home movie person. He just didn’t come in and take a picture, he wanted it to come out right.”<sup>136</sup> One can trace over the course of his films that he was influenced by the trade magazines of the day such as the Kodak filmmaking guide, and *Amateur Movie Makers*, the Amateur Cinema League journal. This trade journal and amateur film association that thrived between the late 1920s until the early 1950s was primarily made up of men, and addressed a masculine readership, speaking to a class

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<sup>131</sup> Zimmermann, *Reel Families*, 39.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>135</sup> Marion Massecar, Interview by Charlie Egleston, June 2012.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

of men who could afford to travel and adventure into spaces that women could not because of domestic obligations and the cultural gendering of leisure hobbies. As the patriarch and breadwinner, Massecar pursued the “Stars of the Town” project in order to provide for his family, something he was able to do precisely because of his patriarchal family role. Marion never joined Roy on his itinerant adventures exclaiming that it was too difficult with little ones back home in Drumbo, a small town south of Kitchener.<sup>137</sup>

This gendered separation of duties in terms of memory-making and archiving carries beyond the private sphere and into the roles of both men and women in traditional history-making. As Sven Spieker notes in his book, *The Big Archive*, women’s roles in traditional archives were historically limited to filing and organizing the records of a masculine bureaucracy.<sup>138</sup> The example Spieker gives is the role of the secretary in the steno-pool: her male superior dictates the letter, and she automatically writes, focusing on the words spoken, rather than their meaning, which contain the “secrets” of the company.<sup>139</sup> Spieker points to this gendered notion of the archive holding or withholding knowledge; it comes with restrictions on who can gain access.

But to return to Mary Kirkland’s search: this rediscovery came through the feminine diaristic counter-archive. This initiative in the resurfacing of Massecar’s films is situated in the ongoing movement away from the narrow, top down institutional way of making and singularizing history, towards a multi-faceted, inclusive, wide-ranging history from the bottom up. This inclusive shift speaks to marginalized communities based on race, gender, and sexual preference reclaiming and writing their own histories against former institutional history. Rather

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Spieker, *Big Archive*, 23.

<sup>139</sup> Spieker, *Big Archive*, 89.

than a focus on a large singular history, localized meta-histories are filling in the gaps in archival trajectories, allowing for histories that were once invisible to emerge.

Mary Kirkland's initiative, with the help of her former classmate, is situated in this shift towards making the once invisible, visible. Through a 411 search, she finally reached Massecar at his residence in Dundee, New York. When Massecar confirmed that he was indeed the man that had come to Dutton roughly fifty years prior, the women got to negotiating. Marion Massecar, the wife of Roy Massecar, located the Dutton film for Kirkland, sold it to her for \$50.00 dollars and shipped it to London, Ontario. The women, the keepers of family history and the collectors of community history, were the ones to locate, organize, and affix a new monetary value to the films. It was Marion who knew where to look in the house, the family *arkeion*, in order to retrieve the film.<sup>140</sup>

While the order of the family archive may not reflect the provenance or order that governs the traditional or institutional archive, its creators, Roy and Marion, understood its unique organization. Again, this points to the important role of the archivist as navigator for the researcher, as one who can decipher and organize the search for a document: where to look first, and where to look off the record, as many archival holdings go unprocessed and therefore remain unknown to the public and the database (somewhere the Internet cannot reach). The relationship a researcher builds with an archivist is an invaluable one, as they help create the order in which a fond comes to be, and their relationship and knowledge about the order of things are often the stumbling blocks that lead researchers to describe their experience of the archive as labyrinth-like: frustrating, confusing, or otherwise. This description accurately encapsulates a researcher's experience, but it is not the nature of the archive. The traditional archive aims to create order,

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<sup>140</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 2.

often in collections where order originally could not be found. This was the positivist inclination to order, claim, map, organize, and itemize the world and its contents in careful thought-out categories of things. The researcher does not merely speak the language of the system, which is not transparent. Its bureaucratic and patriarchal construction withholds information, precisely to keep its secrets inaccessible, in order to protect its donors and depositors, the provenance, and the physical labour that has gone into the acquisition.

The intensive labour that goes into creating a fond and the ethics of selection that inform provenance are what often creates a sense of ownership for the archivist over a collection. The desire to first and foremost preserve and protect the contents of a fond rather than granting access to researchers has been an issue in the past. Yet in recent decades, with the pressure for archives to remain relevant in the digital age of research, archivists are looking for ways to become more accessible to researchers through collaborations in order to demonstrate the relevancy of primary research and in turn, demonstrate the importance of funding archival institutions.

In the case of Library and Archives Canada (LAC), the small gauge film archival department spearheaded by archivist Caroline Forcier-Holloway reaches out to individuals like Mary Kirkland who are engaged in not only bringing new acquisitions to an archive's attention, but also in asking civilians to become actively involved in providing information for the creation of film fonds. This type of outreach, asking citizens to take responsibility in the creation of historical documents, is an iteration of the "community paradigm" and in the spirit of DIY. LAC relies on donors of home movies and marginal films to fill out the "Home Movie Checklist" in order to build historical contexts to audiovisual acquisitions. It also helps archivists quickly assess the condition of the film in addition to content and contextual information. The checklist inquires about the physical condition of a print stating: "Was the film reel recently run through a

projector? If so, are the sprockets torn or the emulsion scratched? Is it warped, twisted or torn in any way? Does it have lens burn marks or other?”<sup>141</sup>

Prior to this checklist, archivists would conduct donor interviews, which were a cornerstone for audiovisual archivists at LAC in the 1970s and 1980s, but with the decline in funding and staff, this much needed fieldwork is now difficult for archivists to do independently.<sup>142</sup> These recorded oral histories were conducted to place marginal works within a context that could create a “case” for them being culturally and historically valuable.<sup>143</sup> Forcier-Holloway, especially in the context of the funding cuts to LAC under the Harper Government, relied on donor-citizens to independently enter contextual information during acquisition.<sup>144</sup> Without a public citizen willing to put the time and effort into filling in the informational gaps, acquisition would not be feasible.

Forcier-Holloway and Lutman have both relied on partnerships with citizens to make their acquisitions come to fruition. With the cutbacks and staffing issues that LAC and other archives in Canada face, these are the ways in which archivists continue to fight to keep our marginal collections alive, relevant, and growing. As American archivist and activist Rick Prelinger has noted in countless lectures and public talks, it is the role of the archivist to act not only on their professional level as archivist, but also to act as a citizen actively preserving history. At the 2011 The International Federation of Television Archives (FIAT) Conference held at Ryerson University in Toronto, Canada, he quoted Robert C. Binkley in 1939 stating,

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<sup>141</sup> Caroline Forcier-Holloway, “Home Movie Checklist,” (Ottawa: Library and Archives Canada 2009), 3.

<sup>142</sup> Caroline Forcier-Holloway, “Rewinding Back to the Beginning: In Praise of the Donor Interview,” *Oral History Forum d’histoire orale* 35 (2015): 10-11.

<sup>143</sup> Caroline Forcier-Holloway, “Making a Case for the Donor Interview: Doug Betts Silent Home Movie Collection,” *Oral History Forum d’histoire orale* 26 (2006): 41.

<sup>144</sup> It should also be noted that there was a period under the Harper Government when small-gauge acquisitions were suspended at LAC.

“The objective of archival policy in a democratic country cannot be the mere saving of paper; it must be nothing less than the enriching of the complete historical consciousness of the people as a whole...”<sup>145</sup> Prelinger, along with other archivists engaged in collaborative archival-scholarly-citizen-based work, are trying to change the gated structure of the archive before too much damage is done. Prelinger suggests that we need to move away from the dangerous binary we have set up regarding value: preservation for the future versus contemporary immediate access. In the easy-access information age, the archives need to reevaluate their practices and rethink dominant archival discourse. Prelinger suggests what Forcier-Holloway and John H. Lutman have already been doing: reaching out to users, engaging in the public sphere, valuing openness, and making note of what is on the periphery of official culture.<sup>146</sup> What is also important to note here is the slippage of the roles of citizen-archivist-researcher-filmmaker that occurs in the Massecar Collection. Massecar slips into these roles first as filmmaker-archivist, documenting specific places in time, while the Kirklands act as researchers, and then citizen-archivists when bringing the collection to the attention of Lutman at Western. These slippages and intermingling of roles echo the forums that AMIA, Orphan Film Movement, and Home Movie Day have provided, whereby the boundaries of professional practices and roles are blurred in service of a collaborative network.<sup>147</sup>

### **Making-Do in Canadian Traditional Archives**

Film collections housed in Canadian and international archives have been witness to the dramatic shifts in value of film culture over the past three decades. Commercial films no longer

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<sup>145</sup> Prelinger, "We Are the New Archivists."

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Snowden Becker, "Family in a Can: The Presentation and Preservation of Home Movies in Museums," *The Moving Image* 1, no. 2 (2001): 125.

have “fair market value,” let alone small gauge amateur works.<sup>148</sup> “Fair market value” refers to commercial film’s drop in value on economic markets. While film is culturally significant in terms of a history of production, distribution, and exhibition, economically its value has been depleting due to the transition to digital formats. In 2012, Eastman Kodak filed for bankruptcy and began to discontinue particular still and motion picture stocks, such as Ektachrome 100D, a vibrant colour reversal film originally introduced for news photography, but also embraced by artisanal and amateur filmmakers in Super 8 and 16mm.<sup>149</sup> Economists note that while Kodak once had an extremely successful business plan, its inability to rapidly adapt to the demands of users in the digital age was the company’s downfall.<sup>150</sup> Archives are also feeling the economic and cultural pressure to engage with digital materials for fiscal reasons. Libraries and archives, once considered steadfast repositories of history and culture, are expected to run themselves more and more like big-data businesses. The appointment of economist Daniel Caron as Head Librarian and Archivist of LAC in 2009 speaks to how the institution attempted to streamline its operations driven by budget cuts. Caron’s senior management team that introduced the Modernization Project did not include librarians or archivists; rather it was made up of business strategists. Modernization became synonymous with digitization—a result of the value of online big-data and the need for LAC to compete with robust online search engines. The project naively boasted it would have LAC’s paper records digitized by 2017. The outcry from Canadian librarians, archivists and academics was profound, with many associations speaking out against Caron and the Harper Government’s vague new digitization strategy:

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<sup>148</sup> Prelinger, “We Are the New Archivists”

<sup>149</sup> Kodak reintroduced Ektachrome 100D in 2017. Kodak, “Kodak Brings Back a Classic with Ektachrome Film,” Eastman Kodak [http://www.kodak.com/US/en/corp/Press\\_center/Kodak\\_Brings\\_Back\\_a\\_Classic\\_with\\_EKTACHROME\\_Film/default.htm](http://www.kodak.com/US/en/corp/Press_center/Kodak_Brings_Back_a_Classic_with_EKTACHROME_Film/default.htm) (accessed July 11, 2017).

<sup>150</sup> Tacita Dean. “Save cinema, for art’s sake,” *The Guardian*, February 22, 2011.

One emerging priority is digitization, in preference to support for on-site consultation of paper records. The complexities of the digital age, with its burgeoning information, are said by Libraries and Archives Canada to make: “comprehensive acquisition and preservation unattainable goals,” necessitating “informed preservation decisions.” This worries historians and other archive users who are concerned this new approach will lead to a truncated cultural archive because of misguided selection or purging criteria, especially in the absence of professional expertise.<sup>151</sup>

The cost of the Modernization Project was a smoke-screen to cloak the loss of frontline jobs of workers who helped researchers and the public engage with LAC’s holdings. While the Modernization Project was going to supposedly bring LAC’s collection online, and in turn become more accessible, archivists felt and still feel frustrated due to the staffing cuts that have resulted in the inability to keep up with the metadata, description, and the masses of incoming acquisitions. The result has created overwhelmed and dispirited attitudes towards getting collections up online, as it is a never-ending job. Caron stepped down from his position in 2013, after it was revealed that he spent roughly \$170,000.00 on personal expenses over the span of two years. Caron’s vague outline of the “Modernization Strategy” appeared to have no infrastructure to even support the large digital undertaking. With his resignation, librarians and archivists felt that the institution could get back on track. Kelly Moore, executive director of the Canadian Library Association, recommended to the Harper Government that they choose someone with a library and archives background to fill the position, unlike Caron, an economist who, in handling a ten million dollar budget, omitted front line jobs on LAC’s reference desks, halted new acquisitions, and cut jobs in small archives across Canada.<sup>152</sup>

The Modernization Project did not even consider film in its digitization strategy. Caron’s

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<sup>151</sup> Penni Stewart, “Harper Gov’t Puts Library and Archives at Risk,” *CAUT-ACPPU Bulletin* 58, no. 4 (2011) [https://www.cautbulletin.ca/en\\_article.asp?articleid=3231](https://www.cautbulletin.ca/en_article.asp?articleid=3231) (accessed May 2011).

<sup>152</sup> Teresa Smith, “Library head Daniel Caron resigns as \$170,000 in expenses found,” *Ottawa Citizen*, May 15, 2013.



focus was on paper, and primarily on the preservation of government documents rather than cultural holdings. This was no surprise during a time when Harper's anti-intellectual stance was disassembling libraries and archives as quietly as possible. In 2007, Harper dissolved the Audio-Visual Preservation Trust, which had been preserving and digitizing Canadian audiovisual works across Canada through a variety of partnerships— though these too had a large investment in digitization as well. Preservation was becoming a bad word in a digitally driven economy and often times audiovisual preservation was being conflated with digitization. The cost of preserving film on film was high, and its market value began to dictate its cultural value. Cinema as a mode of artistic practice has inherently been implicated in the market, simultaneously called a bourgeois mode of art and a democratic one. Archives are cutting fiscal budgets. The ability to store more in less space on hard drives as opposed to cans of film is appealing to bureaucrats who are looking to downsize staff size and storage space while also digitizing a collection. However, this type of thinking is short-sided—an issue that will be explored further in Chapter Three.

### **Outsider Archivists**

While it is easy to focus on the cutbacks currently being felt in libraries and archives across Canada, I would rather focus on the group of “outsider archivists” who are coming up with solutions by changing their personal engagement with archival policy and practice.<sup>153</sup> The decision to acquire the Massecar Collection was an unorthodox, yet profitable one. First, the Western Archives do not contain an official audiovisual archive. The archive does not normally pursue film acquisitions, or even have anyone at the archive who specializes in film handling.

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<sup>153</sup> Prelinger, "We Are the New Archivists."

According to Lutman, the acquisition “was more accident than design.”<sup>154</sup>

Mary Kirkland’s discovery of the Massecar films was also quite accidental. Screening the Dutton “Stars of the Town” film in 2002 at the reunion was a complete success. John Kirkland had video transfers made to sell, with the proceeds going towards schoolyard equipment and student bursaries.<sup>155</sup> The enthusiasm by the community was relayed to Marion Massecar, who Mary and John continued to keep in touch with after receiving the Dutton film. In 2003, after the death of Roy Massecar, Marion asked John if he would like to have the other films Roy shot in the region. She sent him a list with over ninety towns on it, which she was willing to part with for fifty dollars each. The Kirklands could not finance this historical discovery on their own, so they phoned archivist John H. Lutman, propelled by an advertisement they saw in the London Free Press regarding donations to the Western Archives. But the other linkage here is that Lutman, in addition to being an archivist, is also a part of the London-Middlesex Historical Society that the Kirklands were also active in. While they did not know Lutman personally, everyone in the historical community knew that he had been an archivist at Western for over thirty-two years, and when people are interested in donating, they habitually turned to him. Therefore, Lutman’s professional interests blur over into his personal interests, and in turn, this strengthens the connection between the public’s interests reaching the archive. Lutman was an ambassador of sorts, and was often sought after by the Alumni Association at Western to participate in the negotiation of donations to the university. So in several ways Lutman has acted as the bridge between the collection and the community, the patron and the institution, and his active participation in the historical community in London played a large role in this, not to

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<sup>154</sup> John H. Lutman, interview by Aimée Mitchell, Western University, London, ON, November 11, 2010.

<sup>155</sup> Lutman, “Stars of the Town,” 1.

mention thirty-two years of service building a close relationship to the various holdings at the university.

The Western Archives primarily act as a depository for the university's records, but it also houses one of the largest collections of regional history for London, Middlesex and surrounding counties. This area was of interest to Western because, in the past, it was primarily where it drew most of its students. Because it was the first university established in the area, its archive became the central holdings facility, which they now compete for with other regional universities. But the other reason why the Western Archives have been connected to local and regional history since its inception is due to the interests of the first two librarians of the institution: Dr. Fred Landin (1913), Dr. James J. Tomlin (1970). Both men were also Ontario historians who had a scholarly interest in the subject matter. Their influence can be felt in the 1931 university's President's report written by W. Sherwood Fox that emphasized collecting archival materials for the region, a legacy that has earned the Western Archives merit amongst Canadian university archives as having one of the finest local or regional collection.<sup>156</sup> However, to the chagrin of president Fox's historical initiative, the archive fell out of favour with administration mid-century when the expansion of the university and its programs were deemed more important than sustaining their regional historical legacy. The student demographic was changing, and priorities had shifted.

But in 1997, when Joyce Barnett came on as executive archivist, things began to change. The word "archive" suddenly became important again within the university's identity after decades of the word being met with a certain air of disdain (mostly in regards to who should be paying for its maintenance: the university senate or the local region). This type of bureaucratic

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

passing of the buck is something film archives and independent distribution centres Canada-wide feel in terms of maintenance. Whose responsibility is it to pay? Who should be advocating and who should be writing grants and helping to preserve materials? The filmmakers, the creators of the material, or the archive? Or the regional, provincial, or federal governments?

Collecting film within this extensive regional collection has never been a focus for Western. The largest collection of film that Western holds other than Masecar's ninety-plus films are the Lockwood football films. According to Lutman, if a fond came with films and they looked "interesting," they would keep them.<sup>157</sup> Here issues regarding the of assessment of film in traditional archives echo the concerns that archivist Ken Larose highlighted in his article, "Preserving the Past on Film: Problems for the Archivist." Larose discusses issues of acquisition, appraisal and selection, and the problem of there being no official way to assess the quality or value of audiovisual content.<sup>158</sup> Acquiring film collections in traditional archives without a specialization in audiovisual collections can be somewhat haphazard. What one archivist deems "interesting" could be evaluated as insignificant by another.

Nevertheless, when Mary Kirkland approached Lutman regarding the Masecar films, the local historical advocate and archivist jumped at the chance to preserve and share with the public these remarkable marginal films. Lutman's immediate reaction was ecstatic: "I nearly jumped through the phone!" and his enthusiasm was validated as he told Western faculty about the potential cultural and historical value of the films.<sup>159</sup> With the support of the Kirklands and several professors interested in local history, Lutman set out to secure the acquisition.

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Larose, "Preserving the Past on Film," 150.

<sup>159</sup> Lutman, Interview

## Creating Archival Value

The acquisition of the Massecar fond proceeded in two integral directions regarding value: Mary Kirkland had to persuade Marion Massecar (as Rev. Roy Massecar had passed away by the time acquisition was underway) that these films should be deposited in an archive, and more importantly, that they were of historical and cultural value. The other was Lutman's "case-building" for the value of the acquisition to the executive board of the Western Archives. Both cases took a considerable amount of persuading, and both hinged on convincing the participants that these films were of value in different ways. In terms laid out by Prelinger, Kirkland had the responsibility of staking out the cultural capital of Massecar's films to Marion, while Lutman had to convince the executive archival committee of the economic capital of acquiring a collection of amateur films. Negotiating these two different notions of value occurred through "outsider archivist" DIY practices. Kirkland took on the role as citizen archivist in not only initially identifying Massecar's films as historically noteworthy, but also in reinforcing value to Marion Massecar, and in physically retrieving the acquisition for the Western Archives from Dundee, New York.

Roy Massecar died in 2003, leaving his widow Marion as custodian of his films, a collection that was considered a pastime of her husband's from long ago and not of any historical significance. The films were something he tinkered with for a short time in his life and then moved on. In the span of a life, one can see how Marion could dismiss the brief period of work by a film enthusiast.<sup>160</sup> This dismissal of the importance of amateur documentation is a familiar discourse: "oh, why would that be important" or "they're just silly little films" et cetera. Often times, these amateur documents are of the family in the private sphere, or occupying a public one

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<sup>160</sup> Marion Massecar, interview by Charlie Egleston Dundee New York, Spring 2006.

within the context of a travelogue. However, Massecar's films walk the line between the public and private in that they are itinerant films of a community in public institutional and industrial spaces. The camera techniques that Massecar employs (slow pans, close ups, and tracking action shots) with little to no editing allow the films to also be read as home movies for these towns because of their unpolished quality. Mary Kirkland's stewardship helped to convince Marion Massecar of the films' local historical and cultural significance because they contain places, events, people, culture, and life in a specific space and time. Marion's initial reluctance in donating the films to an archive speaks to what I would identify as the amateur cycle of valuing and then devaluing private sphere or amateur culture. We have the desire to document; a desire that Patricia Zimmerman argues is propelled by a consumer culture (Kodak's aggressive advertising), in addition to the symptoms of modern anxiety to capture the ephemeral or fleeting passage of time. We feel a strong need to document, to remember, and capture. We then desire to show and tell: to dialogue, to make witness to, to narrativize, and to regale. This window happens immediately after capturing images and fades quickly, taking with it meaning, value, significance, and context. This context is further lost due to the fact that most amateur film is silent and unable to speak for itself. Many films are often only watched once, if at all. There is not a specified cultural or social space where these images are frequently rescreened. Often they are not shown again until there is a marked occasion to return to the past: a death, an anniversary, or in the case of Mary Kirkland, a high school reunion. Through these rites of passage, amateur film becomes precious again, allowing those who remain to relive the past through the moving image. Without reviewing, these documents fade in significance to the documentarian and its subjects. These films are created for "the future" and for those who will come after.<sup>161</sup> But how

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<sup>161</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 68.

is meaning to be created, then, in the absence of context? Archivists who organize events like Home Movie Day attempt to reclaim their value, and yet the custodian of the film or collection often does it with some hesitation. Donors like Marion need to be coaxed and convinced into seeing or making value. Meaning needs to be reconstructed at each level of acquisition: at the level of the donor by the archivist, and at the level of the archive by the archivist to the executive committee. In turn, all create a platform for the public and academic community to continue to enrich the film or collection with more value.

This strain to create value around the Masecar Collection is quite different to the typical negotiations that occur between a donor and archivist when collections are being acquired. Often times a donor overvalues the documents they are depositing and wishes for the archivist to take them all, when archives typically curate what the donor offers.<sup>162</sup> Archives are about selection. Rarely is a fond created entirely from what is donated. Archivists actively choose during the acquisition process what will make History, and what will be omitted.

The politics regarding selection is one of the most crucial debates in archival theory as it is these decisions that make up what official histories are made of. While in the past traditional archival practices have demanded a certain level of objectivity from archivists during this selection and acquisition process, within recent decades the notion of an archivist's subjectivity is beginning to be taken up. Rather than dismiss the obvious influence of subjectivity on the process, archivists are now acknowledging the complexity of their role as appraisers, managers, and cultural observers in their archival practices.<sup>163</sup> Subjectivity inevitably becomes part of the

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<sup>162</sup> Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg, "The Archivist as Activist in the Production of (Historical) Knowledge," in *Processing the Past: Contesting Authorities in History and Archives*, ed. Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011), 5.

<sup>163</sup> Terry Cook, "The Archive(s) Is a Foreign Country," 514.

process, and it is precisely what led Kirkland to identifying Masseur's films as historically valuable, and what made Lutman so keen to acquire them. Intuition certainly plays a role in archival practice and research, although this conflicts with the traditional Jenkinson model of appraisal.<sup>164</sup> For Marion Masseur it took the contextualization and historical knowledge of Mary Kirkland to convince her that these films were of importance. Once Marion was convinced of their value, John Lutman could go through the administrative steps to formally make the acquisition request.

Citizens transporting archival acquisitions are common when it comes to amateur film collections. Often donors will bring amateur films in with completed information sheets for assessment by the institution. However, the Kirklands personally driving over ninety plus films from Dundee, New York to London, Ontario is going above and beyond. Normally the institution would arrange for large acquisitions to be shipped without the assistance of individuals secondary to the acquisition. Yet in the case of Masseur, the Kirklands' involvement in convincing the donor to deposit the films in the first place became part of the development of trust between the donor and the archive. The correspondence and friendship that was cultivated between Marion and Mary was integral to not only securing the acquisition for Western, but also gathering information and a context around Masseur's film practice. But what is even more surprising about the retrieval of these films was that it was done without any border paperwork.

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<sup>164</sup> In 1922, Sir Hilary Jenkinson, the then Deputy Keeper of the British Public Records Office, wrote the "Manual of Archive Administration." In this work Jenkinson states that archives are evidence and that the moral and physical defence of this evidential value is the central tenet of archival work. He further outlines his ideas regarding objective appraisal, what an archive should be, and how it should operate.



At the border, the officer did not ask the couple much other than their citizenship, and they did not divulge what they were carrying in the trunk of their car.<sup>165</sup>

Even more surprising is that John Kirkland took on the arduous task of indexing all the films before depositing them in the archive. Using his Movieola, he previewed the films to ensure that each film was in its proper can and made brief notes regarding the contents of the reel if it contained a specific event such as a dance, baseball game, or community play, et cetera. The Kirklands were an invaluable element to not only the discovery of the Masecar films but the entire acquisition process. Their ongoing involvement and commitment to the acquisition demonstrates how important the preservation of local history is to its citizens, and also proves how important public involvement can be for small underfunded and understaffed archives.

Western University held a reception when the films arrived to London, Ontario and were officially acquired by the archive. The Kirklands were celebrated for their participation in securing the donation, and the acquisition then began the processing and assessment phase, something which is a continually ongoing process, as the staff do not have much time to spend creating individual descriptions for each film in the collection. Since its creation in 2005, there has been little more than a general description and a list of the films alphabetized by town names that John Kirkland provided. The DVDs, however, were in high demand for the first year or more, so much so that Alan Noon, the Media Archivist at Western University who helped with digitizing the collection, could barely keep up with orders. Interest in the collection has waned over time, now that most people who grew up in these towns have bought their individual DVDs, along with their local library or museum. Only a few scholars and university librarians have acquired the collection as part of their media libraries. One possible reason is that amateur

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<sup>165</sup> John and Mary Kirkland, interview by Charlie Egleston, London, ON, 2006.

itinerant cinema is not prominently examined in post-secondary courses in film, history, or cultural studies departments. The other is that scholars and librarians are not being drawn to the collection by the lack of knowledge about this collection, or the lack of descriptive finding aids for the individual films.

During an interview I conducted with John Lutman, he recounted that he nearly jumped through the phone with excitement over the discovery of the Masseur films by Mary and John Kirkland. This was driven by his personal fascination with home movies, and also their potential historical value. His immediate gut reaction was to preserve them. However, in a professional role, he knew these films needed to be evaluated from the perspective of the Western Archives, its preservation mandates, and its already existing collection. As Blouin and Rosenberg state in “The Archivist as Activist in the Production of (Historical) Knowledge,” the notion of the archivist as an objective custodian in the acquisition, accession, cataloguing, and dissemination of the knowledge in an archive’s holdings is a naïve way to consider the integral role of an individual’s opinion on the acceptance or denial of a collection into the ranks of being labeled historical knowledge.<sup>166</sup> Personal opinion, while at once denied by the rules that govern an archive, still motivates archivists to pursue certain acquisitions. Archivists actively and politically choose to invest time in particular fonds out of necessity now more than ever, due to our current archival climate where deaccession policies are less transparent. The culling of collections is occurring under the strain of political and economic pressure, and deaccessioning is used to justify the purging of materials that still fall under the mandate of the archive. I have visited several archives in Canada— local, university-based, and national— that all have archivists and technicians who have a shelf or a drawer where they keep a gem that was

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<sup>166</sup> Blouin and Rosenberg, “The Archivist as Activist,” 21.

supposed to be deaccessioned and destroyed. Whether it is a frame of a rare 28mm film, or a photograph, or record, they all exist because of archivists who personally engage with their work as both an archivist and an activist. Roy C. Schaeffer suggests that it was the surge of records in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century that ignited the authority of the archivist to become more invested and active in the process of appraisal because of the demand to collect only the most historically relevant documents.<sup>167</sup> This shift in appraisal also came at a time of new accountability with further professionalization of the field.

Lutman faced several obstacles in taking on the Massecar collection. For starters, there was no one who had the technical knowledge base of film preservation at Western University. This is precisely because the archive was not in the business in preserving media, but rather rare books, university records, and regional collections. Their policy states:

At the discretion of the University Archivist, acquisition of materials other than University records may be carried out actively (identifying potential sources and soliciting donations) or passively (responding only to offers to donate). If a potential acquisition involves material of significant extent or value, details of the proposal and its implications will be submitted to the President's Advisory Committee on University Records & Archives for review and direction.<sup>168</sup>

Lutman had to “build a case for the Massecar collection” – a case, a defense, and a persuading argument to present to the Advisory Committee.<sup>169</sup> As with every potential acquisition, he filled out a form stating what the potential acquisition was: what type of media, the size of collection, how it fell under the mandate of the archive to preserve, and how it would benefit the community.

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<sup>167</sup> Schaffer, “Transcendant Concepts,” 612.

<sup>168</sup> The University of Western Ontario Policies and Procedures, Item 23.00, Effective Date: 22 November 2001. <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/mapp/section1/mapp130.pdf> (accessed June 11, 2013).

<sup>169</sup> Lutman, Interview.

Lutman presented it to the executive board for consideration, accompanied by his own personal enthusiasm for the collection. The board reviewed the proposal, and agreed to acquire the acquisition with the intention to digitize the films and sell the DVDs to the public for \$20.00 each. The Advisory Committee recognized the cultural value of the Massecar acquisition, but also recognized the monetary potential of the collection in how it could create revenue for the archive and the library. The profits from the DVD sales have been allocated to the general Weldon Library budget, rather than it going back into the Western Archives. None of the profits have been allocated to help preserve the original films. When I asked to see the films in 2010, they had developed vinegar syndrome, many of them were on their original cardboard cores, and were being stored in plastic bags. Some of the reels had mold. Others still had masking tape on them, band-aid repairs made by Massecar, fifty years earlier. The physical collection was, and still is, deteriorating, and the archive does not have the technical expertise or staff to support this collection properly.

While Lutman personally jumped at the chance to bring this incredible collection of films to the homes of the public on DVD, the longevity of the physical collection still is being overlooked. In media archives there are more questions to be considered when making an acquisition, and it is often the lack of media archival knowledge that puts audiovisual objects at risk of being discarded, mishandled, or displaced. Typically the mandate of an archive requires the institution to consider an acquisition in terms of its value to the region and how it could possibly complement already existing fonds. Archives also question whether they are equipped to properly preserve materials over an extensive period of time. The Western Archives had little information regarding the condition or content of the Massecar films until the acquisition arrived in London, Ontario, and did not have a media specific protocol in place to consider the future

safeguarding of the collection.

Should Western have acquired this collection? While the executive committee saw the profits, and Lutman saw the local historical significance, what of the physical films? How does the treatment of these films as “local home movies” reflect our current digital culture and also reflect the value we place on the amateur as opposed to polished and proclaimed art?<sup>170</sup>

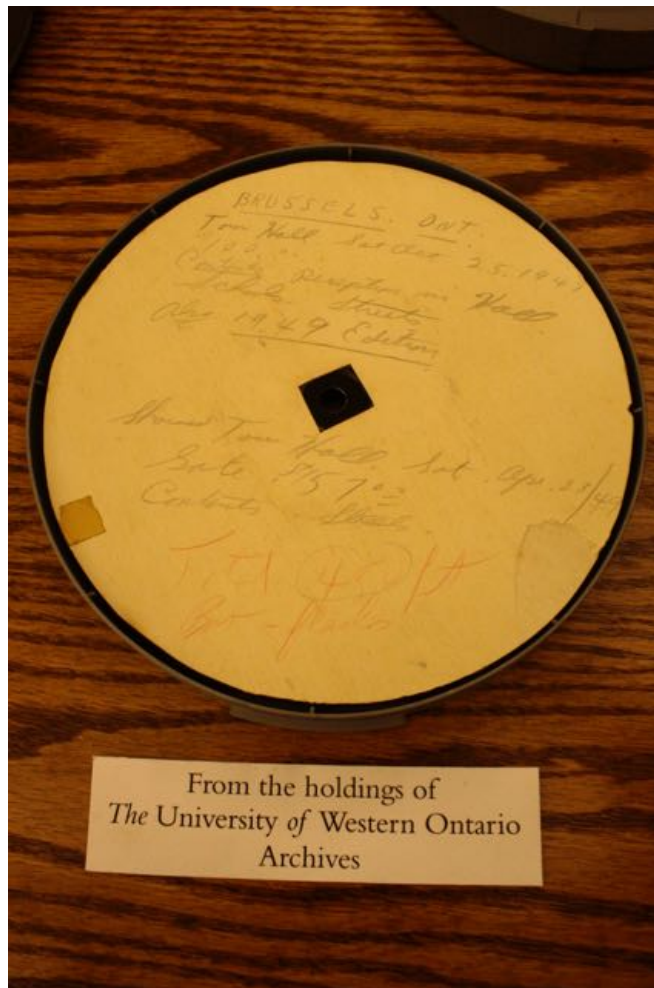


Image 2 – A film from the Masecar Collection, still on its original handmade reel.

<sup>170</sup> Lutman, Interview.

## **Citizen Archivist - Comparison Study: The Dawson City Films**

In the summer of 1978, a swimming pool full of nitrate films was uncovered from the permafrost in Dawson City during preliminary construction soil tests for a new recreation centre. As Sam Kula recounts in his article, “Rescued From the Permafrost,” these films had been used to fill in the swimming tank in 1929, primarily because there was an overabundance of film cans in the local library, and they could be used as cheap filler.<sup>171</sup> Dawson was the end of the exhibition circuit in Canada, so films that came to town often never left. Kula describes the process through which these some five hundred and fifty reels were excavated, temporarily stored, and sorted through based on damage and what was salvageable. The process of shipping these volatile nitrate films back to Ottawa with the help of the military is a compelling story. Once arriving at the National Film Archives, the International Federation of Film Archives and the Library of Congress became involved in order to offload some of the restoration work. Through this process, the U.S. films were repatriated, and titles that were previously thought to be lost were found amongst the collection. However, before this laborious process even began, it was the curiosity and interest of a young curator, Michael Gates, which allowed the rediscovery to become history.

In a brief article in the *Yukon News* in February of 2008, Gates recalls the initial discovery of the films and his integral role in notifying Sam Kula, who was director of the National Film Archive at the time. Gates had only begun working for Parks Canada as a curator for Dawson City’s artifact collection (a large and ever-growing collection of artifacts related to the gold rush) when workers unearthed the first few dozen films. Gates recounts: “By chance, I found an advertisement in an old issue of the *Dawson Daily News* for one of the reels that I had

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<sup>171</sup> Sam Kula, “Rescued from the Permafrost: The Dawson Collection of Motion Pictures,” *Archivaria* 8 (1979): 143.

just examined stating that it was to be shown in the theatre in Dawson City in the fall of 1917.” It was this serendipitous encounter that led him to contact the local museum director, Kathy Jones, and Sam Kula. Gates states, “I started to phone contacts I had in Ottawa and Montreal to see if there was any interest. There wasn’t, until I spoke to Sam Kula, who was the director of the National Film Archives in Ottawa. The next thing I knew, Sam was on his way to Dawson City to examine the site.”<sup>172</sup> Based on his training as a historian and his curatorial intuition, Gates sought out individuals that would share in his interest to do something with the films. Only Kula seemed to see the potential in what the workers had uncovered, knowing well the exhibition routes of early Canadian news reels and American films. Like the Massecar Collection, Gates acted as a citizen-archivist, contacting those he knew could identify the importance of the films.

The films uncovered seemed to have little to do with the Yukon, his area of historical responsibility. Nevertheless, Gates felt invested in the surfacing of film history. Kula credits Gates in helping to find a safe temporary storage space for the films until they could be safely transported to Ottawa. Gates exclaims, “This wasn’t the work my boss had in mind for me, so I found myself slipping out to Bear Creek at the end of the day to see how the museum crew were progressing.”<sup>173</sup>

Moreover, the story of the Dawson City Film collection, while fascinating in its repatriation of some of the most rare early American films and Canadian newsreels, leaves out how citizens helped to identify the films as historically noteworthy. In fact, it was the aid of a “sympathetic truck driver who was prepared to turn a blind eye” to the potentially explosive shipment that allowed Kula and Jones to transport the films to Whitehorse where they could be

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<sup>172</sup> Michael Gates, “There’s film in them thar hills,” *Yukon News*. February 1, 2008.

<sup>173</sup> Gates, “There’s film in them thar hills.”

safely packed and airlifted to Ottawa.<sup>174</sup> These facts are anecdotal in the overall account of the Dawson City Films rediscovery, but I think it is important to recognize how a few individuals were integral to these films being acknowledged as historically valuable by a variety of institutions.

While Kula and the National Film Archives were the first to see the importance of these films, the decision to parse out the preservation work between the National Film Archive, Library of Congress, and International Federation of Film Archives was to better preserve the delicate prints in a more timely manner, allowing the films to not only be repatriated, but sent to where they would be best cared for. While Lutman and Western have identified the Masecar films as valuable in terms of their content, perhaps it is time for the objects themselves to be regarded in the same manner. I will return to this discussion in regards to the film transferring and digitization process in Chapter Three, as the films came under stress during this activity, and it is significant to how we have placed value on the intangible moving image, rather than the physical film format.

## **Conclusion**

While the Masecar Collection may not be in the most suitable archive in terms of media preservation, it exists within an archive supported by communities who are engaged with their history. Citizen archivists, Mary and John Kirkland, have helped to reconnect countless towns with a piece of local history, which has generated more individuals to help in identifying faces and places within the Masecar Collection. In doing so, the value in these images have been rejuvenated after decades of displaced meaning. Throughout the acquisition process, the Masecar Collection passed through a variety of value-judgments: from the position of the donor,

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<sup>174</sup> Kula, "Rescued from the Permafrost," 143.



Marion Massecar, the films her husband made for a brief period in his life transformed from past time into culturally significant historical objects. For citizen archivists John and Mary Kirkland, the films transitioned from a local film of Dutton to a historical obligation to repatriate these films to their home towns. The Western Archives sought to preserve these films, as they are invaluable primary sources of research for historians and researchers interested in local Southwestern and Central Ontario cultural history, in addition to the collection being a rare example of itinerant filmmaking in Canada.

What this acquisition recognizes is the changing roles and values of archives, archivists, citizens, and researchers. As Rick Prelinger notes, “When privilege spreads and public users can themselves roam the archives and articulate their own relationship to materials, cultural history starts to change.”<sup>175</sup> DIY citizen archivists engaging with the archive, as Prelinger notes, not only rearticulate history, but also bring materials that may otherwise not be visible to light, allowing them to work for the public, and not just for internal institutional purposes. Prelinger states, “Archives tend to work silently and reclusively. We cannot assume they are acting in all of our interests when their collections are not exposed.”<sup>176</sup> In engaging with the Western Archives, the Kirklands became liaisons between the institution and the public, demonstrating that citizen involvement is important and integral part in the redefinition of contemporary archival practices.

Western Archives, and more importantly archivist John H. Lutman, demonstrated an outsider archivist approach in engaging with the public so closely throughout this acquisition process. Rather than stepping in and taking over the acquisition process, acting as a gatekeeper between the Massecars and Western, Lutman put trust in the relationship that had been forged

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<sup>175</sup> Rick Prelinger, "It's Only A Moving Image: Archives, Access and the Social Contract," Keynote, Future Histories of the Moving Image Conference, Sunderland University, U.K., November 2007.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

between Mary and Marion. In sharing the traditional courtship of the donor with the Kirklands, Lutman evokes an open, inclusive, and citizen-based archive rather than a traditional bureaucratic one that distances the public from participating in its history.

Lutman also encouraged oral history through several different donor interviews, something that Caroline Forcier-Holloway has recognized as a lost art in the acquisition process. Forcier-Holloway highlights in her essay, “Making a Case for the Donor Interview” that interviewing the donor is now an “often overlooked... tool to gain significant contextual information from archival donors and/or creators of silent home movies.”<sup>177</sup> Charlie Egleston, who was the filmmaker that helped digitize the Masecar Collection, made a trip to Dundee, New York to speak with Marion Masecar to contextualize the films her husband made. Egleston also interviewed the Kirklands and their experience of the acquisition process, which has been integral in sketching out the history of these films in terms of the production, exhibition and distribution practice. These oral histories have been pivotal in understanding Masecar’s motivation to become an itinerant filmmaker, and will be invaluable to researchers studying these films in the future. As Forcier Holloway notes,

Far and few between are the archival institutions that encourage donors and/or creators to participate in a recorded interview upon donation of their fonds or collection, and in particular, interviews with filmmakers of silent home movies. Without structured implementation and real commitment, any institution risks losing crucial details that could remain overlooked, forgotten, or lost forever.<sup>178</sup>

Lutman’s flexibility in allowing Egleston to pursue these interviews in place of himself once again speaks to the openness that he fostered through this acquisition, in addition to thinking of smart ways of overcoming budgetary cuts.

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<sup>177</sup> Forcier-Holloway, “Making a Case,” 41.

<sup>178</sup> Forcier-Holloway, *Ibid.*

The acquisition of the Massecar fond traces a variety of value systems through which the collection passed. However, the values these film prints possess continue to be questioned beyond acquisition due to their digital transformation. Chapter Three will investigate how the Massecar Collection was physically assessed, handled, and digitized by media archivist Alan Noon and audiovisual technician/filmmaker Charlie Egleston over the course of a year. By examining their DIY process against current film preservation and inspection policies in Canada, I will explore the tensions around the preservation of the physical artifact, the risk the collection faced in being digitized, and questions around the stability of the digitized films. While traditionally, archivists and the archive preserve for the future, the choice to digitize these fragile films has given the public access to their local history, although they are not pristine professional transfers. How much does this matter in film and media studies research and in what contexts of use? How is our desire to digitize affecting the longevity of the objects that we study? How has the anxiety of the digital era influenced the current status of moving image archives in Canada and worldwide?

### Chapter Three – Cataloguing and Digitization

The historical turn in film studies and cinematic culture as a whole has affected the material and professional practices of audiovisual archiving and scholarship. The emergence of digital moving image technologies has challenged these fields to re-examine debates over the ontology of the moving image and the ways in which we engage with images in time and space. Film's very ontology, following Walter Benjamin, is based upon the technological reproducibility of the image and the capacity for montage and close-up in the resulting work of art, which acts as a critique of essentializing authenticity and "aura" in other forms of art.<sup>179</sup> Yet, since the emergence of digital copying beyond merely mechanical reproduction, the depletion of aura of cinema itself finds new resonance in our "digital dark ages."<sup>180</sup> As scholars set out to map this new media terrain, we are stumbling with definitions and creating camps based on what cinema was and now encompasses. With our everyday globalized networks and multi-platform technological experiences, moving images from a variety of film and videotape formats now circulate digitally in the nexus of computer code, detached from their original modes of viewing. The global village as defined by Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s has become our online everyday, and has shaped modes of address, the ways in which research is conducted, and how culture operates on a mass scale. As stated in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962): "A computer as a research and communication instrument could enhance retrieval, obsolesce mass library organization, retrieve the individual's encyclopedic function and flip into a private line to

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<sup>179</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writing on Media*, ed. Jennings, Doherty, Levin, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>180</sup> Paolo Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema: History, Cultural Memory and the Digital Dark Age* (London: British Film Institute, 2001).

speedily tailored data of a saleable kind.”<sup>181</sup> The Internet and its coinciding digital platforms have brought the malleability that McLuhan’s scholarship described: a move away from materiality into the virtual, with the speed and ease of personally tailored data, monetizing knowledge into digestible packets of information. It has brought into question our older forms of technology used to access information and create knowledge, specifically due to the commercial clout that digital platforms have on consumer culture. With speed has come the rapid aging of technology, some only having a shelf life of a year or less. New hardware and software quickly become things of the past, causing a rapidly changing technological landscape. It has brought into question the value of maintaining older hardware and software, and the preservation of these various formats and models. More specifically, in media archiving it has brought to the forefront the preservation of a wide range of analog audiovisual formats.

The Masecar Collection is a test case for what scholars are debating regarding this transitional period in audiovisual technologies, dissemination, and scholarly research due to the ways in which the collection speaks to the on-going issues that archives face in this digital turn. The Masecar Collection addresses the audiovisual archival climate in Canada and abroad regarding audiovisual standard practices, long-term preservation storage formats, and most importantly, the changing role of the archival profession and archival culture. Through this unique itinerant collection, this chapter will address three of the overarching concerns faced by archives, and more specifically, audiovisual archives in the digital era:

- Rapidly changing audiovisual archival standards
- Online (immaterial) versus. Offline (material) dissemination of knowledge and information

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<sup>181</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1962), 293.

- Archival Preservation versus Public Accessibility

Using these overarching concerns to frame the discussion, I will examine what the effect of the digital landscape means to traditional “memory institutions.”<sup>182</sup> This chapter will take up the current shifts in how culture and heritage are created, framed, and consumed in a digital world. By examining the differences between the cycles that both digital and physical materials move through, one can begin to understand the significant shifts in the way in which we access knowledge and information and in turn, how this affects the type of scholarly research that is produced. Moreover, I will probe what this means for not only the future of audiovisual collections, but also what is at stake for the future safeguarding of audiovisual archival practices.

### **Rapidly Changing Audiovisual Archival Standards: DIY Digitization of The Massecar Collection**

As noted in the previous chapter, the Western Archives are not commonly known for their audiovisual collections. Rather, the archive holds records of the university, a series of rare book collections, regional collections and several notable newspapers collections from London, Middlesex, and Oxford County on microfiche. Lutman recognized the local cultural significance

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<sup>182</sup> Yola Lusenet, “Tending the Garden or Harvesting the Fields: Digital Preservation and the UNESCO Charter on the Preservation of Digital Heritage,” *Library Trends* 56, no. 1 (2007): 164-182. I am using the concept of memory institutions as used by Yola Lusenet to describe the wide variety of institutions (national or provincial archives, university and college archives, local archives, and library special collections, etc.) both on and offline to highlight just how ubiquitous the concept of archiving or safeguarding records and cultural objects now are. Once clear-cut institutions have now become murky or have collapsed into one another, such as the National Archives and the National Library of Canada being absorbed into one institution in 2004. Subsequently, Library and Archives Canada has faced budget cuts affecting their operating hours, staffing and public services. The issue when collapsing institutions is that a hierarchy is created between the work of librarians and archivists, with the former taking precedence. Each institution has its specific practices and mandates. They often do not speak the same “language.” For instance, librarians promote immediate accessibility, whereas archivists are more cautious and consider provenance and accessibility for future generations. Collapsing libraries and archives together may seem logical on paper for budgetary reasons, but does not translate well in day-to-day tasks.

of Masseur's films in acquiring the collection, but did not have the film handling training to care for the collection in the way a specialized audiovisual archive normally would. To address the issue, Lutman reached out to a colleague at another archive for guidance, as he knew from John Kirkland's initial assessment of the collection, that the prints would need to be assessed and repaired before digitization.

This is the first impasse the collection faced in being deposited at Western University: while it was deemed noteworthy enough to enter a University archive, the archive was not one with audiovisual expertise. Most marginal films in larger institutions are deposited as a small or peripheral component of a substantial fond. For example, amateur films or home movies often find their way to the archive as part of the collection of papers from a political or notable cultural figure. Marginal film is just that: objects that remain on the margins or peripheries of a collection, and in turn, historiography.

Moreover, not all archives are created equal, or in the same ways, which worked to the benefit of the Masseur Collection in the sense that Western Archives accepted an audiovisual collection outside of its standard collection, and a lack of technical knowledge allowed it to be digitized and made accessible to the public quickly. If the collection had been acquired by a highly skilled audiovisual archive, it would have gone under a longer assessment process that could have resulted in the collection being deemed "unprojectable," or not worth digitizing in comparison to other restoration and digitization projects. In this way, circumstances at the Western Archives favoured this important itinerant film collection.

An advantage to Masseur's Collection of films finding their way to the Western Archives was the support of filmmaker, Charlie Egleston. Lutman turned to the filmmaker for his insight and knowledge of film-handling. In the absence of an audiovisual archivist, Egleston, a

filmmaker with a film-based practice, became the expert. Similar to the beginnings of audiovisual archival departments in larger archival institutions such as the National Archives of Canada or the Library of Congress in the U.S., a practitioner with camera training became the person with authority. At that time, Egleston was an instructor in the Film Studies Department, and was contacted to assess, repair, and project the prints for digital capturing, with the support of Western University Media Specialist Alan Noon, and Archival Assistant Barry Arnott who supported the project on the post-production and DVD packaging. Egleston, an artisanal filmmaker, taught film aesthetics and also supervised and trained students on audiovisual technology in the Film Studies Department at Western. With this background, he could assess and repair the prints, and in the process, could recount for Lutman and Noon a bit about Massecar's film practices. Through the support of an artist engaged in personal and small-gauged cinema practices, more about the origins of Massecar's filmmaking was revealed. The knowledge of a filmmaker who understood the processes and the material labour of the artistic practice informed the processing of the collection. For instance, Egleston upon seeing that many of the prints were on homemade cardboard reels made out of grocery produce boxes, became increasingly curious of Massecar's DIY practices. Making due with these makeshift reels for storage purposes, rather than buying and storing all of his prints on metal reels led Egleston to examine the prints themselves more closely for additional physical traces of Massecar's DIY practice on the prints. He found more evidence of Massecar's labour via the scotch tape splices that held some of the films together. Using household tape instead of film splicing cement told Egleston that Massecar was often fixing prints on-the-fly while projecting films. These DIY repairs were quick fixes to tears or snapping of the prints that did not need to last more than a few projections. Unlike artisanal or commercial film, Massecar's exhibition copies only had to



last for two screenings: he would show the reel twice, back to back, often rewinding the footage backwards through the gate for laughs. Moreover, these prints were treated or handled differently than commercial exhibition prints, and had a unique purpose in that they had very exclusive audiences and exhibition practices. Masseur did sell copies of the films for a fee, but often times these screenings were truly ephemeral. They happened once and then only existed in public memory—in the minds of spectators like Mary Kirkland, who sought out Masseur and the film he made in her hometown of Dutton, Ontario.

Egleston, while digitizing one of the films, was able to identify that Masseur had filmed on a 8mm Bolex after seeing his reflection in a shop window. Upon interviewing Marion Masseur, he had the chance to see this camera. Knowing about film stocks, Egleston could make an educated guess on the type of stock Masseur used, which was likely Kodak Safety Film B&W reversal stock.<sup>183</sup> In an interview Egleston states, “He did not process it himself. He would edit the camera originals, which were reversal (positive) images. If someone wanted to buy a copy of the film, he would send it away to a lab to have a print struck from his original.”<sup>184</sup> It was through the support of a filmmaker that could “read” the language of the prints that Lutman and Noon could begin to understand more about Masseur’s film practice, which informed the history of the collection. The importance of having a film practitioner in lieu of an audiovisual archivist involved in the acquisition and digitization of this fond made a significant difference in what we currently know about the collection.

Through a collaborative, open, and unorthodox methodology this specific collection highlights the ways in which Lutman, a traditionally trained archivist, moved away from the traditional standard archival practices in a useful way. Audiovisual archivists exclaim that this

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<sup>183</sup> Charlie Egleston, email to Aimée Mitchell, August 23, 2013.

<sup>184</sup> Charlie Egleston, interview by Aimée Mitchell, Ottawa, ON, May 29, 2009.

type of experimentation in the approach to audiovisual collections is actually quite common. Due to the unique qualities and circumstances surrounding each collection, audiovisual archivists have a difficult time following set archival standards. Some archivists like Ray Edmonson argue that the profession is something entirely different than traditional archiving, as audiovisual archival practices are influenced by a variety of practices, including museum studies, due to the materiality of audiovisual objects.<sup>185</sup>

Archiving as a professionalized job is young, let alone the specialized audiovisual archiving profession. While there are many best practices now like the UNESCO recommendations, FIAF's Preservation Best Practices, AMIA's Cataloging Practices, or the Independent Media and Arts Preservation 101 here in Canada, what can be implemented in practice varies depending on funding, storage space, and labour power.<sup>186</sup> The way a collection is approached is often on a case-by-case basis, highlighting that while there are standardized archival practices, they act more like guidelines than strict rules.

Once Egleston did a basic bench inspection of the films, he set out to digitize them using a simple DIY technique: projecting the films on a white wall, and filming them with a Canon XL1, which was considered a high-end digital camera for 2005. By bringing the projector close to the wall, a focused image could be captured by the digital camera, and recorded on MiniDV. Egleston and Noon imported these DV files into Final Cut Pro, included a title screen indicating what town the film was shot in, and attached credits at the end. Egleston used John Kirkland's invaluable index notes as a guide throughout this process. Any dropped frames from the digital

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<sup>185</sup> Edmonson, "Is archiving a profession?" 245.

<sup>186</sup> The *AMIA Compendium of Moving Image Cataloging Practice*, published by the Society of American Archivists and Association of Moving Image Archivists (2001) is a good reference guide that demonstrates how unique each audiovisual archive is based on its funding, expertise, and resource structures.

transfer could be omitted, and the image contrast could be modified and sharpened. The touched up and titled films were then exported from Final Cut into a DVD format for distribution.

Western Archives has one complete set of the collection in house for the public to access at the archive, while individual town DVDs or entire sets are for sale on request. Noon and Arnott could hardly keep up with the public's request for DVDs in 2008 when the collection was made available for purchase. DVD sales were a task that the two juggled in addition to their other daily archival requests and business because of staffing restraints. But after the first year, sales died down with the archives only receiving a few requests a year.

What this DIY approach highlights is that archivists (professional or amateur as is the case with the development of audiovisual archiving as a practice) are not merely stewards overseeing history but are active participants in its mediation.<sup>187</sup> Most of the labour that archivists engage in is hidden labour—left behind the scenes, out of the sight of the public. As a profession, it is one that needs more transparency in its day-to-day tasks and activities in order for the public to get behind the work they do. As Blouin and Rosenberg state,

... it is the lack of transparency about what actually occurs in the archive for anyone not directly engaged in its processes. Indeed, far from being a site of passive curation, archives seen from the inside out are places of constant decision making, where archivists themselves, like historians and other scholars, are constantly involved in processes that shape the “stuff” from which history is made.<sup>188</sup>

Archivists seem to have difficulty publicizing the hard work they do to those outside of their profession. For audiovisual archivists, it is a conundrum that Ray Edmunson has defined as “a semantic accident. There's no ready-made word, universally understood, to describe institutions which preserve moving images and sound recordings—or the people that work therein. *Archive*

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<sup>187</sup> Blouin and Rosenberg, “The Archivist as Activist,” 3.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

is simply one of the words appropriated, from the 1930s on, to do that job, maybe because of its popular meaning as a place where old material is kept.”<sup>189</sup> Most audiovisual archivists in North America up until the mid-1990s were not trained in programs, but rather on the job, and on a case-by-case basis. Unlike traditional archives, audiovisual archives have developed organically, serving the audiovisual materials within collections as they were acquired, and migrating as technologies and formats changed. As a result, compiling standard audiovisual practices is an ongoing and daunting task especially as the issue of media migration is only going to become an ever-increasing concern with the rapidly evolving hardware and software formats emerging today.

### **DIY Practices versus Archival Standards**

Nevertheless, there are standard practices, guidebooks, and recommendations that audiovisual archivists are encouraged to follow, specifically those in larger well-funded government or private institutions, even though these standards are not adhered to from archive to archive. Regardless of what standards a media archive is practicing, most audiovisual archivists would likely cringe at the DIY digitization process of the Massecar Collection. The fact that upon bench inspection the films were not checked for acid deterioration, film shrinkage, and warping would have concerned most media archivists. An audiovisual archivist would have asked how the film was checked and cleaned for mold, oil, and dirt. These are just some of the standard readings that would be noted during a print inspection to assess whether or not it is possible to begin the process of preserving, restoring, or migrating a film print. Yet, none of these precautions were taken before running the Massecar films through a projector. The films

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<sup>189</sup> Edmunson, “Is archiving a profession?” 246.

were merely spot checked, splices and tears were repaired the best that they could be, and the films were digitized.

A trained audiovisual archivist would inquire as to why digitization was not done professionally, especially because reversal black and white film is difficult to crisply transfer due to the high contrast of the film stock. A professional transfer would be essential if these digital copies were being created for long-term preservation. The answer as to why these transfers were not done professionally is simple: there just was not a budget for it, and the film preservation expertise was simply not there. Yet, these films were transferred, and are circulating in the public sphere, unlike so many collections that are stored in archives with audiovisual collections. Under the Harper Government (February 6, 2006 to November 4, 2015) and the influence of Head Archivists who acted as gatekeepers, many collections in institutions, like Library and Archives Canada or the Cinémathèque québécoise (CQ), are inaccessible due to backlogs in cataloguing and bureaucratic red tape. The process to access negatives from out of cold storage to strike new prints and be digitized is arduous and full of roadblocks. The two of biggest issues preventing high-quality digitization are the prohibitive costs associated with the undertaking and the lengthy process of securing copyright.

When interviewing Egleston regarding the digitization of the Masecar prints, we discussed how these films might have been denied a digital transfer at another institution based on their condition. Some archivists could have potentially assessed these prints as incapable of being run through a scanner, telecine, or projector and therefore intransferable. Egleston remarked, “At the end of the day, the public has access to this footage. And no, it’s not perfect, and no, it wasn’t done following any sort of audiovisual archival standard, but why is that more

important than the public having access to the collection?”<sup>190</sup> The question raises so many of the paradoxes in Canadian archives: not all archives or collections are created equally, and although there are some standard practices when it comes to film handling and collections assessment, there are no standard rules of practice. As the UNESCO guidelines states, “Where necessary, it is usually better for non-comprehensive and non-reliable action to be taken than no action at all.”<sup>191</sup> Moreover, audiovisual archival practices have developed in an unorthodox and unique way that caters to the demands of each collection and archive. While traditional archives were built upon particular archival ethics and standardization, audiovisual collection standards grow organically and are changing as the technology ages and the media shift. For example, Kim Tomczak, co-founder of Vtape, Canada’s largest independent video art distributor, has noted the longevity of open reel ¾” tape or VHS is different to what we thought the life spans of these formats were just a few decades ago.<sup>192</sup> The same will be true of the digital, as we are already learning, however, unlike analog formats, its lifespan seems to be becoming shorter rather than longer.

While participating in an internship at Vtape with Tomczak in 2011 I learned that some digital formats have a considerably short shelf life, such as MiniDV tapes— the type of tapes used to capture the Massecar footage. The tapes that captured the projected Massecar films were imported into Final Cut Pro, and exported out onto DVDs. This makes the MiniDV tapes the masters of the digital project, and the longevity of the MiniDV has proven to be short because of how the magnetic tape easily separates from its binding, resulting in the loss of information. Yet in the mid-2000s, this was the format that was most cost effective and readily available for non-commercial use. The digital version of the collection is at risk due to both the master format and

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<sup>190</sup> Egleston, Interview.

<sup>191</sup> de Lusenet, “Tending the Garden or Harvesting the Fields, 166.

<sup>192</sup> Kim Tomczak, interview by Aimée Mitchell, Toronto, ON, August 18, 2011.

the DVD output format, as each are easily damaged. The Final Cut Pro files (QuickTime files), if taken care of and migrated properly, have the best chance of outlasting these two formats. It is essential that these files are backed up, migrated, and cared for in order for the future of the collection to be accessible.

This migration issue brings into focus the McLuhan quote cited at the beginning of this chapter: "... speedily tailored data of a saleable kind." That is, moving image media, regardless of the format, has been at the mercy of the commercial market, which will play a central role in dictating not only how we store and retrieve media, but also control the evolution of the quality of storage and retrieval. As the market dictates the rapidly changing versions of software, hardware, and digital platforms, digital materials will become more and more at risk of being lost.

Even more concerning is that while the Masecar footage is digitally stored on three precarious digital formats, the original film reels lay in boxes in the archive in different stages of decay. Some films are still on their makeshift cardboard reels and in rusted cans, both of which are speeding up the process of deterioration. All versions of the collection are at risk. If the digital copies are lost or become unreadable, the Masecar films run the risk of becoming permanently inaccessible.

Yet, when I visit the Western Archives and ask to see the films, I am allowed to see the actual reels themselves, not just the DVDs.<sup>193</sup> It is a curious absurdity: the film object is presented as an object or an artifact, and no longer for the content that it contains while the content now rests elsewhere, in the stacks of DVDs. Most film archives operate on the protection

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<sup>193</sup> It should be noted that this hands-on access to the physical collection was possible due to the relationship I had built with Lutman. Whether or not someone from the public would be granted access is unknown.

and preservation of the film elements, which often lay in cold storage, untouched, while preview copies of a film or footage circulate for research purposes. The ability to handle the original prints is influenced by the fact that Western Archives is not an audiovisual archive, and harkens back to traditional archival practices where one can sit with the original objects. The separation of film content from the materiality of the film medium is common practice, yet the treatment of Massecar's films as objects to be looked at and examined for their own value aside from the moving image content that they contain is unique and rare.

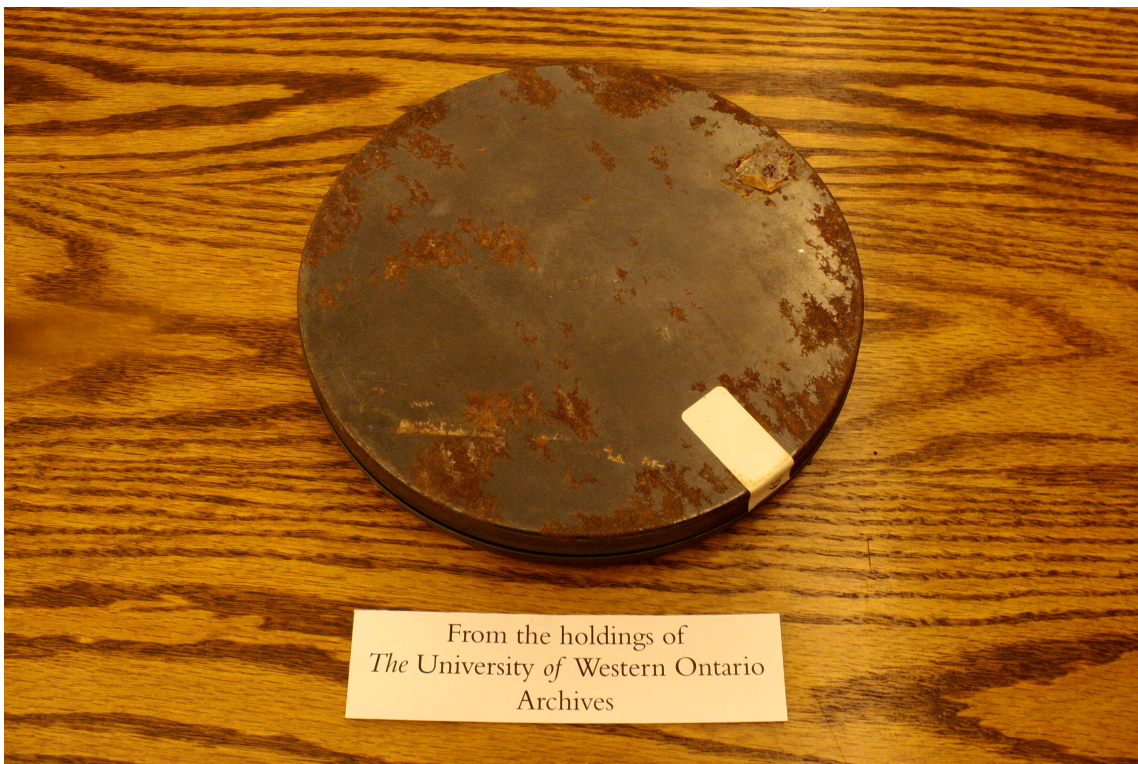


Image 3 – A Massecar film, stored in its original can.

The division of the material object and the digitized content is a prime example of the separation that is occurring in contemporary archives in terms of how we historicize cinema as an image rather than images inherently connected to objects. In doing so, we “shift from thinking about the



complexity of the material object to viewing the visual surfaces of the image.”<sup>194</sup> As Michael Punt points out, “Our understanding of the invention of cinema has been driven almost exclusively by separating the history of the technology from the history of the image.”<sup>195</sup> By considering the image as the primary trace of cinematic history, we undercut “the popular and individual imagination that is sustained by technology as hardware and this act of engaging with technology.”<sup>196</sup> When it comes to marginal film, it is all the more important to keep the connection between the technology and the image as the cinematic practice heavily informs the images captured, and the ways in which “materiality points to social usages.”<sup>197</sup>

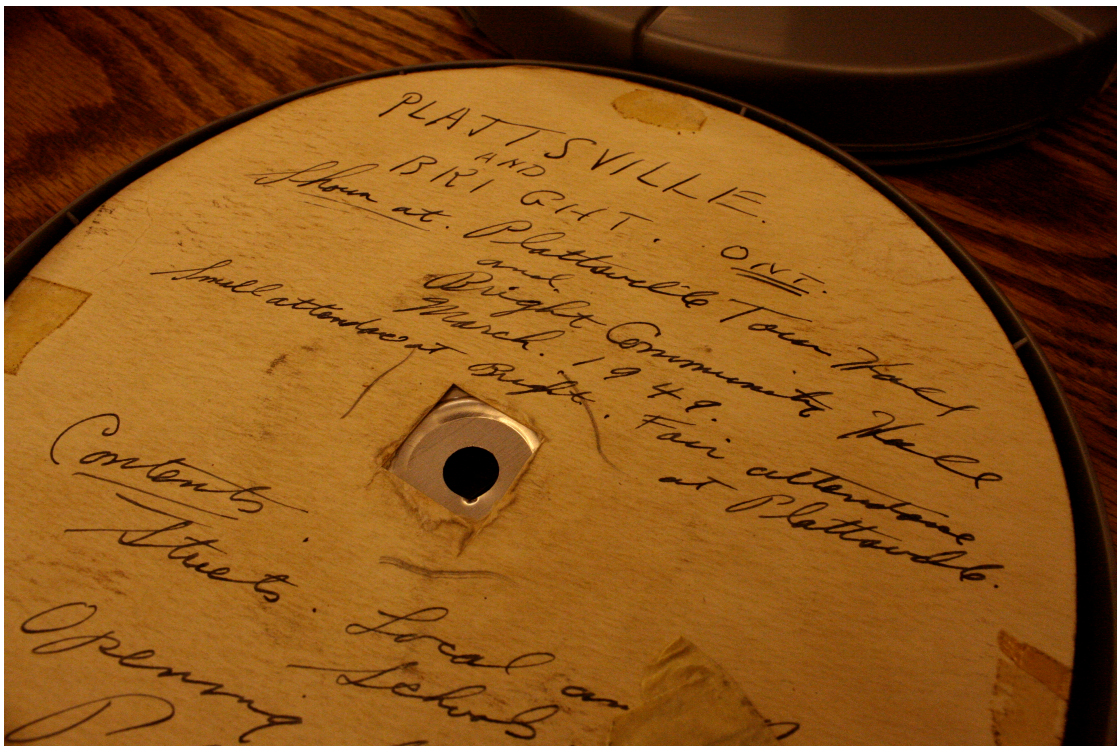


Image 4 – Information Masecar documented on his original cores about the film’s contents and screening.

<sup>194</sup> Joanna Sassoon, “Photographic Materiality in the Age of Digital Reproduction,” in *Photographs, Objects, Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (New York: Routledge, 2008), 200.

<sup>195</sup> Michael Punt, “What Shall We Do With All Those Old Bytes? Saving the Cinematic Imagination in the Postdigital Era,” *Design Issues*. 21 no. 2 (2005): 49.

<sup>196</sup> Punt, 49.

<sup>197</sup> Sassoon, “Photographic Materiality,” 200.

Massecar used small gauge film equipment for its portability not only in capturing his subjects, but for exhibition purposes. In returning to each town for exhibition, Massecar would pack his projector, record player, and small speakers, along with extra folding chairs.<sup>198</sup> Portability of his equipment for both shooting and exhibiting is what made it possible for him to run this side-business on his own. The portability of 8mm is also seen in his evolving film practice in the way he moves through spaces. The films also show how Massecar and his camera are received in each community, revealing how people experienced film as a technology. Some were curious, others were cautious and avoided the camera, and there were many shots of people posing as though the image that was being captured was by a still camera. Moreover, in the spirit of Thomas Elsaesser and his essay “The New Film History as Media Archaeology,” centralizing the technology of small gauge cinema within the study of amateur cinema is an integral part of contextualizing the history of cinematic practices, modes of exhibition, and the cultural impact of small gauge film.<sup>199</sup>

### **Materiality, Digital Copies, and the Fidelity of Moving Images in the Midst of Migration**

Sitting with a box of Massecar’s reels in the archive reaffirmed for me the importance of material culture in moving image history. It emphasized how the physical and material informs the images we study, in the way that it connects us to the practices of the artist negotiating the technical aspects of their medium. The ability to sit with the physical collection is something I feel is strongly lacking from film history. So much can be gleaned about a film’s exhibition, circulation, and history from the physical object itself. The reels from the Massecar collection could tell me things about the collection that the images on the DVDs could not—things like the

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<sup>198</sup> Massecar, Interview.

<sup>199</sup> Elsaesser, “The New Film History,” 103.

date of exhibition, the venue the film played in, how many people were in attendance, and how much money he made that evening, all of which are written on the reels and boxes containing the films. The materiality of celluloid and what the physical print can tell a researcher is invaluable in terms of the historical trace of a specific print, and if film policy were firm at the Western Archives, I probably would have never had the opportunity to sit with the material and learn from the collection in a way that the digital images would not allow.<sup>200</sup> In a digital world, we run the risk of separating ourselves from the important phenomenological experience of the artifact. It is a double-edged sword in the sense that the digitization of this collection has allowed the public to enjoy a part of their history, but the focus on the digital has also left the physical collection, and its invaluable physical traces, in a precarious state



Image 5 – Handling a Masecar film to examine its condition and historical traces.

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<sup>200</sup> It should be noted that exhibition information is entirely contained on the film reels and cans, and does not exist anywhere else. It has yet to be documented in the fond description at item level.

I would now like to turn to the pros and cons of digital as opposed to material film research, and how the migration of archival materials both effects and affects their context and use. I also want to address how the digital is skewing the value of original film materials. The digital is currently being recognized as equal to, or even a replacement for, the original rather than a stand-in facsimile of original material. This, I believe, is jeopardizing the status of the original in media archives and affecting the future of their intrinsic value.

Moving away from the material object and also the physical space of the archive in the digital age is changing the way we engage with our research objects. Archivist Wendy Duff and her colleagues in their essay, “Historians’ Use of Archival Sources: Promises and Pitfalls of the Digital Age,” asked researchers what they gained in physically visiting archives:

Numerous respondents told us that originals are ‘utterly reliable’ or ‘accurate, undistorted and complete.’ They allow the user to be more fully in touch with the material and documentary contexts of the historical period. Original materials are, as a result, the best stimulus to the historical imagination. Many cited the pleasure and provocation of working with original sources, which ‘engage the senses, not just the mind.’ ... Moreover, using original sources in a repository provides a supportive social environment for historical research in the company of other researchers and archivists. ... Finally, many claimed that original sources may provide an unexpected intellectual thrill or mystical experience that they traced to its union with the source. Historical research relies on serendipity of discovery that comes from a personal interaction with and handling of objects from the past.<sup>201</sup>

The phenomenological effect of doing primary research in the archive is a part of our construction of history. While the time and cost of research trips can be burdensome, Duff highlights that the trade off for the researcher is the ability to engage with the aura of an object. The importance of serendipity in research is also crucial—while archives and their structure do

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<sup>201</sup> Wendy Duff, Barbara Craig, and Joan Cherry, “Historians’ Use of Archival Sources: Promises and Pitfalls of the Digital Age,” *The Public Historian* 26, no. 2 (2004): 19.

not allow us to wander the stacks, the perusal of archival boxes do take one in different directions than originally intended. In-house research also allows for interaction with an archivist who can point researchers towards additional materials that may not have come up in their independent online search. Online finding aids are often incomplete or cryptic in their description of the contents of a collection. Once face-to-face with an archivist and able to articulate your research, new places to look appear. Some of these places might be offline or uncatalogued, others items may be in places you never thought to look. Going to the archive makes research all the more fruitful; it becomes, as Duff's research highlights, a community of collaborators rather than a lone search. The digital not only removes us from our physical objects of study, but also from a research community and the potential it contains.

Joanna Sassoon and Alan Sekula highlight this in regards to photographs, which I think is also true of film: that digitization is in danger of "cleaning house of meaning."<sup>202</sup> That is, separating a photograph, and I would also argue here film, from its materiality, highlights the aesthetic qualities of the image while obscuring its sociocultural and historical importance as a mode of documentation, and artistic practice. In turn, digitization carries with it the danger of distilling a film into its content rather than allowing a researcher to derive meaning from the external attributes that are connected to a film.<sup>203</sup> This is especially true in terms of non-commercial and marginal film because the number of prints created and circulated is so few in comparison to those created for commercial distribution. Non-commercial and marginal film carry in their physical features the history of their creation, circulation, and use. Often prints are one of a kind in that they are slightly different cuts or versions of a film or footage, unlike standardized commercial prints. Each print can vary in terms of editing, colour timing, titling, or

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<sup>202</sup> Sekula qtd. in Sassoon, "Photographic Materiality," 202.

<sup>203</sup> Sassoon, "Photographic Materiality," 197.

wear and tear that speaks to how they have been created and circulated in terms of exhibition and distribution.

Nevertheless, there are times where the digital must suffice; as one participant stated, “What I give up in terms of sensuality I gain in availability.”<sup>204</sup> This is very true for film scholars, as we almost always watch films on preview formats. In rare cases, we are able to watch films on flatbed editing tables and handle prints. Film preservation practices inherently remove film scholars from the material history of their object of study. These viewing copies are for research purposes only, not for exhibition or public use, and are often screened onsite at small cubicles, on small television sets, with headphones, or in a well-lit room—a less than ideal environment for critical analysis.

Viewing copies and their digital circulation pose an additional problem for archives, as online accessibility deters researchers from going to view original materials. Sven Lütticken states that in the era of YouTube and file-sharing, “the economy of the rarified object becomes ever more exceptional, placing ever-greater stress on the viewing copy as a means of granting access to work beyond the ‘official’ limited edition and outside of the exhibition context.”<sup>205</sup> In the past, viewing copies were solely created for private research purposes and never for public consumption. These remain tucked on shelves in academic offices, sometimes circulating between colleagues. As both Sven Lütticken and scholar Hito Steyerl highlight, the viewing copies that used to be circulated amongst academics in semi-secrecy are now finding permanent homes online, and these copies made from copies further degrade the quality of the image in the act of migration. Steyerl exclaims,

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<sup>204</sup> Duff, Craig, and Cherry, “‘Historians’ Use of Archival Sources,” 19.

<sup>205</sup> Sven Lütticken, “Viewing Copies: On the Mobility of Moving Images,” *e-flux journal* 8 (2009): 1.

The poor image has been uploaded, downloaded, shared, reformatted, and reedited. It transforms quality into accessibility, exhibition value into cult value, films into clips, contemplation into distraction. The image is liberated from the vaults of cinemas and archives and thrust into digital uncertainty, at the expense of its own substance. The poor image tends towards abstraction: it is a visual idea in its very becoming.

The poor image is an illicit fifth-generation bastard of an original image. Its genealogy is dubious. Its filenames are deliberately misspelled. It often defies patrimony, national culture, or indeed copyright. It is passed on as a lure, a decoy, an index, or as a reminder of its former visual self. It mocks the promises of digital technology. Not only is it often degraded to the point of being just a hurried blur, one even doubts whether it could be called an image at all. Only digital technology could produce such a dilapidated image in the first place.<sup>206</sup>

In her essay, Steyerl highlights the paradox that these degraded viewing copies embody: on one hand, viewing copies, in their degraded quality, undermine the hierarchy or economy of images set up by mainstream culture and capitalism. Yet on the other hand, they become popular images due to the speed and ease with which they circulate—at once denying and embodying their value.<sup>207</sup> Yet I would argue that what is most useful for the purpose of media archives about Steyerl's examination of viewing copies is how “the images themselves reveal the conditions of their marginalization, the constellation of social forces leading to their online circulation as poor images. Poor images are poor because they are not assigned any value within the class society of images – their status as illicit or degraded grants them exemption from its criteria. Their lack of resolution attests to their appropriation and displacement.”<sup>208</sup> Moreover, viewing copies are symptoms of a shift in the value of these moving images from a socioeconomic and political perspective. Viewing copies are a response to the invisibility of artisanal and marginal film in a climate of the “rich” high quality, studio driven, commercial images. For Steyerl any sense of an

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<sup>206</sup> Hito Steyerl, “In Defense of the Poor Image,” *e-flux journal* 10 (2009): 1.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

original film is lost within the poor image; she focuses on the access these circulating copies of viewing copies provide. She argues that the poor image defines the changing nature of images in the digital age. Thus it is the politics of film spectatorship, access, and circulation that will take precedence for Steyerl over the quality or fidelity of images.

The issue around the quality of the image in contemporary culture sits at two poles. On one hand, we are moving into hyperrealism with research being taken up again around IMAX and 3D formats, in addition to high definition television and immersive technologies. Yet the desire for the crisp detailed image is discarded online. Pirated copies and online video streaming are often jumpy, pixelated, and have poor sound quality. The immediacy of access seems to override our desire for the ‘truest’ image. Lütticken exclaims, “Viewers have a great capacity for ‘correcting’ these conditions in the mind, for imagining the ‘proper’ presentation.”<sup>209</sup> New forms of spectatorship and research in these new publics are accessed from the privacy of our laps. In an interview with *Film Comment*, Chris Marker stated that he watched films at home on the computer or television, but only as a reference. He made the distinction in viewing to be one of where we cast our eyes: in the theatre we look up, at home we are often looking down, indicating a reverence for intended original modes of exhibition and cinematic experience.<sup>210</sup> These new modes of exhibition are precisely what are making some artists, archivists, and curators uncomfortable about releasing proper high quality copies of work because the mode of viewing or the medium in which they were created is so integral to context and meaning of the work. Yet the paradox is that these degraded viewing copies then become a researcher’s primary source. Thus value is divided into exhibition value, and the cult value of a restricted viewing copy. The

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<sup>209</sup> Lütticken, “On Viewing Copies,” 3-4.

<sup>210</sup> Olaf Möller, “Around the World with Chris Marker Part II: Time Regained: Ghost World,” *Film Comment* 39 (2003): 36.



binary created is one between the integrity of the work and the immediacy of access—the heated debate that is ongoing in audiovisual archives today.

Lütticken notes that this is an increasingly complex interplay especially as works translate in exhibition mediums: film to VHS to DVD to QuickTime to H.264 to Apple Pro Res to DCP. Some artists are addressing these issues of translation within their work (Michael Snow’s different versions of *Wavelength*, or Chris Marker’s repurposing of his films in his CD-ROM project, *Immemory*, for example).<sup>211</sup> Lütticken celebrates the pirated copies that circulate in the private collections of curators, academics, and cinephiles as blessings in disguise as they are ways that rare works are being kept alive. He proposes an “official” viewing copy edition project, which in some ways is already happening through online archives like Fandor.com, Ubu.com and Archive.org. Yet there are political burdens regarding copyright that need to be

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<sup>211</sup> Michael Snow’s film *Wavelength* (1967) is distributed solely on 16mm, based on the wishes of the artist. For Snow, *Wavelength* is a filmic, durational, medium specific experience. In response to questions regarding this specificity, and inquiries made by scholars and curators for a digital version, Snow created *WVLNT: Wavelength For Those Who Don't Have The Time* in 2003. This iteration of the film compresses the forty-five minute original into fifteen minutes: “In *WVLNT (Wavelength for Those Who Don't Have the Time)*, Snow takes the “destruction” of this influential film into his own hands, dividing the 45 minutes of the original film into three pieces and putting them on top of each other, thus creating a new, independent work while initiating a (re)thinking of the presentation of experimental film under today’s conditions.” “Michael Snow screening at Plug In ICA,” Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art <https://plugin.org/events/201309/michael-snow-screening-plug-in-ica> (accessed July 4, 2017).

Similarly, Chris Marker was interested in the remediation of his images. *Immemory* (1997) brought together images Marker’s previous work and his photo archive, remixing it for a user-led exploration on CD-ROM. Marker likened it to a Proustian madeleine, allowing the viewer to virtually explore and build connections to the images in the roving way memory does. Marker exclaims, “But my fondest wish is that there might be enough familiar codes here (the travel picture, the family album, the totem animal) that the reader-visitor could imperceptibly come to replace my images with his, my memories with his, and that my *Immemory* should serve as a springboard for his own pilgrimage in Time Regained.” Chris Marker, “*Immemory* by Chris Marker,” Chris Marker: Notes from the Era of Imperfect Memory <https://chrismarker.org/chris-marker/immemory-by-chris-marker/> (accessed July 4, 2017).

also taken up when considering these modes of translation. What happens to the traditional avenues of archival research when scholars forfeit seeking out the original in lieu of the immediacy of the digital copy?

As archivist Rick Erway points out, online databases like Google and large digital library catalogues place priority on quantity over the quality of images. Instead of creating high quality archival digital files, online databases are focusing on processing more materials for access. Part of this shift from quality to quantity has to do with the younger generation's research habits. As Erway says, "Soon students will only search online— what is not there, will not be considered... If the [materials] are not accessible, they are not used; if they are not used, they may go away. Neglect can lead to obsolescence."<sup>212</sup> Moreover, collections are eager to get material online to increase use, visibility, and in turn be able to raise their public value in order to support the institution.

While it may seem naïve to think that a library, special collection, or archive could go completely online, there are those in the information science community that believe this is the inevitable shift that will have to happen. Scanning in massive bulk for access rather than for preservation denotes a shift in the relationship between the user and the institution: "Digital access to cultural heritage should be the rule rather than the exception."<sup>213</sup> Erway suggests that institutions should consider "scanning on demand," when materials are requested by researchers.

While this might be possible for paper collections and fonds, the reality when speaking to audiovisual media archivists is that there is no infrastructure in place in most audiovisual archives to take on the task of scanning on demand. While some larger institutions like Library

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<sup>212</sup> Ricky Erway, "Supply and Demand: Special Collections and Digitisation," *Liber Quarterly* 18 no., 3/4 (2008): 325.

<sup>213</sup> Erway, "Supply and Demand," 331.

and Archives Canada are now in a position to take on scan-on-demand digitization projects via new infrastructure and audiovisual scanning technology, smaller archives still struggle to keep up with the demands of digital access. Brock Silversides, Head Media Archivist at the University of Toronto attests to this, exclaiming that mass digitization is a naïve pipe-dream of administrators who do not understand the immense amount of labour and technology that would be needed to support such an incredibly vast project.<sup>214</sup> This is one of the many “myths of the digital” and what some administrators, researchers, and the general public are being led to believe the digital will do for future of memory institutions. There is a danger in galloping too quickly into digitization and digital storage of historical artifacts and archival fonds without carefully weighing out the pros and cons of migrating various forms of technology. As David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins point out, “there is an urgent need for a pragmatic, historically informed perspective that maps a sensible middle ground between the euphoria and the panic surrounding new media.”<sup>215</sup> Cultural artifacts could be subjected to irreversible ramifications if we do not pause to assess these digital platforms in regards to the organization of information, modes of research, and sustainable long-term access to fonds. This is especially true for audiovisual collections, as audiovisual archivists are learning on the ground everyday how the passage of time is affecting the longevity of audiovisual formats. As noted in Chapter One, the Library of Congress used to destroy nitrate films after they were transferred onto acetate stock. This was before audiovisual archivists had standardized practices and ethics around film preservation or fully understood the conditions that would allow for nitrate to be safely stored.

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<sup>214</sup> Brock Silversides, interview by Aimée Mitchell, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, November 2013.

<sup>215</sup> David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins qtd in *Grain to Pixel* by Giovanna Fossati, (Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, Netherland, 2009), 16.

Moving into the digital age, it is important to pause, as Thorburn and Jenkins suggest, ensuring that new practices and initiatives do not conflate preservation with digital media migration.

### **The Myth of the Digital**

It is important to note how and why the rhetoric of the myth of the digital is such a powerful driving force behind the current shifts towards the digital, and the culling and de-accessioning of original materials. The myth of the digital has framed the anxiety around the disappearance of film, and has influenced what side bureaucrats, archivists, and researchers alike are taking in this crucial debate around what to save, how to save it, and how to access these collections. As Tom Gunning has noted, we have been too caught up with the fascination of the digital medium to see its pitfalls and its role in a larger trajectory or history of media. Giovanni Fossati draws attention to this in the intro of her book, *From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of Film*, quoting Gunning:

Every new technology has a utopian dimension that imagines a future radically transformed by the implications of the device and practice. The sinking of technology into a reified second nature indicates the relative failure of this transformation, its fitting back into the established grooves of power and exploitation. Herein lays the importance of the cultural archaeology of technology, the grasping again of the newness of old technologies.<sup>216</sup>

While there is a myriad of points to be dispelled about the myth of the digital, I will recite here what I believe to be the three major influential myths about the digital that are affecting the future of film archiving and preservation.

*1. The myth that everything can be saved.*

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<sup>216</sup> Tom Gunning qtd in *From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of Film in Transition*, by Giovanna Fossati, (Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, Netherland, 2009), 14.

The spacelessness of the digital and the concept of its ever-expanding storage space is quite prominent in our popular online culture. Gmail boasts that its storage space is climbing higher by the second—allowing you to watch the number creep up on its homepage. The digital is being commodified and governed by conglomerates. Space is monetized by platforms like Vimeo, Dropbox, and The Cloud. It is supposedly never-ending, but it is not given away for free—and we anxiously vie for it, this space that is space-less. Spacelessness in turn, has allowed for the assumption that we now have space to save everything in digital form, both personally, and collectively as a public. This desire to create all-encompassing digital databases is what Allan Sekula has called “aggressive empiricism, bent on achieving a universal inventory of appearances,” alluding to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial encyclopedic desires to name, map, and stake claims within the modern world.<sup>217</sup> The outdated desires of the brick and mortar 19<sup>th</sup> century archive are supposedly being fulfilled by the space-less digital archive.

However, this space is not space-less. The space is merely remote, and out of the sight of its users. Digitized files are housed on large servers that need climate-controlled rooms, regular maintenance, and large amounts of electricity. Former TIFF Film Reference Library Archivist Julie Lofthouse highlighted at a roundtable talk on archives that current projections show that housing the servers for digitized films in addition to the costs of migrating them every five years for translation and readability would actually cost more than it would to keep films on celluloid and in cold storage.<sup>218</sup> The concept of spacelessness also posits compression into smaller physical space, and while this may seem economical to administrators and management in the short-term, it is likely to create more problems in long-term storage and retrieval. Decisions

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<sup>217</sup> Allan Sekula qtd. in Sassoon, “Photographic Materiality,” 201.

<sup>218</sup> Julie Lofthouse, “Film and Media Archives,” TIFF Bell Lightbox. Toronto, ON. March 1, 2012.

regarding what hardware and software are to be used in digitization strategies cannot be done hastily, regardless of the short-term financial benefits. To quote archivist Rick Prelinger: "Market value cannot dictate cultural value."<sup>219</sup> That is, in the case of film, the declining interest in its commercial use should not dictate its cultural importance, or preservation strategies. The shift in digital commercial exhibition should not dictate long-term preservation formats for film-born cinema.

In the case of the Masecar Collection, digitization occurred because of the monetary gain that would come from making the collection accessible. Little money was put into the actual digitization process, yet each DVD sells individually for \$20.00 CDN. While the DIY digitization was beneficial for the public and Western University, the lack of a standardized digitization strategy will make it difficult to migrate the collection in years to come due to the original digital masters being on QuickTime and MiniDV—highly precarious and low-grade transfers.

Many of the Masecar films have become too brittle to risk projection, and the attention that they need in order to be able to view them by other means is not a priority the Western Archives. There is little urgency to properly archive the films because there is no one with the time, funds, or access to the technology to do so. There is no budget for a media archivist to care for film at the archive, and this points to the gap in knowledge between administrators and archivists. In the eyes of the administration, now that the films have been digitized, the originals can decay without the fear of losing their content. Essentially, the provenance of keeping film as film is not important in the grand scheme of budgeting for this institution. These choices are being made by administrations in large and small archives across Canada—what to digitize, what

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<sup>219</sup> Prelinger, "We Are the New Archivists."

to prioritize, and more importantly, what departments and positions are and are not going to make it through the digital transition.

There is a popular notion amongst bureaucrats that once a document is digitized, it has been preserved, and sometimes it is assumed that the original is no longer needed because the digital facsimile can replace the original. In Canada, we have seen this happen in our school library systems, and through the de-accessioning and budget cuts to staff in libraries and archives (both public and private) across the country. In 2014, the Harper Government closed seven of the eleven Ocean and Fisheries Libraries, which was another example of how this particular government set out to devalue memory institutions and their invaluable scientific research. The rationale for the cuts from Gail Shea, Minister of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) stated that, “An average of only five to 12 people who work outside of DFO visited our eleven libraries each year. It is not fair to taxpayers to make them pay for libraries that so few people actually used.”<sup>220</sup> Her statement disregards the invaluable resource these libraries provide to government researchers, scholars, and the scientific community, who, while few in number, remain an important body of expertise who mobilize the value of these holdings for future generations of Canadians. While the DFO claims that all-important documents under copyright were digitized, the backlash from the scientific community, librarians and archivists, political leaders, and the general public has raised the profile of the culling of these documents, journals, and books. While the aim was to digitize what was going to be discarded, much of it did not have clear public domain status under copyright, rendering it unable to be posted online. The remaining holdings were dismantled and offered to university and college libraries before being

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<sup>220</sup> Gail Shea, Statement from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans <http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/media/npres-communique/2014/20140107-en.html> (accessed Mar 5, 2014). This page is no longer accessible to the public.

opened up to the general public and ultimately the recycling bin. The scientific community has been outraged at the scattering of invaluable scientific knowledge, and also skeptical of the quality control and maintenance of the digitized files.<sup>221</sup>

Decisions are being made by government bureaucrats regarding the future of Canadian local, provincial, and national fonds and special collections without enough representation of those who work in the field— LAC’s Modernization Project being the most blatant dismissal of professional input to date. Moreover, while the digital may appear to be a space-less, never-ending, and accessible place to preserve cultural objects, it is nonetheless a copy of the original. It is not financially feasible to move large holdings into a digital format, let alone process, describe, and manage those records. Budget cuts have conflated the digital copy as preservation, thereby undermining the longevity of original holdings. As LAC promises more digital collections online to offset the loss of face-to-face research and reference desk support, archivists and researchers are stating that digitization cannot replace the invaluable knowledge of a librarian or archivist.<sup>222</sup>

## *2. Digitizing everything means I have access to everything.*

Vivian Shoback writes in her article, "Nostalgia for a Digital Object: Regrets on the Quickening of QuickTime," that she laments the time when gifs, in their tiny windows, were our animated or moving image experience on computers.<sup>223</sup> That was only a little more than 15 years ago, and already many of us are able to long for a former version of particular software because

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<sup>221</sup> Erika Throkelson, "Why is the Harper Administration Throwing Away Entire Libraries?" *Huffington Post*, January 9, 2014. [http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/desmog-canada/destruction-of-dfo-libraries\\_b\\_4569748.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/desmog-canada/destruction-of-dfo-libraries_b_4569748.html) (accessed Mar 5, 2014).

<sup>222</sup> Stewart, "Harper Gov't Puts Library and Archives at Risk."

<sup>223</sup> Vivian Shoback, "Nostalgia for a Digital Object: Regrets on the Quickening of QuickTime," *Millennium Film Journal* 34 (1999): 29.



of how rapidly technology is changing, updating, and advancing. This becomes a problem in the digital age: while we may be able to digitize everything, we will not necessarily always have access to it. The problem of a lack of a universal digital language and compatible platforms has led many librarians, archivists, artists, and researchers to archive older hardware and software programs knowing what will be left behind in the process of migration. This is not done not for nostalgic purposes, rather, this is a pragmatic choice. Not only do we have to consider the issue of migration of physical objects translated into digital form, but also the longevity of those cultural and historical objects that are migrated or digitally born.

Maintaining specialized knowledge of older hardware and software platforms in order to migrate and have access to older files is a major issue for digital-born originals, regardless of whether they are word documents or digital video recordings. This leads to one of the most questionable notions of the digital in popular culture: that the digital is stable. As previously noted, MiniDV tape, the format upon which the Massecar fond was digitized, is one of the most cheap, yet unstable digital tape formats because the magnetic binding peels away easily, allowing data to be lost. As hardware and software continue to adapt and be upgraded at an accelerating speed, we are bound to lose information. For example, floppy discs, CD-ROMs, DVDs, and Blu-Rays are becoming obsolete as computers do not come with drives to access these files anymore, and even if they did, there are very few operating systems that support particular programs to open those files regardless of the media. Moreover, the digital is not any more stable than physical objects. In fact, digital-born originals risk becoming obsolete at a faster speed than physical technologies. In addition, digital decay happens just as much as in other physical objects.

Lastly, although we may imagine and discuss the digital as a space-less, never-ending entity, the hardware that stores it is still an object: susceptible to its environment, and at risk of fire, of water damage, or being dropped, et cetera. While the digital does give us the ability to access or carry a large amount of information around individually, it does not promise to always be available or legible.

*3. Digitization will remove the archival problem of selection.*

The idea that archival digitization will relieve the long standing issue of selection during acquisition comes with many cautions. Early digitization projects have pointed to a second level of selection in what is digitized first, creating another hierarchy of what gets seen and what remains unseen in an institutional archive or collection. Collections or fonds that are heavily used, for example, are being uploaded online first because of a demand for access. This leaves lesser known materials all the more buried within an archive: users are directed to what has been deemed mainstream twice over—first by its heavy use within the traditional archive, and then reinforced online.

The issue of selection occurs initially when a film is acquired by an archive, and then again when an archive decides to select specific films (and specific versions of films) to digitize and disseminate in a digital format (as a DVD, Blu-Ray, digital file/DCP, or online streaming). Joanna Sassoon succinctly states in her essay, “Photographic Materiality in the Age of Digital Reproduction” the danger in this secondary filter of selection and how it effects or transforms the meaning of images:

During the process of selecting photographic images for placement in a digital collection, the image is moved by its custodian into a new discursive space - into that of the marketplace. This space serves to

exploit and commodify the aesthetic qualities of image content rather than to promote the research potential of the photographic object.<sup>224</sup>

While problematic, commodifying historical moving image artifacts is a strategic move to keep public archives visible in an increasingly competitive privatized online market. Jan-Christopher Horak states in regards to the online and corporate cinematic market:

The transnational media corporations who control moving image media distribution worldwide have no interest in distributing silent (or documentary, avant-garde, Third World, etc.) films because: a) the perceived market of consumers interested in such films is too small, making the amortization of digital technology and transfer a difficult proposition; b) many of these films are in public domain so that companies are not interested because they can't protect their investment.<sup>225</sup>

Horak goes on to explain that the films that do become digitized will be few in relation to the vast number created since the inception of moving image history. The danger will be that the canon available for public and educational use will be heavily linked to the economics of commercial media distribution, leaving particular types of cinema (marginal film certainly among them) difficult to access. Cinematic history that makes the digital cut will create an additional hierarchy in the already fraught notion of canonical cinematic works.<sup>226</sup>

Film scholar Zoë Druick gives an excellent example of this problem using the National Film Board of Canada, which showcases over 2000 films for public access on their website. The site promotes both old and new works by the Board, and is a great research, teaching, and entertainment tool. As noted in the previous chapter, not all archives are created equal, and this

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<sup>224</sup>Ibid., 205.

<sup>225</sup> Jan-Christopher Horak, "Old Media Become New Media: The Metamorphoses of Historical Films in the Age of Their Digital Dissemination" in *Celluloid Goes Digital: Historical-Critical Editions of Films on DVD and the Internet Proceedings of the First International Trier Conference on Film and New Media*, October 2002. ed. by Martin Loiperdinger (Trier: WVT Wissenschaftliche Verlag, 2003), 21.

<sup>226</sup> Horak, "Old Media Become New Media," 21.

archive does not provide its entire collection online with equal opportunity for all titles to be viewed. What is selected to go online is certainly by curatorial preference, and the NFB does not provide any transparent criteria for why certain films are there and others are not. According to James Roberts, Director of General, Accessibility and Digital Enterprises at the NFB, how they choose their films has a lot to do with "marketability" and of course, copyright. Films online reflect a particular notion of what the NFB has and continues to stand for as a national shaper of Canadian culture: focusing on Indigenous issues, the Challenge for Change series, Unit B films, documentary, and animation. Druick notes that the films selected make up less than 20% of the NFB's entire collection and give an "A-political assemblage of history."<sup>227</sup>

The result is what Druick calls a polarization of the NFB archive, where the popular titles become more popular, and those that are lesser known become all the more obscure. This highlights that although we think the digital can bring more of a democratized access to information, it is still being selected, chosen, and censored. Algorithms—the code written that directs, connects and draws correlations between data—as William Urrichio points out, are still authored by individuals who are employed by those in political and economic power that continue to influence and monopolize knowledge online ubiquitously.<sup>228</sup>

A larger problem for archives is that the information their databases hold is often incomplete, and their search engines are simplistic due to the massive amount of back catalogue data that archivists and information science technicians must input on a daily basis. When a user is searching the NFB website for a film that is currently not online, they are redirected to the

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<sup>227</sup> Zoë Druick, "The Archive beneath the Archive: The NFB and Memories of Canadian Cinema," Film Studies Association of Canada conference presentation, Waterloo, ON, May 31, 2012.

<sup>228</sup> William Urrichio, "The Stories That Algorithms Tell," TIFF Higher Learning Talk. Toronto, ON, May 14, 2014.

NFB's holdings at Library and Archives Canada. Yet, getting to the specifics of an item line description (metadata) is not feasible in this large fond. This leads back to the issue of frequently accessed fonds becoming the popular and overused primary historical resource, while lesser-known, less described fonds continue to go unnoticed due to the lack of catalogued metadata. What the researcher is left with is a general overall description and the name of boxes and file folders. The metadata that is needed to get one virtually closer to what is in a physical box is often not provided online. There are gaps and although researchers may be frustrated by what is hidden, what is overlooked is that the small labour force in these memory institutions are overworked and unable to provide immediate answers. Yet visiting and being in an archive, face-to-face with an archivist or someone on the reference desk can bring you a step closer to what you want in a timely manner. They know where to look, because you can tell them what you are looking for in language that reaches outside of the Boolean code that you feed to a search engine. Archivists speak the language of the archive and its out-dated search engine better than researchers do, and therefore know where else to look when one seems to have exhausted research options.

The phrase "online user" is used to describe individuals who access an archive's online contents. In traditional archives, the public or researcher is often described as a "visitor," given a pass to enter the archive (that comes with an expiry date), where one must be tracked (signed in and out of the building). One must leave bags, coats, and particular items in a locker while sitting with a fond. One looks at materials, handles them carefully, and does not remove items from the archive, all the while keeping the original order or arrangement of the materials. The word "visitor" and these rules of care indicate that a visitor is a guest, and granted privileges only once their need for access is identified and rationalized. The term "user," however, implies that an

individual is accessing, borrowing, and perhaps taking from a fond or collection. To use something often means to deplete, manipulate, or add to what you are using. An online user is a blanket term to identify those who access the Internet and engage with digital devices. Users have been positioned within our popular culture to be the primary subject of the digital and digital technology has been shaped by users' desire for intuitive interfaces and immediacy. The competition to hold the attention of the user through faster and more expansive information systems has created a problem for the archive: the archive does not privilege the user or visitor, rather, it privileges the fond and the donor. Copyright and other restrictions come with the use of particular fonds, but this red tape seems to have created more frustration now more than ever with those who use archives due to the conflicting nature of the online database versus the online archive.

Archivists are striving to make their online collections more user-friendly but cannot keep up with the sophistication and speed at which larger companies like YouTube and Google are creating their databases (not to mention the copyright and legal fees). Archives and rare collections are being backed into a technological corner because many do not have the staff support, financial backing, or the permission to make everything accessible online. More importantly, the way an online database organizes and displays information is different from the ways in which archives present knowledge. In trying to bring an archive online, the traditional modes of organization are clashing with the way Internet search engines operate. Online databases allow users to find their own way using search engines, instead of entering through the professionally-defined and carefully researched finding aid. In turn, search engines can skew and decontextualize historical materials in the way that online databases present or juxtapose search results. Sassoon states,

Custodial institutions are widening their power to define our view of the past, shift our understanding away from the original material object and proscribe through management styles what kinds of research questions that can be asked. Thus, while the digitising process had the potential to enliven the trajectories of individual photographs [and here I would add moving images] as images beyond current institutional boundaries, the process also realigns the concept of the collection and in doing so undermines the nature of the archive. Institutions are not only framing understanding of the past through materials through shifting the styles of documentation from contextual to content.<sup>229</sup>

What Sassoon's insights point to is the undermining of physical collections and the importance of their contextual provenance by online research. The danger that is increasingly becoming more apparent in Canada is that as more memory institutions promise to go online, the less access and support is being given to support in-house research, which also shapes what research questions are asked and investigated.

Traditional archival practices have leaned on the side of preservation, with a certain amount of gatekeeping in terms of who may access materials and how they are used. Archivists want to honour the wishes of the donor in terms of how collections are accessed. As noted by Wendy Duff, scholars want to access original materials for the reliability and undistorted context that offline material research provides. Moving collections online potentially disrupts the provenance and arrangement of a fond, moving it away from the order of provenance and into more of a database schema. Suddenly materials can be browsed or accessed by thematic interest rather than the order of a fond's contents.

The organizational structures of archives and fonds are very different from the way in which online databases organize information. Archives preserve the original order or provenance of a group of documents, regardless of its format, as they were organized upon the creation of a

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<sup>229</sup> Sassoon, "Photographic Materiality," 211.

fond. The fond is described as a whole, and grouped into linear subsections, rather than items being described individually. The organization speaks to a singular linear passage of time and space. Robust online databases, however, individually describe items and create metadata in order to tag items for easier search results that actually remember previous searches in order to build on that metadata. The organization of these databases lends themselves to a rhizomatic sense of time and space that is non-hierarchical but also idiosyncratic.<sup>230</sup> Online archival databases sit somewhere in between these poles of description and organization due to the size of their holdings. They do not carry robust metadata, or intuitive interfaces like commercial databases.

While the Googles and YouTubes of the world may have users convinced that everything is accessible and at a user's fingertips, the reality is much of history and knowledge lives in an offline world. Archives are striving for more transparent ways to reach the public through better front-end interfaces by inputting more metadata to yield more transparent search results. But there is not enough financial support or staff to keep up with the growing amount of information. Unlike the corporations that continually grow in terms of stakeholders, technology, and labour market, memory institutions continue to have their funding and staff cut.

Moreover, these aforementioned digital myths are some of the reasons why the public and administrators at various levels of bureaucracy are putting their trust in the digital rather than reconsidering how archives, libraries, and special collections can work alongside and be integrated into a digital strategy rather than be replaced by it. The feasibility of going completely digital and online is something that most working archivists will tell you is an impossibility in

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<sup>230</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 21.



this country. As Terry Cook suggests, traditional archives and their foundational functions as memory institutions cannot be done away with, but need to be reconceptualised to handle the online information age:

I am not therefore abandoning the record but, realizing that there are too many of them, I am rather advocating that archivists cannot understand the new records by first looking at billions and billions of records; instead, they must start with an understanding of the wider context of the process of the record's creation and contemporary use ... If we as information professionals can guide our sponsors and users from masses of specific information on to knowledge, and even wisdom, we will be secure indeed in the new age and make a valuable contribution to society and posterity. If not, we will be replaced by software packages that can handle facts, and data, and information very efficiently, without any mediation by archivists or anyone else.<sup>231</sup>

Cook is suggesting a reframing of the work of archivists—evoking the larger macro perspective to archiving that has been in effect in Canada since the 1990s, which brings context to the process of a record's creation in relationship to the public and its societal function. This macro approach reaffirms the insight of Hugh Taylor who argued that tracking the larger forms and patterns of knowledge by archivists would allow researchers and the public to “transcend the morass of information and data into which we will otherwise fall.”<sup>232</sup> Cook argues that archivists remain relevant in the post-custodial Information Age by acting as guides “through the information forest,” which provides value-added knowledge to otherwise overwhelming information systems.<sup>233</sup> In doing so, archivists continue to bring a provenance, or an order to things, not only at the level of individual fonds, but within the larger patterns of information, which helps users to synthesize it into knowledge.

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<sup>231</sup> Terry Cook, “Electronic Records, Paper Minds: The Revolution in Information Management and Archives in the Post-Custodial and Post-Modernist Era,” *Archives & Social Studies: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Research* 1, (2007): 411-412.

<sup>232</sup> Taylor, “Transformation in the Archives,” 24.

<sup>233</sup> Cook, “Electronic Records, Paper Minds,” 431-432.

## Archival Preservation versus Public Accessibility

What the debate about online versus offline sources (or digital materials versus physical materials) exacerbates is the highly fraught longstanding debates around preservation versus access. It is not a black and white or binary problem, but rather an issue that is in constant flux. This section will cover some of the major issues for and against traditional archival practices that uphold preservation and provenance of fonds for the purpose of preserving for the future, against the need for accessibility of archival materials through digital platforms that promote use, repurposing, and dissemination. I argue that in order to move forward, these knowledge and information models need to exist within a dialectic aimed towards a collaborative framework rather than a competitive, hierarchal, and commercially influenced model, which will allow scholars and the public to benefit from a variety of integrated research methods and approaches.

As previously noted, archives at all levels are feeling the pressure to move their collections online in order to compete with the demand of accessibility. This move online is a tentative one as standard practices are not yet in place, specifically around issues of copyright, material use, file sizes, formats, and image quality. Ricky notes in his essay “Supply and Demand: Special Collections and Digitisation,” that archives need to move away from archival quality to accessibility quality, or “good enough” quality, in order to deliver the materials requested in a timely manner.<sup>234</sup> As with the Massecar Collection, the films were transferred in DIY “good enough” quality for access rather than high resolution, or archival quality. It highlights an underlying ethical issue regarding preservation: provenance aims to respect the original materials and render the digital facsimile in the highest quality possible. However, as previously stated, specifically in regards to viewing copies, online digital access allows for the

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<sup>234</sup> Erway, “Supply and Demand,” 331.

freedom of circulation and use, which includes varying quality of materials.

Access used to stand for who was granted permission to see physical collections, but now, as archivist Rick Prelinger notes, “Access is, in fact a spectrum of possible use, ranging from in-house viewing to full online availability with reuse permission - from scholarly use to uninhibited public use.”<sup>235</sup> Prelinger notes the curse and the blessing that moving image archives have always been to archives—a place of contention in terms of a document of truth, but also a work of art that might come with sticky copyright use. Yet as media evolves, Prelinger suggests that moving image archives could now be seen as a gateway for archives to move online and test the digital platforms that are becoming cornerstones of not only research but our everyday lives.

But not all archivists are as eager as Erway or Prelinger to go online. Those who come from more traditional views worry about who is accessing what from the archive, and worry about how they will be using the material—in what context, with what permission, to what audiences, and on what type of platform. The traditional roles of moving image archivists and archivists in general are positioned within a protective custodial role, which some feel is being threatened as they move materials out into the online digital world. It is reshaping their job descriptions; some now being considered as “media managers” rather than archivists.<sup>236</sup> Archivists are trying to come to terms with where they are now situated in the modern workflow of the archive. Some are responsive while others are resistant. While there is resistance and anxiety, the digital and its ubiquitous nature is an inevitability for archives, and as Prelinger states, is allowing archives to come face to face with the “precautionary principle” that has overshadowed moving image access in the past.<sup>237</sup> The digital is forcing archives to take on the

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<sup>235</sup> Prelinger, “Archives and Access in the 21st Century,” 114.

<sup>236</sup> Prelinger, “We Are the New Archivists.”

<sup>237</sup> Prelinger, “Archives and Access,” 115

red tape it has tried to avoid or deny in the past, along with questions surrounding “...ownership, standards, sustainability, and accountability.”<sup>238</sup>

As collections move online, with media conglomerates like YouTube, Google, Vimeo, et cetera, monopolizing the market, there is the public misperception about what archives are, what they do, and what types of holdings they have. While online access is potentially changing research for the better, there is also confusion about what the make-up of archives are and how they behave. With this confusion comes a new frustration building around access, and an indignation as to what the public feels they have a right to access because of the immediacy of other forms of moving image media. Some of the results of this demand has motivated archives to invest more in their search engines in order to not just describe a fond, but give it context during the cataloguing stages. Archives are considering how to change the metadata they use so that fonds can be tagged with keyword descriptions that would act more intuitively to what the public is looking for.

Younger generations, as Prelinger and other scholars have noted, have a different relationship to images, their quality, and cultural ownership. Archivists that once protected the pristine original are being called upon to note the importance of access by circulating images however possible. There is a need for a new form of openness towards media. Prelinger suggests that with the “abolition of archival privilege” that is possible with digital media, we can begin to reconsider our relationship as users of archival media. No longer gated or contained within the physical space of the archive, online users, Prelinger argues, gain a new form of openness and sensuality with the images. While they may not be in the presence of the original media objects,

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

they often have the ability to “touch” the media through its discreet components.<sup>239</sup> Allowing users to engage with media in an uncontrolled way lifts the restrictive nature of the archive and replaces it with a supportive environment of remediation, opening up new avenues of archival use.

Again, this shift is highly focused on the user rather than the donor or the provenance of the collection, but archivists like Prelinger and Erway are looking for solutions to how archives can be relevant in the information age we live in. As Prelinger states, “If they don’t find what they’re seeking in official trusted repositories they’ll grow to depend on the YouTube’s of the world.”<sup>240</sup> This is part of his mandate for the Prelinger Archives, on Archive.org, which hosts open source content from texts, audio, moving images, and software as well as archived web pages. The site states, “Libraries exist to preserve society's cultural artifacts and to provide access to them. If libraries are to continue to foster education and scholarship in this era of digital technology, it's essential for them to extend those functions into the digital world.”<sup>241</sup> It is important to note here, however, that the Internet Archive uses the word library rather than archive to describe itself. Libraries function very differently than archives, allowing patrons to browse the stacks, lend out materials, reproduce them, et cetera. Also all the moving images available at Archive.org are officially part of the public domain, making copyright clearance a non-issue.

Nevertheless the Internet Archive is a step towards making non-commercial moving images accessible to the public and researchers alike. It is a model on which archives can build and consider when moving forward with online access to unrestricted holdings. The Massecar

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<sup>239</sup> Prelinger, “It's Only A Moving Image: Archives, Access and the Social Contract.”

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Archive.org, “Why the Archive is Building An Internet Library,” The Internet Archive. <http://www.archive.org/about/about> (accessed Feb 26, 2007).

Collection was acquired by the Western Archives with the intention of digitizing the films. There was no question as to whether or not they would become available, instead it was a given, and the profits from sales was incentive for the archival executive to secure these important local films. The profits from DVD sales, however, did not go back directly to the archive, but instead was put back into Weldon Library, which is the campus's central library that houses the Western Archives. Little, if any, of the money from the profits of the DVD sales has made their way back to the fond. Its maintenance is non-existent without the film expertise to care for it and the MiniDV tapes still remain the fond's digital master.

That is not to say that the archivists do not want to see this collection better cared for; simply put, it is the lack of resources, labour power, and knowledge of celluloid preservation that prevents this fond from a longer shelf life. When I last saw the prints in November of 2010, some were brittle, smelling of vinegar, and covered in a light mold. The films are at least being kept in a stable, temperature and humidity controlled storage, although some still remain on cardboard reels, and those with vinegar syndrome are not properly segregated.<sup>242</sup> And so the films are naturally meeting their fate, as all films eventually will under less than ideal storage and maintenance conditions. If there was the time and money, the archive would bring in a film archivist to assess the films, but the task would be lengthy, and the costs are the beyond the means of their budget.

Western Archives and the DIY pursuit to share these films with the communities featured in them, was a proactive effort to share history through digitization—the preservation of these

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<sup>242</sup> Vinegar syndrome is the term for the decomposition of acetate film. The film can appear to be brittle, shrunken, or warped and will give off a vinegary scent. The condition is brought on by heat and/or moisture in the storage environment. The vapours emitted by a decomposing print can affect nearby prints, which is why it is important to segregate them immediately as to not infect a collection.

films was an ad hoc result of that pursuit. Choosing to disseminate the collection on DVD was a choice made because of the budget, but at the time it was also the most publicly accessible format. What is unique about this collection is that it was specifically acquired to make accessible to the public, rather than it being something that sits waiting for researcher requests. After the digitization of these films, promotional DVD copies were sent to the towns featured in the films along with one of Masseur's original posters. This sparked great enthusiasm within the communities, and led to over three thousand DVDs produced for purchase within the first year of their release.<sup>243</sup> As word spread within these communities, more Masseur films appeared. Citizens approached the Western Archives with films from Linwood, Tavistock, Wingham, Ailsa Craig, Dorchester and Wellesley, which were prints likely sold by Masseur, though not included in the original acquisition.<sup>244</sup>



Image 6 – A slightly molding Masseur film. It is likely also warped, indicated by the uneven wind that has exposed raised edges of the film. The film in the background is being held on the reel by Scotch Tape.

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<sup>243</sup> Lutman, "Stars of the Town," 2.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

Yet the scope of the outreach for the collection died down a little over a year after the initial acquisition, and there is little activity within the online presence of the collection. Administrative shifts happened within Western Archives in 2010, when Lutman retired from his position, and there was no new hire made for the J.J. Talman Special Collections. The archives now function with a “Logistics Coordinator” managing the facilities, alongside a series of archivists overseeing large portfolios divided by subjects that are supported by archival assistants. As of 2017, the Western Archives have yet to move the Massecar Collection online. “Stars of the Town” is not listed under the Western Archives Special Collections, but instead it is buried within the “Virtual Exhibits” section of the website. Visuals for the collection under the page titled “Stills and Clips,” include a sampling of stills, yet no moving images.<sup>245</sup> The homepage for the Western Archives website is in need of upkeep, as the database for accessing collections is non-functioning. It is easier to search the Western Library main database for “Stars of the Town” than to attempt to access the Massecar Collection through Western Archive’s website. This once again points to the investment in Western University’s overall library database system and not to resources specific to the Western Archives. Thus, the enthusiasm, and diligent efforts of this DIY acquisition, digitization, and dissemination have been undermined and the collection is no longer reaching scholars or the public while it remains on DVD. Western Archives, in order to remain relevant, needs to make the leap into online access to ensure that researchers, students, and the public will continue to see the archives as a leader in historical regional collections.

The loss of momentum or interest in this collection speaks to how the ecology of moving image archives needs to be continuously kept active through access. Once digitized, Lutman,

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<sup>245</sup> Stars of the Town, “Still and Clips,” Western Archives, Western University. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/archives/starsofthetownfilmstills.html> (accessed April 24, 2017).



Egleston, and myself promoted the collection through conference papers, and articles, yet without the online presence or accessibility, the collection slipped out of view. This is a common occurrence with preservation and access projects: there is a flurry of activity during the funded project, but the sustainability to keep it going for years to come is not always carefully thought out. More often than not, the infrastructure within the home institutions is simply not there.

## **Conclusion**

In an era where budgets are being cut and the labour force is being downsized, archives are forced to think creatively outside of their traditional mandates. While the circumstances are not ideal, it has led archives to reconsider their own policies and practices in order to thrive in the new technological landscape and political climate. Thus, in this transitional archival period it is imperative that the Canadian audiovisual archival community function transparently and collaboratively with its patrons and policymakers in order to move forward and make wise decisions about the future of our moving image history. Activating all the actors within the ecology of moving image archives is imperative to creating a network of growing online and offline collections. The key is to find collaborative models that value the history, context, and materiality of the original artifact in tandem with the need for digital accessibility. There will need to be a push towards educating the archival network— from citizen to bureaucrat —in order to create clear policy wherein preservation will not be conflated with digitization. The Massecar Collection is an example of how one archive made-do in the mid-2000s in order to make local history accessible to the public, regardless of the few resources they had. Yet the missing link in the ecology of this collection was an understanding of proper film preservation, and the lack of scholars and educators to activate this archival collection in meaningful ways. Film preservation expertise would have allowed these prints to be stored and maintained properly, prolonging their

shelf life, which would have also allowed them to be digitized using high-resolution film scanners in the future. In doing so, the digital archival files would become much more stable, and easier to migrate to new formats and/or resolutions. Activation by scholars and educators would allow the digitization of this collection to move forward in a variety of ways: by building upon the skeleton finding aids through thoughtful research, including films in course syllabi across disciplines, and thus creating a demand for this collection to be migrated online and made accessible to an even larger audience.

Chapter Four will look at the ways in which Canadian audiovisual collections like “Stars of the Town” have struggled to become part of traditional archives, only to then face more challenges as they attempt to remain visible and accessible once absorbed into official history. I argue that the traditional 19<sup>th</sup> century archive, with its focus on paper being the primary source of historical truth impeded audiovisual documentation from entering archives and being properly cared for. This hierarchy in turn affected the ways in which audiovisual archiving as a profession evolved organically without professional standardization, and has been marginalized within traditional professional archival circles. Finally, due to the marginalization of the practice and the labour of audiovisual archivists, there has been a gap in how scholars engage with film collections and how they theorize the Archive. Through an historical examination of these hierarchies and ways of knowledge-making, I examine how the treatment of film in archives impedes the ability for collections like “Stars of the Town” to thrive and remain visible within a traditional archival setting.

## **Chapter Four – Hierarchies and Displaced Histories**

The previous chapter focused on the effects of rapidly changing archival standards, the dissemination of online and offline audiovisual materials, and how this influenced the current debates in archival preservation and public accessibility. I traced the debates regarding the digitization of moving image collections, and more specifically, the DIY digitization of the Massecar Collection as an example of how audiovisual archives greatly differ in archival standards and practices. The DIY digital reproduction of the Massecar Collection, while below optimal archival standards, allowed the public to reclaim these moving images and their local histories, revealing the challenge that many Canadian institutions with aging media art collections are facing. Scant media migration budgets have forced archivists to make strategic decisions in order to complete initiatives.

Chapter Four will take a step back to historically frame the present situation audiovisual collections are facing in regards to the future of safeguarding collections and making Canadian moving image history accessible. I will trace the historical trajectories that have led to collections like the Massecar fond being underrepresented not only in audiovisual collections, but traditional archives as a whole. I will be focusing on the discourses that shape our relationships to audiovisual archives as archivists, scholars, and the public. I will argue that audiovisual archives and collections have been implicated in a variety of hierarchies that have impeded their visibility, legibility, and value as a primary historical resource. These hierarchies include:

1. The primacy of the paper record as the document of historical truth over other material records including: photographs, audiovisual materials, audio recordings, and objects, et cetera.

2. Traditional archivists versus audiovisual archivists: long standing professionalized practices versus the organic development of DIY common practices
3. Film archivists versus academic scholarship: the disparity between the practical labour of archivists and the theorizing of “the archive” by the academic community

Through an historical examination of these hierarchies and ways of knowledge-making I will examine how the treatment of film in archives, by archivists, librarians, and scholars has heavily influenced the ways in which we speak, imagine, and construct contemporary discourses about the status of moving images archives.

### **The Bias of Communication: Traditions in Official Memory**

Canadian communications theorist Harold Innis has argued that, with the invention of the printing press, the written word became an extension of the human experience, and a “verifiable” form of memory.<sup>246</sup> It solidified alphabets and collective imaginaries, and strengthened the institutional control of empires. For Innis, Gutenberg’s press made “[a] common ideal image of words spoken beyond the range of personal experience” and created “an extended social structure was not only held together by increasing numbers of written records but also equipped with an increased capacity to change ways of living.”<sup>247</sup> With the creation of this mass communication technology, the written word and the medium of paper became the primary historical document.

The history of communication that has been mapped out by both Innis and Marshall McLuhan speaks to how modes of communication have shaped networks of knowledge and the institutions that disseminate them. The influence of the written word as the “official” mode of

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<sup>246</sup> Harold Innis, *Empire and Communications*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 10.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

communication for governments and bureaucracies has prioritized what we save in our archives and libraries. In the archive, paper documents take precedence over other forms of knowledge. This is primarily due to archives having been originally created to house documentation of the activities of the state. Placing importance on the written document as the primary source of knowledge has had an impact on the attention and care paid to other materials that in turn, have not been as visible or accessible to researchers. In fact, moving image collections were not recognized as official records or documents by the International Council of Archives until 1972 even though the first official film archive was founded in 1933 in Stockholm, Sweden.<sup>248</sup>

Preserving audiovisual records is new in comparison to paper records. Their care involves more specialization and labour. Audiovisual collections hold unique forms of history in that they can include a wide variety of objects spanning from production (cameras, editing equipment), distribution (posters and promotional materials), and exhibition (projectors, kinetoscopes, televisions, tape decks, etc) in addition to the primary media format. Archives and other memory institutions in Canada and internationally are still more comfortable with focusing on paper documents as a primary resource rather than a recording, photograph, or moving image. This imbalance is reflected in the lack of priority audiovisual collections take in institutional fiscal budgets, and in turn, in media scholarship due to research barriers.

Innis traced the influence of paper records throughout Western history to understand how it was and continues to be such an integral part of “the organization and administration of

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<sup>248</sup> Wolfgang Kohte, Archives of Motion Pictures, Photographic Records and Sound Recordings: A Report Prepared for the XIIth International Congress on Archives, Moscow, August 21-25, 1972 (Paris, 1972); FIAF Historical Timeline, Federation of International Film Archives <http://www.fiafnet.org/pages/History/FIAF-Timeline.html?PHPSESSID=0qrs22pmkl0gg0m8dm4r33da61> (accessed Feb 16, 2017).

government and in turn of empires and of Western civilization.”<sup>249</sup> Where printing presses existed, so did centres of finance, government, and industry—so much so that by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century a new monopoly of knowledge was built up in relation to paper.<sup>250</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> century printing had brought efficiency to parliament and helped to document and solidify state ideologies.<sup>251</sup> Paper documents increased the communication between nations and led to the widespread growth of mass communication and commerce. Moreover, the printed document became the medium of “official history” with other forms of communication marked as “secondary” sources to the written or printed word. With the printing press came a cultural change in the way people told stories about themselves, their nation, and their personal history. The oral tradition of storytelling through spoken word, song, dance, and theatre was replaced by a top-down mode of official history-making.

Muller, Feith, and Fruin’s 1898 *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*, from which much of contemporary archival practice has been derived, defines an archival collection as: “The whole of the written documents, drawings and printed matter, officially received or produced by an administrative body or one of its officials, in so far [sic] as these documents were intended to remain in the custody of that body or official.”<sup>252</sup> Traditional archives understand the term “document” to extend only to written texts or “text-like records.”<sup>253</sup> These records (most of them produced by governments and corporations) are what fill a large majority of archives worldwide. Whether they are internal memos, financial records, meeting minutes, public censuses, or death certificates, these documents have been integral in shaping the

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<sup>249</sup> Innis, *Empire and Communications*, 5.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>252</sup> Lisa Darms, “The Archival Object: A Memoir of Disintegration,” *Archivaria* 67 (2009): 150.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*

construction of the past. Archives are the traces of not only the cultural contributions of a nation but its financial, social, and political choices in war and peacetime.<sup>254</sup>

Yet with the industrial revolution came other modern technological feats, including photography and cinema. By the 1840s scientists had begun using still photography to document studies in a wide variety of fields including medical subjects, botany, chemistry, physics, astronomy, and geology.<sup>255</sup> John Tagg notes in his introduction to *The Burden of Representation*, that the rise of popular photography was a result of the technology being legitimized as a scientific form of documentation. Institutions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century such as prisons, asylums, hospitals, schools, and factories used photography to complement written records during experiments and medical observations.<sup>256</sup> Still photography, and later moving image photography, would change the way science conducted research and understood the world. These technologies made it possible to see beyond the means of the human eye—and to mummify time—Muybridge’s galloping horse experiment being a seminal example.<sup>257</sup> The Victorian Era in North America, still with its cabinets of curiosity and amateur-professionals, found that arts and sciences were beginning to be segregated into institutional silos: Library | Archive | Museum. Knowledge was categorized, displayed, streamlined, and controlled by government institutions and the private market.

Photography was separated into the professional and the amateur, relegating amateur photographers to a secondary position within the budding field of visual historical records. Tagg writes,

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Jill Delaney, “An Inconvenient Truth? Scientific Photography and Archival Ambivalence,” *Archivaria* 65 (2008): 76.

<sup>256</sup> John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 5.

<sup>257</sup> Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” 9.

If amateur photography operates in an exceedingly limited institutional space and signifying range, then it is hemmed in on all sides by divisive barriers to technical and cultural knowledge, ownership and control. But beyond this, even if variation, innovation and dissent were exhibited by amateur photographic practice, it would not carry the weight of cultural significance, because, by definition, its space of signification is not culturally privileged... amateur photographic practice was largely confined to the narrow spaces of the family and commoditized leisure which imposed their familial division of labour, and reducing it to a stultified repertoire of legitimated subjects and stereotypes.<sup>258</sup>

Much like amateur photography, amateur filmmaking, as Patricia Zimmermann argues in *Reel Families*, has historically been relegated to the domestic space— confined to a limited amount of social and cultural signifiers, operating under the conditions of a professional, well-defined film industry. Within the confines of a feminized pastime, a domestic hobby, and a middle class leisure commodity, amateur filmmaking has been positioned in the hierarchy of social and cultural value to be something utterly ordinary and mundane. It is an ongoing struggle to affix value to these images for both archivists and scholars. Due to the “complexly demarcated spheres of modern cultural practice,” archivists, academics, and critics have focused primarily on professionalized images due to their intrinsic historical, political, or artistic value.<sup>259</sup> As noted in Chapter Two, archivists often have to go to great lengths to justify their reasons for acquiring amateur film collections due to their often mundane, repetitive, and ordinary content. The fact that amateur films have taken so long to become legible to archivists and academics speaks to the ways in which these institutions of knowledge have historically struggled with the value of film as an art form and not just as a passing fad or form of public entertainment. It is through a continuous tension between amateur and professional—specifically the ways the boundaries of

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<sup>258</sup> Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 18.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*



these definitions shift and are defined—that Canadian film history and preservation has struggled to cultivate and grow.

An early example of the shift from visual and oral storytelling (often amateur) towards official paper-centric modes of knowledge in Canada is the saga of natural history museums during the Victorian era. These museums were meant to visually stimulate the mind through “naked eye science,” which emphasized the importance of experiential knowledge through close observation of specimens.<sup>260</sup> These specimens were often geological in nature (birds, plants, minerals, et cetera) that volunteers would help identify. As Lisa Given and Lianne McTavish note, early Canadian museums, archives, and libraries had a complementary system of reading and looking, and believed that “the two activities would be inadequate without each other.”<sup>261</sup> Many of these natural museums were run by volunteers and amateur historical societies that watched as federal funding near the turn of the century became more devoted to public libraries rather than object-oriented museums. Carnegie philanthropic foundations between 1886-1917 spent over \$56 million on funding libraries throughout the English-speaking world, which democratized the public's access to knowledge but also led to the depletion of support to organizations that housed artifacts and cultural material objects.<sup>262</sup> Carnegie's support of the self-educated citizen accessed knowledge primarily through the world of books.

The rise of public libraries also led to the professionalization of information sciences that would primarily focus on paper-based libraries, paying less attention to the specialized skills needed in museum and archival collections. Slowly, these institutions that used to go hand in

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<sup>260</sup> Lisa M. Given and Lianne McTavish, “What Is Old Is New Again: The Reconvergence of Libraries, Archives, and Museums in the Digital Age,” *The Library Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (2010): 10.

<sup>261</sup> Given and McTavish, “What Is Old Is New Again,” 11-12.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

hand became separate, and the latter became secondary in the eyes of bureaucrats. As these institutions of memory and knowledge became divided and professionalized, the amateur collectors, curators, and volunteer custodians of history were ushered out for those with doctorates and professional certificates.<sup>263</sup>

The separations between amateur and professional led to divisions in labour as well. Under the collaborative amateur model, the curator not only arranged collections but was also the person who maintained the vitrines, and acted as caretaker of the grounds.<sup>264</sup> Through the professionalization of the field, curators became historians too busy with intellectual work to busy themselves with the manual labour of the field, and labour became hierarchical. Moreover, the exclusion of amateurs through the institutionalization and professionalization of knowledge led to particular modes of knowledge being favoured over others. Through the creation of hierarchies and divisions of knowledge, our national, cultural, and individual relationships to memory and history were shaped. Documentation in forms such as books and paper records, became official modes of memory, while natural history and storytelling through a variety of art forms (painting, sculpture, photography, and moving images) became of secondary or even peripheral importance.

Early on, photography and filmmaking were relegated to different spheres of practice: as support material in scientific documentation, a tool for national propaganda, as popular entertainment, and an amateur hobby. Legitimizing cinema as both a historical document worthy of preservation and as an art form worthy of recognition and study is inherent to its birth as a technology. As Sam Kula notes in the introduction of his UNESCO RAMP Study:

Just two years after the first public exhibitions of cinematography in

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

Paris, London, Berlin and New York, Boleslav Matuzewski, a Polish cinematographer in the employ of Nicholas II of Russia, published a manifesto in Paris calling for the establishment of a world-wide network of archives to acquire and conserve the product of this new marvel of technology, this new source of history. Matuzewski was aware that for cinematography to fulfill its historic mission it would first have to move from “purely recreational or fantastic subjects toward actions and events of documentary interest; from the slice of life as human interest to the slice of life as the cross-section of a nation and a people.”<sup>265</sup>

Yet, Lumière claimed cinema was “an invention without a future.” Even cinema’s early achievers found it hard to champion the invention as an art form and of historical value.

Canadian film collections at the National Archives of Canada remained a buried sub-department within the Department of Trade & Commerce as a branch of the Pictorial Division with little activity or representation in annual reports prior to the creation of the Federation of International of Film Archives (FIAF) in 1938, and the creation of the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) in 1939.<sup>266</sup> Film was not even cared for by the National Archive until 1923. Prior to that year, it was housed by Britain’s Imperial War Office.<sup>267</sup>

The slow recognition of film as an indexical historical document, beyond entertainment and propaganda, let alone rationalizing it as an art form, was the first challenge to overcome in institutional collections. The trajectory of Canadian film preservation is a prime example of how the hierarchy of amateur and professional has shaped the cycle of false starts on preservation strategies and later on, digitization. This cycle that continuously seems to fail points to the weaknesses in the preservation ecosystem.

## **An Historical Overview of Canadian Film Archiving**

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<sup>265</sup> UNESCO, *The Archival Appraisal of Moving Images: A RAMP Study with Guidelines*, prepared by Sam Kula (Paris: 1983), 5.

<sup>266</sup> Wonzy, “National Audiovisual Preservation Initiatives,” 90-91.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

While still photography quickly found a permanent home at the National Archives of Canada, the history of which institution would house Canada's moving image collections has been a fraught one, shared amongst several institutions. I would argue that this volleying and trepidation regarding stewardship has led to Canadian moving image history being overlooked. Historically, it speaks to the hierarchies of cultural value that have preoccupied not only Canadian institutions, but the international archival community as well. The DIY or organic development of audiovisual archives as collections and as a professionalized practice has come up against the traditional archive, which has been slow to recognize the value of audiovisual documents as valuable historical records in need of safeguarding. In addition, the lack of knowledge in how to properly care for these collections here in Canada has led to the loss of over ninety-thousand early films.

In 2009, *Archivaria*, the journal of the Association of Canadian Archivists, released a special issue entitled “Special Section on Taking a Stand!: Activism in Canadian Cultural Archives.” Media scholar Michele L. Wonzy contributed with her article, “National Audiovisual Preservation Initiatives and the Independent Media Arts in Canada,” which included an outline of the historical trajectory of Canadian media archives since their early inception to their contemporary status. What this article reveals is a continuous cycle of committees and recommendations, followed by short-lived initiatives by the federal government to address the issue of Canada’s lack of media preservation. Wonzy’s article has become an important document in Canadian audiovisual communities because of its scrutiny of the timeline of the federal history of moving image collections in Canada. The following section is an overview of Wonzy’s historical timeline of the audiovisual preservation in Canada, paying close attention to

the bureaucratic creation and disassemblment of federal organizations.<sup>268</sup>

The Dominion Archives of Canada were created in 1872 under the Department of Agriculture, but did not become an autonomous and publicly accessible institution—the Public Archives of Canada (PAC)—until 1912.<sup>269</sup> Within the PAC, there was no official Cinematographic Division until 1937, an initiative that began with the appointment of Gustave Lanctôt as Dominion Archivist in 1934. Initially, the British War Office was responsible for Canada’s audiovisual archive, which was primarily accessed by film producers for stock footage. In the years following the Second World War, the Canadian Motion Picture Bureau (1923-1941) and the Pictorial Division of the PAC oversaw Canadian moving image materials. The Motion Picture Bureau both produced and exhibited films, but preservation was not part of their mandate. As a part of the Department of Trade and Commerce, the bureau’s responsibility was to capture footage to promote Canada internationally for immigration, and educate Canadians about themselves through newsreels. This footage, much like the collection at the British War Office, was also used as a stock footage depository.

With the creation of the Cinematographic Division, Lanctôt went about writing to newsreel producers from both within Canada and internationally, asking that footage that was relevant to Canadian interests and history be sent to PAC.<sup>270</sup> David Lemieux notes, however, that Lanctôt’s plan needed to expand beyond the initial acquisition to consider the actual preservation and storage of the collection. He lacked the expertise and specialization needed to properly care

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<sup>268</sup> It should be noted that David Lemieux also wrote an excellent article historically mapping the status of a Canadian national film archive in his article, “A Film Archive for Canada” published in 2002 in *The Moving Image*.

<sup>269</sup> Canada’s national archive has gone through a series of official titles: The Dominion Archives of Canada (1872), Public Archives of Canada (1912), The National Archives of Canada (1987), and Library and Archives Canada (2004).

<sup>270</sup> David Lemieux, “A Film Archive for Canada,” *The Moving Image* 2, no. 1 (2002): 6.

for the prints he was acquiring. Without a background in film preservation he was naively requesting 35mm prints to be printed to 16mm positives for preservation, instead of asking for 35mm internegs/positives. Lemieux writes:

The most basic principle of film preservation techniques is that the best possible element for preservation purposes is the original 35mm negative or at the very least "the 'master,' the copy closest to the original negative," yet Lanctôt's inclination was that presentation was as important as preservation. In a follow-up letter to Movietone News, Lanctôt wrote, "now could you kindly recommend me what you consider the best method of storing such films and advise me as to the style of filing cases to be used and the firms which are supplying same." The Dominion Archivist's intentions were noble, but his enthusiasm and commitment to the task could not be matched by his conservation expertise.<sup>271</sup>

What this highlights is the ongoing conflict that media formats face in terms of safeguarding—the opposition of preservation versus exhibition and access. Lanctôt's lack of a strategic plan for film preservation beyond acquisition reveals the systemic issue that arises out of archival hierarchies privileging specific forms of material knowledge.

Lanctôt found himself looking for a place to store the new acquisitions, which the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau could not help with, having been at capacity within their own storage facilities. Contrary to his storage situation, he continued to reach out to producers, filmmakers and museum curators for acquisitions, including John Abbott at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the soon-to-be President of the Federation of International Film Archives (FIAF).

By 1937 there was momentum building within the international film community to form a federation to address the pressing concern of silent film preservation. With the advent of synchronized sound cinema in the late 1920s, silent films were being discarded from cinema

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

houses and collections. Many films would end up discarded at the end of a film exhibition circuit, such as the Dawson City films discussed in Chapter Two. Within Canada, there was pressure coming from filmmakers to protect independently produced films due to the threat of the growing Hollywood studio system in the U.S.. Within a year, the Federation of International Film Archives (FIAF) was founded, and despite Abbott's efforts to sway Lanctôt and the PAC to join FIAF and attend the inaugural conference in New York, the Canadian treasury was not in support. Canadian participation in FIAF would not take place until 1964, and representation on the executive did not occur until Peter Morris joined the board as Treasurer in 1966.<sup>272</sup>

The delay in joining FIAF was also influenced by the founding of the National Film Board of Canada (NFB). Ross McLean, the private secretary of Vincent Massey, was responsible for nominating John Grierson to conduct a survey on Canada's film holdings in 1937.<sup>273</sup> Grierson's 1938 report recommended the establishment of a centralized film department to oversee the production, distribution, and preservation of Canadian moving image culture. Lanctôt wrote to the Secretary of State in February 1939, requesting that a representative of the PAC sit on the board of the NFB, but the request was denied.<sup>274</sup> Established in September of that year, the NFB fashioned itself as a leader in education and documentary both nationally and internationally, but in terms of its mandate on preservation, there was little movement. With the outbreak of the Second World War, the NFB functioned as it saw fit, and in the post-war period did not revisit the issue of preservation.

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<sup>272</sup> "Past Executive Committees," Federation of International of Film Archives <http://www.fiafnet.org/pages/History/Past-Executive-Committees.html> (accessed December 19, 2016).

<sup>273</sup> Massey headed a royal commission on the arts, named the Massey Report, between 1949 and 1951, which resulted in the creation of the National Library and the Canada Council for the Arts. He was the Governor General of Canada from 1952-1959.

<sup>274</sup> Lemieux, "A Film Archive for Canada," 8.

Acquisition activity at the PAC also slowed during the war, and there was little support within the institution to form a film preservation infrastructure. Lanctôt retired in 1948, with a film collection on a steady rise due to the output of the NFB, but with no preservation strategy in place. Lemieux writes, “The missed opportunities and failed initiatives show that, as part of the Public Archives of Canada, the requirements of a national film collection would always be subordinated to the greater demands of its parent organization.”<sup>275</sup>

However, film preservation became a pressing issue for both the NFB and Dominion Archivist W.K. Lamb when Hye Bossin, a journalist for *Canadian Weekly*, spoke out in his article, “A Plea for a Canadian Archive” stating, “Even now, when Canada has just begun to march toward its great destiny, it is strange that such a powerful industry and art as the moving image picture should be without historic records in places designed to house them. How ridiculous will it seem several generations from now?”<sup>276</sup> Lamb, who continued Lanctôt’s fight for an official Canadian film archive, wrote the NFB regarding a strategic preservation plan stating, “I don't think the Archives alone could get very far with the project. On the other hand, if the film industry itself is interested, or could be interested, and if an agreement could be arrived at whereby films would be deposited regularly in an Archives collection, then I think it is entirely possible that something might be arranged.”<sup>277</sup> On record, Lamb was the one to reach out and suggest that the responsibility to care for and preserve Canada's moving images would have to be a collaborative effort between both public and private sectors. Lamb requested vault space from the NFB in order to organize a regular deposit of films, but was told there was little to no room for such an initiative.

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>276</sup> Hye Bossin, "A Plea for a Canadian Archive" *Canadian Film Weekly*, January 26, 1949.

<sup>277</sup> W.K. Lamb qtd in Lemieux, “A Film Archive for Canada,” 11.



The pressure put on the government by Bossin was heard by Lamb, and in 1951, the Canadian Film Archive Committee (CFAC) was formed, which included Lamb, Bossin, filmmaker J. Roby Kidd, and W. Arthur Irwin, then Head of the NFB. Irwin agreed to the NFB temporarily storing films of historical value, and lending their expertise to the CFAC. Yet, this was only temporary, and not a permanent solution. The committee remained active, attempting to garner financial support from both public government and film industry investors. They published a report in 1954 which they "... encouraged the repatriation of some of Canada's celebrated past works and also pushed for a separate, autonomous film archive."<sup>278</sup> The committee did help to acquire some rare early Canadian film prints and elements during their active years, but their aim to create an official Canadian film archive did not come to fruition. Although a new storage facility for PAC was being built in 1956, there still was not an official film division at the PAC, and the facility would not offer the specialized climate controlled conditions needed for volatile nitrate film. Without achieving their goals, the Canadian Film Archive Committee disbanded in 1957.

Lamb remained hopeful that the CFAC's efforts would not be in vain and continued seeking initiatives in the late 1950s, which led to the opening of the Canadian Film Archive (CFA) in 1963, as part of the Canadian Film Institute (CFI). It brought together non-profit, government, and commercial sectors of film in Canada. Peter Morris, the first Curator of the Canadian Film Archives strongly recommended that the government invest in protecting one million feet of nitrate film, warning that the consequences of not doing so could lead to the loss of irreplaceable Canadian film history.<sup>279</sup> In 1964, the CFI/CFA became a member of FIAF, but

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<sup>278</sup> Wonzy, "National Audiovisual Preservation Initiatives," 96.

<sup>279</sup> Lemieux, "A Film Archive for Canada," 15.

the issue over preservation and proper handling of the nation's moving image holdings was far from over.

The nitrate fire in the summer of 1967 in Beaconsfield once again forced the issue of preservation into the spotlight. Jean T. Guenette writes: “Because of the lack of concern for Canada's film heritage, more than half of the films produced in this country between 1890 and 1950 have been lost.”<sup>280</sup> The lack of care Guenette highlighted was the fact that these nitrate films were being kept in a warehouse, (also described by some at the NFB as an airplane hanger) in unfit conditions for volatile nitrate, which can ignite and burn uncontrollably.<sup>281</sup> Sam Kula recounts in his article, “Mea Culpa: How I Abused the Nitrate in My Life,” stories of a series of entirely avoidable nitrate fires, including the Beaconsfield fire stating, “In Montreal in 1967, during another hot summer, the National Film Board, the unofficial custodian of the country’s film heritage, stores its nitrate films in a warehouse at Beaconsfield, on the outskirts of the city. There are no climate controls of any kind. The warehouse contains all sorts of other combustible material, like tanks of diesel fuel. A fire breaks out, cause unknown, and the nitrate helps make it a spectacular blaze.”<sup>282</sup> The NFB’s official statement to the public confirmed the loss of roughly ninety-thousand films in the blaze, exclaiming the strong need for a proper Canadian film archive.<sup>283</sup> The CFI had been responsible for this collection for the past four years. The collection, however, still remained in a variety of places—the PAC, the NFB, and the CFI—none of which were equipped to house nitrate. The neglect of the nitrate collection once again reinforced the lack of value being placed on Canada's moving image materials, and pointed to

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<sup>280</sup> Jean T. Guenette qtd. in Wonzy, “National Audiovisual Preservation Initiatives,” 97.

<sup>281</sup> Ironically, it is in this airplane hanger that NFB filmmakers Colin Low and Roman Kroitor also tested their projections for *Labyrinth/Labyrinthe*—the three chamber film projection created on 70mm and 35mm for Expo ‘67

<sup>282</sup> Kula, “How I Abused the Nitrate in My Life,” 201.

<sup>283</sup> Lemieux, “A Film Archive for Canada,” 14.

the fracture in the infrastructure to care for film collections. While the NFB and the CFI were to be sharing the responsibility for preserving Canada's moving image collection, they did not have the resources needed. The Public Archives of Canada began to collect unstable nitrate in 1969, as a result of the concerns around the safe storage of the flammable format. The PAC also continued repatriating more newsreel collections from England and the Library of Congress in the United States.<sup>284</sup> The NFB's reputation for carelessness was spreading, and by the late 1960s the PAC was already in the midst of positioning itself as a depository that could care for not only film, but other audiovisual formats.

In 1972, Secretary of State Gérard Pelletier created the National Film Archives Committee to reinvigorate the National Film Policy, and the PAC began the conversion of over fourteen-thousand nitrate films onto safety film. In tandem, Pelletier was looking for a way to bring together the preservation work taking place within institutions throughout Canada, including the PAC, NFB and CFI, but also the institutions that came to be through the funding of the Canada Council: La Cinémathèque canadienne (later, Cinémathèque québécoise), Le Conservatoire d'art cinématographique de Montréal, the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre and the Cinematheque of Vancouver (later Pacific Cinematheque, and now The Cinematheque). Wonzy writes, "Collective responsibility for audiovisual materials had been identified more than once throughout the historical developments that had led to this moment, but to date, policy regarding the preservation of film had always hinged on public access for distribution and circulation, not on the traditional mandate of the archival environment: that is, to acquire and preserve."<sup>285</sup> Each institution had their mandates regarding distribution and exhibition in addition to safeguarding Canada's audiovisual heritage to consider, which sometimes were at odds with

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<sup>284</sup> Wonzy, "National Audiovisual Preservation Initiatives," 98.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

traditional preservation mandates. In a report written by Guy Coté, commissioned by Pelletier on the activities of these various collections, concluded that independent archives did not have the infrastructure or long-term stability to support a permanent moving-image collection.<sup>286</sup> Coté concluded that the PAC was the only institution that would take on such a responsibility, even though Dominion Archivists Lanctôt and Lamb believed that moving forward would need a shared and joint effort.

As the PAC's collection began to grow in terms of infrastructure and holdings, the Canadian Film Archive at the CFI withered. Due to an insufficient amount of funding, the CFI was selling large amounts of archival materials to the PAC in order to keep afloat financially.<sup>287</sup> In 1972, the National Film, Television and Sound Archives (NFTSA) was established as a separate division within the PAC. By 1974, the PAC once again became the primary holders of Canada's moving image archive with over twenty-million feet of film in the collection. The National Film Archive (NFA) at PAC was officially established in 1976, and given full federal funding to carry out the incoming acquisitions, with the expectations that expansion would need to happen in order to accommodate future collections. The late 1970s was a time of expansion and investment for the NFTSA as a whole. Additionally, Françoise Picard, head of the Canada Council, and Sam Kula, who was Director of the National Film Archive, came together to discuss an initiative to have the work of filmmakers receiving Senior Arts Grants have their work deposited at the PAC. This was done in order to recognize the need to preserve Canadian independent and artisanal cinema in addition to films from the NFB, commercial film productions, and repatriated stock footage/newsreel materials. NFTSA was collecting an average

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<sup>286</sup> Lemieux, "A Film Archive for Canada," 16.

<sup>287</sup> A large portion of funding at this time was provided by the Canada Council for the Arts

of 6,250 titles a year in the 1970s, which ballooned to 19,397 per year in the 80s.<sup>288</sup> But as Lemieux points out, this massive influx of audiovisual titles during this time has led to the issues that LAC faces today. The mandated deposits in the 1970s and 1980s (specifically of the NFB and CBC) have left the archive unable to keep up with recent productions nor able to welcome new deposits today.

By the early 1980s, NFTSA was seen as a champion of audiovisual preservation by FIAF and the larger archival community, specifically for the mass transfers of nitrate to safety film—especially the rare 9.5mm and 28mm gauges. The NFTSA stood as an example to other national archives that were just coming around to acknowledging audiovisual records as historical documents. NFTSA was a “total film archive” in acquisition, preservation, and access. Yet by the end of the 1980s, it was becoming clear once again that the ability for one institution to safeguard Canada’s audiovisual history was simply not possible.

Another report was commissioned in 1995, “Fading Away: Strategic Options To Ensure the Protection of and Access to Our Audio-Visual Memory,” to identify at-risk collections and reassess the activities of the NFTSA moving forward. It is the first report to acknowledge the need for format migration and the challenges of obsolete technology. The steering committee was comprised of representatives from commercial, non-profit, and government cultural bodies across Canada who fund, produce, house, exhibit, and preserve audiovisual works. Importantly, this audiovisual report was also the first to include First Nations, ethno-cultural groups, and artists collectives in the conversation of acquisition, preservation, and access, to which I will return later. The actual study was carried out by Jacques Grimard at the National Archives of Canada (NAC), along with members of the Department of Heritage and contributors from

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<sup>288</sup> Lemieux, “A Film Archive for Canada,” 17.

Telefilm, CBC, NFB, Association for the Study of Canadian Radio and Television, Société des auteurs, recherchistes, documentalistes et compositeurs, Productions Via Le Monde Inc., and the Canada Council of Archives. The report thanks a list of Canada's most renowned audiovisual archivists. Though relegated to fine print, their institutional knowledge, practical expertise, and hands-on experience of the day-to-day workings of audiovisual preservation was what made the report possible.

The report plainly states in its introduction that its recommendation moving forward is a decentralized and collective approach: a shared responsibility amongst "heritage holdings," recognizing the economic and geographic obstacles to coming to "workable solutions."<sup>289</sup> The rhetoric echoes sweeping bureaucratic speak with good intentions, yet the report and its recommendations failed to produce a network of resources for audiovisual collections from region to region.

Nevertheless, the core issues the report candidly identifies have been crucial in bringing the barriers facing audiovisual collections Canada-wide to light. The Masseur Collection case study is a concrete example of the real ways audiovisual works face these barriers and challenges. What the report brings to the forefront is the recognition of the total life cycle of audiovisual works: production, dissemination, access, and preservation are the shared responsibility of the audiovisual ecosystem.

The report resulted in the formation of the Audio Visual Preservation Trust of Canada (AV Trust), which in the early 2000s initiated the Masterworks Program that set about preserving at-risk audiovisual works across film, radio, television, and the music industry. For

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<sup>289</sup> Task Force on the Preservation and Enhanced Use of Canada's Audio-Visual Heritage, "Fading Away: Strategic Options To Ensure The Protection of and Access to Our Audio-Visual Memory," National Archives of Canada, Ottawa, ON, 1995.

film, the program primarily focused on feature-length films. Smaller projects were also taken on through the AV Trust to help digitize independent works identified as culturally valuable to Canada's audiovisual heritage, but these were focused on access more than preservation. The Masterworks Program was active between 2000-2006, until the Harper Government began to cut back on the AV Trust funding, which was completely pulled in 2008, when the Trust was dissolved.

In addition to this activity, the Library and Archives Preservation Centre in Gatineau opened in 1997, as a state-of-the-art facility dedicated to preserving Canada's documentary heritage with proper cold storage and preservation laboratories. The impressive facilities allowed archivists specializing in a variety of preservation mediums (books, maps, film and photography, paintings, rare objects) to work together under one roof in an open concept environment a-top of the storage vaults.

While this facility has helped audiovisual archivists to undertake important preservation work, it was put under major restraints when the Harper Government took power in 2006. Two years before Harper took office, the National Archives and the National Library of Canada were collapsed into Library and Archives Canada (LAC), a decision that consolidated resources and staff. The choice to collapse these institutions and the role of Head Librarian and Head Archivist came under heavy critique from library and archive associations across Canada. The folding of these two major memory institutions into one, in addition to the Harper Government coming into power meant continued cutbacks. LAC halted incoming acquisitions, major staff cutbacks were implemented, and preservation initiatives were suspended. The Harper Government's effect on libraries and archives was devastating. It was an assault on knowledge and information with the disassembling of various libraries and archives nationwide, stoppages in previously required

government digital deposits, and gag orders put on federal and provincial librarians and archivists from speaking about their day to day activities, and going so far as to stop staff from participating in association conferences.<sup>290</sup>

In the wake of these cuts, LAC began what they called a “Modernization Project,” which was announced publicly online in November 2009. The website outlined LAC’s “Preservation Orientation Instrument,” which naively outlined the goal of LAC going completely paperless by 2017. The site (now inaccessible by the public) stated, “Preservation, acquisition and resource discovery are the three pillars of LAC's core business.”<sup>291</sup> Considering the activities of libraries and archives as a business and monetizing culture in this way reveals the ambitions of an economist acting as Head Archivist, rather than a trained and practicing archivist. Economist Daniel Caron became Head Librarian and Archivist in 2009, two roles that were previously separate due to the different nature and operations of libraries and archives. As previously noted in earlier chapters, The Modernization Strategy was also heavily criticized due to its vague outline for digitization for LAC. The website outlining the project gave bullet point descriptions for the project that only generally outlined how LAC would go about collecting, preserving, and disseminating:

- Increasing digital capacities to store and access materials
- Implementing a whole-collection approach to preservation decisions

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<sup>290</sup> Sam-chin Li , “The vanishing act of government documents – and what to do about it,” Our Right To Know <http://ourrighttoknow.ca/tag/library-and-archives-canada/> (accessed January 2, 2017); Margaret Munro, “Federal librarians fear being ‘muzzled’ under new code of conduct that stresses ‘duty of loyalty’ to the government” *National Post* March 15, 2013. <http://news.nationalpost.com/news/canada/library-and-archives-canada> (accessed January 2, 2017); Letter sent to Caron on behalf of Queens University Librarians & Archivists: [http://post.queensu.ca/~qula/QULA\\_LAC\\_4April2013.pdf](http://post.queensu.ca/~qula/QULA_LAC_4April2013.pdf) April 4, 2013. (accessed May 7, 2013).

<sup>291</sup> “Modernization Project,” Library and Archives Canada, No longer accessible: <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/modernization/012004-2031-e.html> (accessed December 13, 2009).



- Sharing efforts in a stronger preservation community<sup>292</sup>

These three areas of focus for the Modernization Project did not have the support of the community to implement it. As noted in earlier chapters, Caron did not consult the preservation community when putting forth the Modernization Strategy, which was reflected in his lack of detail in the project. Had he consulted the community he would have had a better sense how the unique needs of the library and archival communities across Canada could not be streamlined into his vague macro top-down approach to collections. The infrastructure simply was not there, especially in the wake of Harper's cutbacks.

It is important to note, however, one positive outcome for audiovisual preservation under Caron's term at LAC. Funding was approved for the Nitrate Film and Preservation Facility, which opened in June of 2011. The nitrate collection now housed there consists of 5,575 reels of film and close to six-hundred-thousand photographic negatives.<sup>293</sup>

Guy Berthiaume was appointed the new Head Librarian and Archivist of Canada in 2014, after Caron was forced to resign from his position after his spending scandal (discussed in Chapter Two).<sup>294</sup> Berthiaume is a trained historian and was previously Chair and Chief Executive Officer of Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec. Since taking on the position, he has gone about undoing some of the damage Caron and the Harper Government caused. He has lifted the ban on archivists' and librarians' travel and participation in conferences to talk about the work they do, and has also lifted the moratorium on acquisitions. He has met with staff in order

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Pauline M. Portelance "Library and Archives Canada Marks the Opening of the New Nitrate Film Preservation Facility" Library and Archives Canada, June 21, 2011. <https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/whats-new/013-528-e.html> (accessed November 22, 2011).

<sup>294</sup> Smith, "Library head Daniel Caron resigns as \$170,000 in expenses found."

to understand the challenges they face, and is reconnecting researchers to archival specialists. While Berthiaume understands the importance of digital reference copies for accessibility, his digitization strategy is to not attempt to digitize everything— LAC cannot afford it, and he accepts the impossibility of that task. Rather, LAC will make holdings available by request. He is also interested in people experiencing holdings in a material way: “We used to think our role was to be all digital all of the time but people have a different emotion when they are in touch with the actual documents. We should be aware of that and be involved in exhibitions and conferences at 395 Wellington and elsewhere.”<sup>295</sup> Amidst the rapid digital growth of online collections, Berthiaume has acknowledged the value of engaging with original materials.

In 2015, LAC was approved to build the Gatineau 2 Preservation and Access Facility, which will be located adjacent to the Gatineau Preservation Centre. The facility will preserve and provide access to LAC’s textual records. This facility is part of LAC’s three-year plan, which is focused on a Long-Term Infrastructure Strategy, centred on providing the space and capacity for collections to grow, and be safely preserved. The facility is being designed in a way that will allow LAC to adapt the space based on the needs of future collections.<sup>296</sup> Berthiaume also announced the launch of the Documentary Heritage Communities Program (DHCP) in June of 2015. The \$7.5 million program is aimed at supporting local and regional documentary heritage projects across Canada over the span of 5 years. Organizations such as archives, privately funded libraries, historical societies, genealogical organizations and societies, museums with an archival component, and relevant professional associations, are eligible to apply for funding. The project

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<sup>295</sup> Chris Cobb, “Canada’s chief librarian and archivist reflects on his first six months,” *Ottawa Citizen* November 23, 2014. <http://ottawacitizen.com/entertainment/local-arts/helping-canadians-know-themselves> (accessed August 14, 2015).

<sup>296</sup> “Gatineau 2 Preservation and Access Facility,” Library and Archives Canada, <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/about-us/preservation/Pages/gatineau-2.aspx> (accessed June 6, 2016).

has funded a wide variety of initiatives, including the following audiovisual preservation projects: Iqqaumajuakkuvik Project: Digital Audio Archive of Inuit Oral History (Nunavut Bilingual Education Society), Inuit Film and Video Archives – Archiving Activities (Inuit Broadcasting Corporation), Media Digitization and Description: Heiltsuk Traditional Use Studies Audio, Community Photographs (Heiltsuk Cultural Education Centre), and Reel Heritage 2.0 (Toronto International Film Festival).<sup>297</sup> Many projects funded through the DHCP support the processing or digitization of collections, but many will also help to build upon existing databases, and create new ones. Providing support to small collections projects allows documentary heritage to remain within a community, and demonstrates LAC's investment in sharing financial resources across a collections network, specifically in the way that DHCP recognizes collections that exist outside of traditional libraries and archives.

Specific project-based support, often made through partnerships, is the way many audiovisual collections are being safeguarded, digitized, and made accessible in contemporary Canadian collections. The focus has been primarily on digitization and online access, as the push for accessibility increases in the digital age, while preserving audiovisual works on their original formats often does not take priority. For film, the costs of restoration and striking internegatives, optical tracks and prints is far too costly for local projects. Thus a hierarchy exists again with access trumping preservation by actually standing in for it. It is the reality that collections face as content within collections is being created at such a rapid speed. Many collections are using the DHCP to safeguard and sustain a collection, but also to prepare themselves for the ability to handle rapidly growing collections.

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<sup>297</sup> A complete listing of recipients can be found here: <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/services/documentary-heritage-communities-program/Pages/documentary-heritage-communities-program.aspx>

## **Amateur Film in the Archive**

In the midst of this debate over the state of our film history, is an even more unstable and hidden history of amateur film. Scholars and archivists have been re-examining the place of amateur film in the archive, but also within film history. Amateur films, and specifically home movies, are gaining attention due to their sociological insights into culture and people that are captured in moments of everyday life that would otherwise not be seen. Yet, as noted throughout this study of the Masecar Collection, amateur film continues to be undervalued by archives. When the Modernization Project began to assess the future of LAC's physical and digital collections, the small gauge film initiative was the first to be put on hold. Archivists were asked to put a moratorium on acquiring home movies or amateur footage from the public with little information as to when this restriction would be lifted. Placing value on the amateur within the hierarchy of cultural meaning continues to be a barrier for collections to be safeguarded. As LAC's small-gauge film archivist Caroline Forcier-Holloway described in Chapter Two, the lack of funding to do fieldwork in order to contextualize amateur works has made it difficult to build a 'case' for their cultural and historical value to enter archives. .

Scholars have been struggling to find a methodology in which to understand amateur film outside the context of distribution and exhibition. While archivists and scholars have been able to identify these films as culturally and historically important, there is still a struggle to understand the amateur phenomenon beyond the story of discovery, or the development of an alternative non-commercial artistic practice.. The interest in amateur film is very much a film-based interest, especially as families pull reels of Kodachrome out of basements and attics, and unmarked reels are sold in antique stores. As noted in Chapter One, the interest in marginal film since the 1990s has generated the Orphan Film Symposium in New York City run by Dan Streible, International

Home Movie Day, and The Centre for Home Movies in Baltimore, Maryland—each garnering support for amateur film (a term they use in a wide-reaching and inclusive way). Home Movie Day urges citizens to preserve work on film stating that it is the most stable format for preservation, while The Centre for Home Movies is working towards digital preservation by uploading as many films as they can to the Internet Movie Archive. Each organization highlights the hidden history of amateur cinema, and how closely linked it is to the physical film object and its projection. These initiatives have encouraged DIY private collections, as well as deposit within these university-based facilities, in order to offset the inability of federal archives to include them within their larger collection.

### **The Ecology of Moving Image Collections**

The historical trajectory of moving image collections in Canada follows a variety of cycles. We might consider these cycles as ecosystems in that they constitute a system of ecological networks coming together, and unfortunately falling apart. These cycles have been storm-like in that they build up towards a moment of crisis before action is taken—the storm hits, it pours down, the system feels rejuvenated, committees are organized, inquiries are commissioned. Action is taken, but within the confines of a particular government and project budget. Resources and energy then begin to dwindle under the weight and stress of managing large collections, and initiatives go dark—until the next storm builds, and the cycle begins again.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century many are deeply invested in models of sustainability that involve everyone doing their part to save, reserve, or protect resources. If we think about our audiovisual collections as ecosystems that need to be revived as a cultural resource, then there needs to be infrastructure implemented to sustain them in a way that serves a collection for all parties

involved. This would mean shifting our top-down notion of archival hierarchies based on institutional expertise, and adopting a network model that has echoed throughout the commissioned reports. It means re-examining mandates to put access to collections as the number one priority, and enabling policy makers, archivists, media-makers, researchers, and the general public to activate their roles and resources within the cultural ecosystem. Activating this system requires both professional and amateur skill sets to work together, which are integral to reclaiming knowledge and history. Agency must be felt within the network of the ecosystem in order to keep the environment active, vibrant, and growing. Rick Prelinger, during his talk, “The Future of Memory,” outlined these points as key characteristics of an accessible and thriving moving image collection:

- Treats access as a key part of its mission, not an afterthought
- Reconfigures its workflows to expand access and use
- Limits access to collections only required by law, respect, custom and unavoidable constraint
- Makes materials available before they’re requested
- Measure value by consumptive use
- Seeks out new users
- Brings archives into the community and community into the archives
- See archival activity as a civic function
- Builds transactional spaces
- Avoids being hobbled by the precautionary principle<sup>298</sup>

The Masseur Collection certainly attempted to activate most of Prelinger’s key points: access was a priority, as Lutman, with the help of the Kirklands, Noon, and Egleston, created a workflow to prioritize access. Rather than there being limits to accessibility and copyright, Western Archives welcomed the public to purchase these films for personal use. The films are accessible, though only on DVD. In digitizing this collection, Lutman revived relationships

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<sup>298</sup> Rick Prelinger, “The Future of Memory,” Keynote for TIFF Higher Learning, TIFF Bell Lightbox, Toronto, ON. October 2015.

within the region, bringing the community back to the archives. The inclusion of the Kirklands and the repatriation of these films by the towns themselves have certainly activated the civic function of the films once more. The “Stars of the Town” films have been exhibited again in the region creating a transactional space that animates local history. Most importantly, Lutman was never “hobbled by the precautionary principle” rather, the team he gathered flew in the face of precautionary archival practices in their DIY digitization of the delicate films.

While I agree with the most of the qualities Prelinger lists above, I am cautious around the notion of “Measure value by consumptive use” in that the most accessed collections or fonds within an archive can overshadow the work that is needed elsewhere in regards to overlooked or uncatalogued collections. I would also include on this list Prelinger’s sentiment regarding the idea of archivists as activists dedicating time to bringing attention to the overlooked histories of collections by seeking out and encouraging communities— whether they are civic, cultural or academic— to activate and engage with them in order to bring attention and internal archival support to those collections.

Additionally, this list needs to include, recognize, and take responsibility for the long-overlooked colonial legacies of Canada’s archives. As Crystal Fraser and Zoe Todd note, moving forward, researchers must engage with “a *historically-informed critical decolonial sensibility* in our engagement with the archives.”<sup>299</sup> In their research, Fraser and Todd address the systemic issues that indigenous peoples face when attempting to access fonds that contain information

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<sup>299</sup> Crystal Fraser and Zoe Todd, “Decolonial Sensibilities: Indigenous Research and Engaging with Archives in Contemporary Colonial Canada,” *L’Internationale Online*. February 15, 2016. [http://www.internationaleonline.org/research/decolonising\\_practices/54\\_decolonial\\_sensibilities\\_indigenous\\_research\\_and\\_engaging\\_with\\_archives\\_in\\_contemporary\\_colonial\\_canada](http://www.internationaleonline.org/research/decolonising_practices/54_decolonial_sensibilities_indigenous_research_and_engaging_with_archives_in_contemporary_colonial_canada) (accessed February 16, 2017).

regarding the Indian Residential Schools system. Fraser experienced this first-hand attempting to access records for her dissertation research at LAC, which involved applications being lost, records mysteriously being taken out, and files put under review or hold. She writes, “To access archival materials in Canada is to move across geographic, political, and even linguistic boundaries. It is to contend with the structures and rules that govern each organisation; researchers are forced to grapple with power structures that trickle down from bureaucracies to individuals that hold sway over the materials, facilities, and accessibility.”<sup>300</sup> While archives move collections online and boast about accessibility, it is essential not to lose sight of what continues to be left offline, inaccessible, and gated, and more importantly to whom. Canada’s archives predominantly contain colonial histories of male activity speaking for or in the place of women and people of colour. In order to make space for marginalized histories to be voiced and reclaimed, there is a need for institutional archives to acknowledge their inherent colonial structures, and Nation-building mythologies. We might ask why particular collections are celebrated, while others continue to remain inaccessible? Giving Indigenous and marginalized groups within the Canadian diaspora the ability to access collections written about or on behalf of their communities in order to challenge and re-write those histories is an integral first step.

Another way forward is to disseminate resources in order to create autonomous archives and collections that can be organized in ways that suit the needs of the community rather than continue to exist as a sub-section of a larger colonial archive (often located far from of the community). The aforementioned Iqqaumajuakkuvik Project: Digital Audio Archive of Inuit Oral History funded by the Documentary Heritage Communities Program is one example of reclamation, allowing an audiovisual collection to be created by recording Elder interviews and

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<sup>300</sup> Crystal Fraser and Zoe Todd, “Decolonial Sensibilities.”



digitizing existing oral history. This project will generate new records and give historical agency to community members through a participatory project that does not need to be housed in Ottawa.

While the DHCP initiative is opening up these networks through funding and digitization initiatives, it has yet to lead LAC into a truly decolonial sensibility regarding their holdings and their colonial implications in creating a particular white-settler colonial history of Canada. For example, LAC is primarily accessed by the public for its genealogical holdings. Currently advertised on LAC's homepage is a listing of "Popular Topics" which includes "Researching Your Aboriginal Ancestry at LAC."<sup>301</sup> Clicking on the link, however, does not bring the user to a dedicated search portal or a specific how-to,; instead it redirects you to the "Genealogy & Family History" page, grouping the highlighted topic back into the larger colonial genealogical search. The genealogical database uses registered government documents (birth, marriage and death certificates, census, immigration and citizenship, military, land ownership, and employment records) to trace family histories, reiterating the inherent settler colonial holdings of the archive. While LAC makes a gesture towards inclusivity, there is little trace of meaningful effort.

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<sup>301</sup> It is also worth mentioning here the problematic of who this popular topic is being aimed at and how LAC is creating a specific liberal subject with the desire to retrace their colonial history and where it could possibly intersect with First Nations. Ancestry.ca and their current marketing strategy called "Unlock the family story in your DNA" has come under heavy criticism by Indigenous scholars who are angry in the way in which people are looking to claim and covet indigeneity. Kim Tall Bear stated during a CBC interview, "We construct belonging and citizenship in ways that do not consider these genetic ancestry tests. So it's not just a matter of what you claim, but it's a matter of who claims you." "Sorry, that DNA test does not make you indigenous," The 180 with Jim Brown, November 6, 2016. <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/the180/least-important-election-the-case-to-stop-changing-the-clocks-and-the-problem-of-dna-as-proof-of-culture-1.3834912/sorry-that-dna-test-doesn-t-make-you-indigenous-1.3835210> (accessed February 16, 2017).

As May Chew has highlighted, while colonial institutions are making steps towards inclusivity through funding initiatives, restructuring, and repatriating collections, there is still the need to pause within these projects in order to examine and problematize the way in which Canadian mainstream culture celebrates multiculturalism within their liberal memory institutions. In rectifying acts of racism and cultural erasure, there seems to be little discussion around the “symbolic retooling” of Canada’s libraries, archives, galleries, and museums.<sup>302</sup> In doing so, Chew argues that there is a form of a-political assimilation happening without actually doing the work of decolonization. While digital access to marginalized histories are important, the digital is being adopted as a tool used by memory institutions to distance themselves from their colonial history. Chew argues that moving forward, there needs to be more of a space made to problematize and discuss these shifts in a way that would decentralize the control of the narrative away from these institutions that are still filtering access to these histories.

In order to activate and care for Canada’s audiovisual archives, many of the issues, workflows, and infrastructure of the larger institution in which they are housed in are also going to need to be addressed. Audiovisual archives are being called upon to revive interests in archives as a whole, yet in terms of labour power and internal support, they are still not receiving nearly enough attention in acquisition, processing and cataloguing, storage, preservation, restoration, and long-term media migration strategies. These are just some of the internal technical and labour issues archival staff face, which does not even include the strain put on the outreach services provided to researchers and the public.

### **The Archive & the archives: Archival Rhetoric & Archival Realities**

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<sup>302</sup> May Chew. “Museums, Digital Interfaces, and the Problem of Archival Inclusion.” De/Materializing Bodies: Activist Media Archives Symposium. Ryerson University. November 12, 2016.

Thinking about how archivists, academics, artists, and the public approach the notion of the archive, and what they assume about the nature of its structure and organization, reveals an array of contradictory expectations. In this final section of the chapter, I would like to highlight some of the conflicting notions and assumptions about archives, and more specifically audiovisual archives, in order to bring to light the hidden labour and functions of frontline staff and archivists. By acknowledging and bringing transparency to the issues and systems of memory institutions, archivists, academics, artists, and the general public can begin to align their knowledge bases and research, dispel misconceptions, and activate their roles within the archival ecosystem— thus flattening the hierarchies and integrating silos of knowledge that have been created.

Archival metaphors run rampant in academic scholarship—Derrida’s “archive fever” being a popular entry point—evoking feverish obsession with the archive as a site of memory, repression, and trauma in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>303</sup> The archive is unpacked as a site of anxiety, nostalgia, melancholic loss, and fragmentation. As physical collections or a site of research, the archive is often described as dusty, a site of decay, a burial ground—overlooked and unseen. Academics and artists often discuss materials in the archives with language similar to archeological digs or resource extraction: excavating, mining, digging, and discovering. Yet these terms give agency to the researcher as the “hero” in the archival detective narrative, overlooking the role of the archivist, who has carefully selected and organized archival items—in anticipation of their use—long before the researcher arrives to them. Terry Cook notes,

The ‘archive’ (singular) usually engaged by such scholars as a metaphoric symbol, as a representation of identity, or as the recorded memory production of some person, or group or culture. But there seems little awareness (with rare exceptions) of the history of the

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<sup>303</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 19.

archive, from after that initial creation or inscription to its appearance in the archival reference room or of the internal concepts and processes that animate actual archivists working inside real archives (note plural), or of the distinct body of professional ideas and practice these archivists follow, or of the impact all this has on shaping both the surviving record and historical knowledge.<sup>304</sup>

The hidden work of archivists and archival staff in the acquisition, process of archival selection, cataloguing, organization, and digitization of materials for access, is often misconstrued and overlooked, which is characterized by a poetics and affect in the discourse applied to the researcher's relationship to archival materials. The meta-histories that these archival holdings carry in arriving to the researcher are decontextualized in the sense that the researcher's narrative of excavation begins with their database search or the opening of the archival box.<sup>305</sup>

Film scholar Jacqueline Stewart has also taken up this precarious discourse regarding the ways in which researchers or archivists become the heroes of the archive through the trope of the modernist detective or the colonial explorer-hunter. Stewart is interested in the ways in which we narrativize our archival stories of "discovery" as though these objects or records have been lost: wherein fact they have been carefully placed and organized, waiting to be put to use.<sup>306</sup> During a talk in Toronto in 2010, she recounted the acquisition of films made by an American archive that included filming a restaging of the "discovery." The reenactment used the stylistics of film noir to add drama or interest to the story. The reenactment depicts a car driving down a dimly lit alley towards a deserted looking industrial building. The films are discovered inside the dark warehouse, stored in a heap beneath a sheet of burlap. The reenactment speaks to an internalized story of discovery – of lost and found – that archivists and scholars tell and retell when engaging

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<sup>304</sup> Terry Cook, "The Archive(s) Is A Foreign Country" *Historians, Archivists and the Changing Archival Landscape*, *The Canadian Historical Review* 90, no. 3, (2009): 498.

<sup>305</sup> Cook, "The Archive(s) Is A Foreign Country," 511.

<sup>306</sup> Jacqueline Stewart, "The Politics of Film Preservation," TIF High Learning Keynote, Toronto, ON, October 29, 2010.

with archival research, and more specifically with rarified films. These discourses around the lost or discarded films or the triumphant narrative of discovery involve a type of claiming or coveting of information in the archive. It is a common accusation against archivists, but Stewart argues that researchers are also guilty of creating this relationship to archival materials.<sup>307</sup> It is a curious discourse to consider in a cultural climate of public access – why are we so eager to covet or make claim to film and its ephemera that has been specifically placed there for all – especially now, when the archive is becoming more open to the public?

For film scholars, the archive has become a site for a particular kind of cinephilia in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. Sontag described cinephilia in her timely article *The Death of Cinema* as “quintessentially modern; distinctively accessible; poetic and mysterious and erotic and moral – all at the same time.”<sup>308</sup> As Nathan Carroll notes “[i]n the twentieth century, life often seemed spectacular, as if staged for the camera. Everything in the late twentieth century, including the act of archiving itself seemed potentially archivable.”<sup>309</sup> In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, New Film Historians such as Mary Ann Doane, Miriam Hansen, Philip Rosen, and Tom Gunning unpacked the spectacle of modernity and public life, thereby reconstructing cultural histories in the cinematic, recordable age. Each returned to the indexical cinematic archive in search for what had been previously overlooked in early cinema. George Toles writes, “Cinephilia has always delighted in the serendipitous finding and elaboration of the overlooked moment, the ‘corner of the eye’ detail in film narratives. The film lover pursues the apparently incidental throwaway element in order to discover, on closer inspection born of intuition or feeling, how the

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid. See the talk online at TIFF Higher Learning: <http://www.tiff.net/the-review/jacqueline-stewart-on-the-politics-of-film-preservation/>

<sup>308</sup> Susan Sontag, “The Decay of Cinema,” *New York Times* February 25, 1996.

<sup>309</sup> Nathan Carroll, “Mitchell and Kenyon, Archival Contingency and The Cultural Production of Historical License,” *The Moving Image* 6 no. 2 (2006): 58.

inconsequential is essential—a possible key to the whole design.”<sup>310</sup> Toles’s description of cinephilia also lends itself to the ways in which researchers often approach archives, seeking unturned stones, anticipating a serendipitous discovery previously overlooked. Cinephilia amplifies the anxiety of “lostness” around audiovisual archives due to the impossibility of saving film from inevitable decay. Yet the intense desire remains to seek out the missing indexical pieces within both cinematic and cultural history.

The anxiety around the “Death of Cinema” due to the digital turn in commercial cinema increased the discourse of anxiety and loss articulated around audiovisual collections and reinforced the Derridian notion that archives are founded on disaster or its threat.<sup>311</sup> This threat of loss is amplified for film because of its inherent indexical ability to archive or mummify space and time. Film historians caught up in this supposed “death” of cinema have been turning to the archive as a site to reinvigorate the life and value of film, yet the rhetoric, specifically around “lost” collections, is misconstrued. Fostering this line of thinking and this relationship to archives and their collections, while evocative for a research project, can be detrimental to the realities of archivists and frontline archival staff. Researchers (academic, artistic, or public) will often come to archives anticipating immediate access to holdings. The assumptions and navigability of the search is often fraught with fragmentation, copyright barriers, and dead ends, which lead to frustration when it is assumed that all records are processed, described, and reference copies are accessible. The discourse of lost or found in these instances misconstrues the researcher’s role within the narrative of their search. The frustration, and how that feeds into

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<sup>310</sup> George Toles, “Rescuing Fragments: A New Task for Cinephilia,” *Cinema Journal* 49 no. 2 (2010): 161.

<sup>311</sup> Hal Foster, “The Archival Impulse,” 5.

the dramatics of the lost object, creates a skewed representation of the research process. Carroll writes,

lostness is a sublime chaotic cultural condition that is publicly controlled, rhetorically subdued, and economically disciplined by the discourse of rescue and restoration... Like junk bond traders, we cinephiles often let our imagination over speculate and run riot over these archival gaps, overinvesting lost films with the idea that we may have to rewrite history at large if indeed complete versions were ever brought to light.<sup>312</sup>

Yet scholars who are predominantly doing this research through online database searches of collections often do not turn to archivists who have a relationship to the material to engage in their search. Instead, the narrative of serendipity (of the researcher and cinephile) is a lone journey between the archive (singular) and the archives (plural). It is no surprise then when the researcher “finds” the “lost” object on their own, it is so they can covet it, having initially created its historical importance by creating the lost-found narrative.<sup>313</sup>

The discourse around “lostness” however, is also activated by archivists to discuss audiovisual collections. As highlighted by archivist and scholar Caroline Frick, the “Nitrate Won’t Wait” preservation campaign of the 1980s was fueled by “dramatic tales of nitrate-fueled infernos in laboratories or projection booths [that] livened the trade press, titillated audiences, and affected early archival interest in conserving celluloid.”<sup>314</sup> Frick in her book *Saving Cinema* also revisits the myth of 90% of American cinema being lost (a myth that Canadians are also guilty of in the AV Trust report of 1995) that was adopted for the purposes of the nitrate film preservation campaign. Lawrence Kerr, formerly with the American Film Institute confirms

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<sup>312</sup> Carroll, “Archival Contingency,” 54.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>314</sup> Frick, *Saving Cinema*, 7.

along with Dennis Doros of American Moving Image Archivists that this is not the case.<sup>315</sup>

While films were being destroyed or lost in fires, many other copies of these films existed elsewhere for safekeeping. But the narrative of lost prints helped to bolster preservation campaigns through the myth of disappearance. While some prints are out of circulation and the ability to watch them has now been centralized to a specific space (the cinematheque, museum or archive), it does not mean that they have vanished.<sup>316</sup> Moreover, value through rarefication has been a somewhat precarious discourse in the politics of preservation and would benefit from diligent fact-checking rather than dramatic statements.

The Orphan Film Movement in the 1990s reinvigorated the crisis rhetoric of “Nitrate Won’t Wait” campaign to rally support around marginal film entering into archival collections. In this metaphor, the orphanage represents the archive, and marginal films are the orphans that the movement insists should come under the care of the state. In his keynote at the inaugural Orphan Film Symposium, Gregory Lukow stated that the purpose of evoking the public policy metaphor (Save the Children) or the notion of the orphanage was to recognize the need to save film made outside of the Hollywood realm, including documentary, avant-garde, newsreels, amateur cinema, and home movies:

Despite the positive and productive ‘Save the Children’ connotations of the orphan film, the question remains as to whether or not there are attendant costs to the public archives or to the public interest that emerge in the wake of this new metaphor. It is a double edged sword? ... the ultimate and most powerful impact of the politics of the orphanage has been to reinforce in a new way the historic division of labor between the public and private sector archives. On the one hand, this division of labor provides the challenge and opportunity for vital new public-private partnerships with the archives, this division of labor keeps public sector archives at arms length from dealing with materials they previously might have more proactively sought to preserve –

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 66-67.



materials for which a compelling case can often be made that they should remain and be conserved within cultural institutions.<sup>317</sup>

What Lukow and the Orphan Film Movement are overlooking here when evoking the term orphan and the “Save the Children” metaphor is that it carries with it a colonial white savior narrative that features a broken and fraught child welfare system. Anthropomorphizing marginal film for provocation overlooks the ways in which these narratives of crisis and saving perpetuate the traditional Victorian and colonial desires to covet, map, contain, and catalogue the cultural holdings of a nation-state. It situates orphan film as the innocent and passive victim. Within this metaphor of the orphanage, the top-down organization of a nation’s cultural holdings is filtered through a particular lens of power, ownership, and value. The discourse of crisis and saving implies that with a plan, all things can be fixed and saved, which audiovisual archivists will tell you is the ironic impossibility of the profession.

Prelinger’s notion of ephemeral films, which was how many discussed marginal film before the Orphan Film movement, is more useful in that it addresses the nature of marginal film within its description: “lasting for a very short time.”<sup>318</sup> Ephemerality is the fate of many moving images that were not designed to last such as advertisements, industrial films, newsreels, or found footage. Prelinger’s term allows for a different type of dynamic to be enacted. Yet alarmist rhetoric makes for good headlines, book titles, and conference papers, which all draw support to this overlooked area of cinematic history. This is the double-edged sword of the movement.

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<sup>317</sup> George Lukow, “The Politics of The Orphanage: The Rise and Impact of the ‘Orphan Film’ Metaphor on Contemporary Preservation Practice,” Keynote, Inaugural Orphan Film Symposium, University of South Carolina, September 23, 1999.

<sup>318</sup> Webster Dictionary, “Ephemeral,” Merriam-Webster <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ephemeral> (accessed July 5, 2017).

The interest in marginal film that drives the orphan film movement is an opportunity to shift the discourse—to trouble the archive—and our relationship to the histories that have been granted historical value. It allows us to question why particular types of cinema have been left within private family archives, discarded in estate sales, deaccessioned by public institutions, or forgotten in commercial labs. It is a chance to gather the meta-histories of cinema in opposition to its commercial history, and organize financial support for collections in order for them to remain within the communities that created them—much like the previously mentioned Documentary Heritage Communities Program that Library and Archives Canada has implemented. The partnerships that Lukow hints at between public and private institutions, I believe, are the best ways forward: activating scholars with research grants, and memory institutions with collections with support for acquisition, cataloguing, and ongoing care.

The “Orphanista” movement has great enthusiasm, and continues to do great work, yet is also leading scholars down alarmist roads that distort the perceptions of archives, what they are doing, or what they are not doing enough of—all often without the knowledge or background in audiovisual archiving or the labour conditions of these institutions. As I discuss below, it leads scholars to disseminate misinformation regarding collections, their access, and availability, and more often than not, perpetuating the discourse of “lostness” with dramatics. I have witnessed this firsthand at conferences where papers have been given with an air of indignation around research holdings, collection accessibility, or archival practices—often without much context surrounding the challenges that particular memory institution might be facing—or what resources are indeed available, but were not accessed. The image of primary scholarly research has been perpetuated as a solitary endeavor, often overlooking the collective possibilities in the invaluable resource that archival staff offer. Yet when archivists and collections staffs are

involved in scholarly research, they are often relegated to “the footnotes of history” rather than incorporated into the text.<sup>319</sup>

What I find most troubling about the alarmist discourse around the archive created by scholars is the way it is permeating the social sciences and humanities. For example, Emily Cohen’s article, “The Orphanista Manifesto: Orphan Films and The Politics of Reproduction” published in *American Anthropologist* is infused with dramatic flourishes, and mistaken notions of what archives are and do. She begins the article discussing the “growing apocalyptic movement of film preservationists who identify as ‘orphanistas’” and their love of “old decaying silent film” which “provokes an emotional landscape of urgency.”<sup>320</sup> The tone from the very outset of the article is of alarmist rhetoric, as she takes up Lukow’s notion of the orphanage and embellishes it:

As an orphanage, the film archive is transformed into a place of forgotten abandoned images and texts. Decomposing nitrate reels are near death, buried underneath museums and occasionally resuscitated by the will of collectors and the gaze of spectators.<sup>321</sup>

Cohen sees archives as a “mass burial ground of dying images” rather than institutions that protect, revive and prolong the accessibility for moving images and texts.<sup>322</sup> Archives strive to do the opposite of burying an object— acquisition grants archival items or objects with the cultural value that allows them to be cared for, curated, and studied. Cohen continues to be caught up in Derrida’s *Archive Fever*, in her musings on the Margaret Mead Film and Video Festival, with its tagline “No Film Left Behind – Orphan Cinema.” It is specifically her exposition on the screening of *Decasia* (2002) by Bill Morrison that continues her poetics of decay: “... to admire

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<sup>319</sup> Cook, “Archive as Foreign Country,” 512.

<sup>320</sup> Emily Cohen, “The Orphanista Manifesto: Orphan Films and The Politics of Reproduction,” *American Anthropologist*, New Series 106, no. 4 (2004): 719.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

both the beauty and despair of life's end. A symphony montage of glissando, unstable pitch and staccato, reminiscent of the ticking of a time bomb simultaneously creates sensations of horror and hope, creating a kind of filmic trance."<sup>323</sup> She continues to describe the loss or decay of film in a way that is hopeless, as though archivists and memory institutions are not safeguarding large collections for the future: "For many in the film community, imminent destruction seems to represent the coming of the end of cultural heritage. The archive has been transformed into an orphanage of innocent dying children betrayed by their patriarch."<sup>324</sup> Cinephelia, and the fetishization of nitrate here reveal a Laconic anxiety that Others and reifies film as a fleeting object of desire.

Film, and more specifically nitrate film, is often characterized by scholars as fragile, dusty, unstable, and in the process of decay. What is overlooked because of their relationship to the projected image and not the actual materiality of film, is film's resilience and impressive shelf life. While nitrate is flammable, it is only at risk in volatile temperatures and storage conditions. Yet the mythology that has been created around nitrate and nitrate fires through the calamity of collections being stored in the absolute worst ways, piques the interests of cinephiles and the public much more than the discovery of nitrate films buried in the permafrost of Dawson City— 400 of them still projectable. Archivist Sam Kula, in his article, "Mea Culpa: How I Abused the Nitrate in My Life," apologizes for exploiting the weaknesses of the format and "ignoring its towering strengths as the workhorse of the industry."<sup>325</sup> Nitrate was chosen for film projection because of its toughness, its resilience, and its ability to run through a projector hundreds of times and still produce a beautiful image. Prints, due to their theatrical rotations,

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 723

<sup>324</sup> Ibid., 727

<sup>325</sup> Kula, "How I Abused Nitrate," 198.

needed to be tough to withstand being threaded through a projector, exhibited, wounded and unwounded, and shipped again and again—and by amateurs learning the craft of projection. Kula exclaims,

Every country has its stories of early film exhibitions in an astonishing variety of improbable and unsuitable venues. This may explain why there were fires from time to time, but it also confronts us with a more obvious question: Why weren't there more fires? Many, many more fires? Yes, nitrate is flammable. Anyone who has seen the films of test burns of nitrate would be impressed at how successfully a nitrate film fire resists all efforts to extinguish it... But think of the conditions under which nitrate was projected in those early years. The nitrate film didn't cause fires. The appalling ignorance and incompetence of the "theatre" owners and projectionists were responsible... When you consider the number of film presentations that took place in the first decades of the cinema, almost all by amateurs or by projectionists who were learning on the job, you must realize nitrate must have been able to accommodate a fair degree of mishandling and rough treatment.<sup>326</sup>

Kula addresses the mythology around nitrate head on, exclaiming that it has been archivists (and I would also argue film historians and cinephiles) who have been highlighting the format's weaknesses rather than its strengths: "You cannot raise funds from governments and foundations by reminding them that nitrate was the workhorse of the industry for sixty years, that immense quantities of nitrate films were safely in circulation in every corner of the globe and under the most adverse circumstances..."<sup>327</sup> Kula goes on to apologize for perpetuating the fear around nitrate in his involvement in the "Nitrate Can't Wait" campaign—attempting to scare donors into depositing films, and alarming patrons with the notion that these films (stored safely in the vaults) would combust and destroy entire archives if not cared for and transferred to a more stable format immediately. He ends his article quoting the description of nitrate in *The Oxford*

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 199-200, 200-201.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 202.

*Companion to Film*, which also tows the party line around the stock's combustibility rather than the resiliency of a format that an entire commercial industry was built upon:

“Nitrate film, or more correctly nitrate base, was the standard film stock base for 35mm until 1951... It continued in use for 60 years despite considerable fire risk resulting from the film's tendency to ignite when run at speed through projectors, cameras, or editing equipment.” Amazing, isn't it, that a multi-billion dollar industry based entirely on such an unsuitable and dangerous product was ever built!<sup>328</sup>

The ways in which the “Nitrate Can't Wait” and Orphan Film Movement have sought to garner interest in film preservation has been effective in the short-term. But it mobilizes problematic discourses that overlook film's resilience and the archive's important role in safeguarding audiovisual culture in the long-term. These discourses of anxiety are entrenched in our collective cinematic imaginary and are examples of how alarmist discourses have been disseminated and operate in academic and archival fields.

What is curious, however, is when the intersection of academic, archivist, and artist collide and allow for the nuances of these discourses to be muddied, complicated and explored. Artistically, the ways in which filmmakers and other media artists play, arrange, and reimagine the archive and/or archives allows the discourses of anxiety, memory, and loss, to be given space (sometimes quite literally in the gallery) to explore alternative ways to engage with historical ephemera. Carolyn Faber is an archivist and filmmaker who began considering the ephemeral nature of film when she began collecting regional amateur film and cataloguing it for the WPA Film Library in Orland Park, Illinois.<sup>329</sup> Faber exclaims in an interview, “As a filmmaker, I've always had a difficulty with the idea of the ‘preciousness’ of film... Working as an archivist

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> WPA Film Library, <https://www.wpafilmlibrary.com/> (accessed February 2, 2017). The WPA is a comprehensive stock-footage library.

really made me think about why we have this unbridled, passionate drive to preserve ourselves on film. It made me wonder what it is that we are so afraid of losing?”<sup>330</sup> Faber, during her time working for the stock footage company, was monetizing and bringing cultural value to formerly private or non-commercial amateur films. Yet in her film practice as an experimental filmmaker, she has sought out reels of footage to repurpose in her work. She explains that her conflicting choices are linked to the economics of cultural value and literal monetary value:

After awhile I decided that I couldn't stop being a filmmaker and I wasn't going to change my process to an “archivally safe” one, because I didn't have the money to do that. It also seemed kind of ridiculous to try and achieve some kind of permanence for a film that's particularly about the impossibility of the very idea. So it made more sense to me to just accept the contradictions in my work and see what I might learn from them. It's a constant learning process, one that's encouraged by working in different disciplines.<sup>331</sup>

What is so interesting about Faber as an archivist, filmmaker, and academic is the way in which her practices sit in opposition of one another. The WPA Film Library is a commercial stock footage archive compiled of educational films, the British Pathé Newsreel Collection, along with animation, documentary, features, and amateur films spanning from 1896-2001.<sup>332</sup> Its clientele consists mostly of television and documentary producers. The WPA is in the business of selling the marginal to the commercial. Amateur footage and home movies from the Chicago area were welcomed into the library under an agreement whereby in exchange for the signing away of copyrights, donors received digitized versions of their deposited films.<sup>333</sup> The WPA encouraged these deposits based on the requests for historical footage from the Chicago area by their

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<sup>330</sup> Laura Kissel and Carolyn Faber, “Lost, Found and Remade: An Interview with Archivist and Filmmaker Carolyn Faber,” *Film History* 15, no.2 (2003): 209.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Carolyn Faber, “The WPA Film Library” in *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories*, ed. by Karen L. Ishikawa and Patricia Zimmermann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 191.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

clientele, yet in the end, the footage is often overlooked because of its amateur aesthetics. Faber explains, “One of the most pressing challenges at the WPA Film Library is the constant negotiation between commercial profit-making interests and the need to properly care for the films. These interests create messy intersections when determining the value of the materials to the archive against preservation costs for safe, long-term access.”<sup>334</sup> It also echoes the case of the Masecar Collection taken in to the Western Archives under the condition that they could be digitized cheaply and sold. This overlooks what is required to continue to properly care for the films, but the conditions in the archives are still far better than their fate in Masecar’s home..

Thus, Faber in her film practice overlooks the ethics of copyright and care because of the economic restraints of experimental film, which often favours the ephemerality and tactility of the image rather than our cultural desire to safeguard cinema. As Hal Foster points out, archival art echoes the contradictions of archival practices and “does so in a way that underscores the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private.”<sup>335</sup> In these places of contradiction, something restorative happens, but not necessarily in a literal way. Artists engaged with the archive(s) pull things back from the margins, re-centering overlooked histories, reimagining the past in order to do repair and imagine histories within the gaps while also offering up possible futures.<sup>336</sup> *Decasia* (2002) and *Lyrical Nitrate* (1991) are both seminal pieces that rework archival footage in decay, evoking the passage of time and the anxiety of cultural loss, yet their non-linear modes of storytelling allow the audience to explore the contradictions in the respective pieces in a relational way.

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>335</sup> Foster, “The Archival Impulse,” 5.

<sup>336</sup> Charlie Egleston made an experimental documentary film called *Star of the Town* (2007) from Masecar’s footage. This was commissioned by Western University. Preview: <https://vimeo.com/147901183>



What Emily Cohen's paper on the Orphanista movement highlights are the dangers of holding film too dear and giving into the discourse of preciousness that Faber challenges through her filmic practice. Instead of looking at films like *Decasia* and *Lyrical Nitrate* as sites of loss as Cohen does, one should turn to Kula's notion of nitrate (which could be extended to all film, really) as the resilient material it is. The "workhorse" of the industry, like all workhorses, is long forgotten when it can no longer do its job. It highlights the economics involved in cinema and its end goal to fill theatres, and build audiences. But what makes it into the archive or is appropriated into experimental work, is given a second life, proving again that the chemical composition of film is robust. Images are deeply etched within the physical make-up of the material, but also culturally in the way it continues to resonate with audiences in new contexts or iterations beyond the commercial theatrical setting.

Moving beyond films, artists have also taken up audiovisual archives in very tactile ways through art installations that allow audiences to play and spatially explore the imaginary or utopic notion of the archive.<sup>337</sup> Artist Renée Green's installation *Import/Export Funk Office* (1992), a hip-hop research room, "was an office like space filled with books, cassettes and videotapes, as well as four desks that served as 'funk stations.'"<sup>338</sup> Green, in creating a research room that welcomes participants to browse an archival collection, conflated the accessibility of a library and the arrangement of a private collection to produce an explorative and open notion of archives. In doing so she set up a utopic engagement with archival materials: here materials simply appear independent of those who have selected or arranged them. The ability to simply walk up and engage with the materials overlooks the often-intricate negotiations and retrievals

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<sup>337</sup> For a comprehensive look at this subject see Okwui Enwezor's book *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, 2008.

<sup>338</sup> Merac Yerushalmy, "Performing the Relational Archive," *Photography and Culture* 2, no. 2 (2009): 157.

that needs to happen between researcher and archival staff. While some aspects of accessing archival materials are conflated or erased in the installation, others are highlighted. Green provided participants with white gloves and magnifying glasses to encourage engagement with the materials, which also evokes a specific archival posturing in terms of how to engage. Undertaking half archival research, half detective work, participants are asked to piece a narrative or through-line together— much like what researchers attempt when engaging with archival materials. In doing so, Green sets up the complexities of the archive(s) and shows what cannot be fully understood or accomplished: “not only because of the mass of information present, but also because of the intricate and idiosyncratic relations between the work’s various aspects.”<sup>339</sup> Participants experience the impossibilities of the total archive, total research, or total knowledge, a notion that Okwui Enwezor and Hal Foster highlight as a turning point in the 1990s: the archive was no longer represented as a cohesive entity but as a fragmented or fractured palimpsest.

A closer-to-home example of artists activating audiovisual archives in the context of the archive(s) is Cait McKinney and Hazel Meyer’s installation called *Tape Condition: degraded* (2016), which explored the queer porn tape collection, mostly on VHS, at the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA) in Toronto, Ontario. The exhibition took place on the second floor of the CLGA, which added another layer of archival entry—ascending the staircase to the second floor, one must pass by the rooms in the Victorian house that hold the tapes to which McKinney and Meyer refer. This spatial arrangement renders the presence of the archive as a space of work and labour visible. Coming to the second floor, participants stepped through a hole in the wall—as though the room you entered had been secret or hidden until then. The histories that the artists

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 160.

activated have certainly been overlooked, and porn—specifically queer porn on VHS—are overlooked objects in the archives(s). In their artist statement they wrote,

*Tape Condition: degraded* takes the form of an immersive installation in the archives' gallery space. A working digital transfer station is situated in a kind of pervy, quasi rec-room. In the grant proposals we wrote to fund the show, we promised that the space would “conjure the unique feeling of an activists community archive, warm and somewhat domestic” but what we really mean is that it will look like a space in which one could a) comfortably jerk off or b) digitize something or maybe do both at the same time.<sup>340</sup>

Entering into McKinney and Meyer's exhibit accurately combined this utopic space of rec-room-meets-archival-digitization station, giving it the air of DIY community archives. The room was lined with boxes and files, yet they were mostly facades. Some contained a few copies of *The Body Politic*, but unlike Green's interactive work, *Tape Condition* leaves more gaps. Much of this has to do with the pornographic content of the collection, but also with what is missing from the CLGA archives due to “white gay men's predominance in staffing roles and the influence of a narrowly memorialized AIDS crisis' on building these nascent collections.”<sup>341</sup> The central piece to the installation were the “Dream Tapes” in which eleven artists, activists, and thinkers were asked to reflect and share their fantasies both real and imagined about the future of queer and trans media. Here the installation activated the imaginary archive of tapes lost, tapes wished for, and those forecast to certainly come.

McKinney and Meyer not only engage with the materials they find in the archives, but also take up the complications of digitization and the blatant gaps in the CLGA collection.

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<sup>340</sup> Cait McKinney and Hazel Meyer, “Play Rewind Repeat, ” Artist Statement. *Tape Condition: degraded*. Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives and Push Rub Press. Toronto, ON. June 16-Sept 18, 2016.

<sup>341</sup> McKinney and Meyer, Artist Statement.

Unlike other archival art that engages with materials to imagine futures or construct pasts, these artists engage with the systemic issues of archives in media transition:

Digitization is not a magic-bullet solution to the space and preservation challenges facing community archives. Widescale digitization creates massive amounts of data that needs to be stored securely, managed through metadata assignment (when descriptive text is associated to a file), and migrated as new formats replace old ones (think, for example, of the impending obsolescence of DVDs).<sup>342</sup>

The installation elevated archival art in the way it speaks back to the archive(s), revealed the labour in DIY archiving that the CLGA engages in, and the contradictions the collection faces. It activated the physical site, challenged the collection's gaps, while creating a utopic space for present engagement, and conjuring the fantasies for its future—all the while acknowledging the systemic barriers of the archive and the fate of a predominantly VHS collection caught in the transition of migrating formats.

Moreover, in these instances be it scholars, archivists, or artists who are creating problematic or contradictory representations of archives, it is important to bring transparency to the actual labour that exists in the act of archiving: acquisition, record and metadata creation, storage and retrieval, or digitization and research. The archivist and frontline staff are integral collaborators that allow art and scholarship to activate collections. They need to be acknowledged beyond the footnote in the hierarchy of knowledge and creative efforts. If academics, artists, and the general public continue to see archivists merely as gatekeepers or the “handmaidens” of history, important research and collections will continue to be overlooked, and the cycle of outcry and the discourse of crisis will continue in Canadian audiovisual collections.

What would the integration of these bodies of knowledge look like? Terry Cook suggests that before that question can be approached, scholars need to let go of their notion of history as

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

being fixed. Acknowledging that theories and facts could change allows for authority and objectivity to be closely interrogated when the knowledge bases of archivist and historian meet. Breaking down that hierarchy of who writes history is the first step. This echoes Bordwell's claim in his essay, "Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory," in which he critiques 1970s subject-position theory stating that it is a top down inquiry where "the writer often takes as the central task the proving of a theoretical position by adducing films as examples" thus fulfilling their hypothesis.<sup>343</sup> He traces what he calls Grand Theory, characterized by abstract theories and allegories, back to 19th century intellectual traditions, that he would like to do away with in exchange for what he calls "middle-level research."<sup>344</sup> Middle-level research, which often involves archival research, does away with top-down philosophical theory for more empirical and grounded theoretical research. This type of research could activate the collaboration of archivist-academic, which could allow for philosophical theory to be informed or rooted in empirical research, harnessing the skill sets of each actor in the archival ecosystem.

It is also imperative here to acknowledge the often gendered or feminized labour that occurs in memory institutions: "Just as patriarchy needed women to be subservient, invisible 'handmaidens' to maintain male power, so historians required archivists to be neutral, invisible partners of historical research to maintaining unchallenged the central professional assumptions of historians."<sup>345</sup> Surprisingly, Derrida once wrote that he hopes archivists will not curate holdings but "make their data available in a disinterested and non-directive way without interpretation" as though archivists are not inherently researchers and historians themselves.<sup>346</sup> Cook writes, "the archivist is viewed by historians as a kind of honest broker, or informed tour

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<sup>343</sup> David Bordwell, "Vicissitudes of Grand Theory," 29.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>345</sup> Cook, "Archive As Foreign Country," 506.

<sup>346</sup> Jacques Derrida qtd. in Cook, "Archive As Foreign Country," 512.

guide, between original creators of the record and its later use by researchers” rather than active participants in the construction of social memory.<sup>347</sup> Part of making this shift in discourse is to see the archivist as an active rather than passive participant in the construction of history and social memory.

In order for archivists to be able to meet scholars half way in collaboration there is the difficult task of harnessing resource management. As collections move online, there is more pressure on archivists to devote time to promoting online traffic to popular collections. These online initiatives, which are directed from institutional administration, consume a lot of labour power, and resources, which do not allow archivists and frontline staff to give researchers one on one support. Cook laments:

And might archivists in their present rush to standardization, digitization, and outreach programs stressing numbers of ‘hits’ and clients rather than substance, also be changing into rather general tour guides less suitable for such specialist visitors (as historians) content to lead tourists to the obvious, the well known, the visually appealing, the easy to locate, the popular or politically correct, but less willing, or now, in some cases, less able, to take visitors off the beaten path to the back roads where the real country may be experienced?<sup>348</sup>

The inability to support researchers then perpetuates the vilification of archivists by researchers, who often deem them gatekeepers who stand in the way of important research from happening. Without transparency regarding the pressure put on archivists internally from administration and externally by researchers, these negative impressions will only continue. Recognizing the emotional labour of archivists is an integral element to moving forward in collaboration. The ethical and emotional labour placed on archivists and staff often remains hidden and overlooked as it happens out of sight of the public and researcher. As researchers engage more and more

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<sup>347</sup> Cook, “Archive is a Foreign Country,” 505.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, 503.

with archives through web portals rather than in person, the labour of archivists and archival staff becomes even more invisible.

This feeds the frustration of researchers, especially when attempting to retrieve audiovisual materials that often require work to access. To reiterate the argument in Chapter Three, the myth of the digital has perpetuated the false notion that everything can be or should be digitized for access. The demand for access placed on archivists from their administration and researchers continues regardless of the impossibility of the total archive project. This is not to say that the digitization projects that are happening are not worthwhile. They are in terms of widespread access, yet oftentimes these initiatives are happening within vacuums. The work and collaborations that memory institutions are doing is often overlooked due to poor advertising or dissemination. For example, Library Archives Canada in 2015 created a new hi-resolution scan of *Back to God's Country*—Canada's seminal early melodrama from 1919. While Milestone Films in the US had previously digitized the film in 1999, the new scan that LAC created in-house on their 4K scanner produced a crisper image and richer hues in the tinted and toned scenes of the film. However, there was no press release regarding this new scan and nothing was disseminated in Canadian film history or silent era film circles. Instead, LAC quietly posted this beautiful new scan to YouTube with only the synopsis accompanying it, and its copyright clearance.<sup>349</sup> Nothing else accompanies the images—it is posted silently, without musical accompaniment. The oversight may be minor to LAC, yet early film scholars immediately notice the glaring omission of music, which traditionally accompanied silent films. Paul M. Sarazan and

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<sup>349</sup> *Back to God's Country*, Library and Archives Canada's YouTube Page <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dd-kzSUDgdE> (accessed January 24, 2017).

Jack B. Weil are credited writing the theme song “Back to God’s Country” for the film.<sup>350</sup> This is but one example of how digitization projects that are taking place with archival material are not being given the attention or level of care or expertise they could. While LAC identified the cultural significance in properly digitizing *Back to God’s Country*, and had the archival expertise and technical resources to do so, it lacked the historical context and the visibility to celebrate the efforts made to restore it. Had they collaborated with scholars who held expertise, the launch of the digitization could have been richer and garnered more attention and impact.

## **Conclusion**

Navigating the way forward towards a preservation and access strategy for Canada’s audiovisual holdings will need to be a collaborative effort that flattens hierarchies of knowledge and recognizes the unique contexts, meta-histories, and expertise each participant in the archival ecosystem has to offer. Transparency is key in order to understand the hidden labour and barriers that archivists face internally, and also to recognize how these memory institutions need to dismantle and decolonize their infrastructures and mandates in order to address the barriers externally. Knowledge-sharing will also be key in order to not reinvent the wheel when compiling best practices, sourcing materials, and taking stock of what institutions have already done work to either safeguard or make audiovisual materials accessible. This will be crucial in order to make labour visible and break out of the cyclical loop regarding the preservation and access initiatives that have been implemented over the decades. Understanding the history and different iterations Canadian audiovisual archives have taken will be key to locating collections and mapping who is stewarding which collections, and organizing efforts in ways that speak to

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<sup>350</sup> Silent Era Entry for *Back to God’s Country*. “Back to God’s Country,” Silent Era. <http://www.silentera.com/PSFL/data/B/BackToGodsCountry1919.html> (accessed January 15, 2016).



regional, cultural, and community expertise. In activating scholars, archivists, artists, the public and their respective roles, collections can be supported by technical expertise, cultural context, and historical value to multiple communities. An active network will help archivists and archival staff compile comprehensive fond descriptions, create metadata, and identify the work as something to showcase in order to generate interest for a collection (and quite possibly how it speaks to related and/or overlooked collections also in their holdings). Harnessing the skill sets of each actor in the ecosystem is what will allow it to thrive and grow, and in doing so, the hidden (labour, histories, overlooked materials) will become visible in every sense of the word.

## Conclusion

The Masseur Collection is an example of DIY total archives in action, activating Terry Cook's notion of the community archival paradigm. Its imperfections reveal the weaknesses in the Canadian archival network in that there needs to be more support given to regional, local, and community-based collections in the network that care for unique media formats like film. But the Masseur Collection also highlights the ways archivists, citizens, scholars, and artists can participate within the ecosystem of preservation, dissemination, and access. Archivist John H. Lutman's work dramatized a shift away from "stable hierarchical organizations" of acquisition and digitization toward the use of "fluid horizontal networks," and created a situation where a blurring between citizen-archivist-audiovisual practitioners led to the accessibility of the Masseur Collection.<sup>351</sup> The collection also arrived at the Western Archives at a moment when the archival network was facing political redefinition and financial constraints.

A year after the Masseur Collection was acquired, the Harper Government came into power in Canada, stripping the heritage budget, and negatively effecting funding for libraries and archives nationwide. The large bulk of my research for this dissertation was conducted under that climate of crisis with the aim of using the Masseur Collection as an example of making-do during a time of scarce resources. With the exit of Daniel Caron from LAC in 2014 and the Liberal party coming into power in 2015, the archival climate has significantly shifted. LAC is slowly rolling out a new digitization strategy for its media holdings, focusing on the most at-risk collections first. Indigenous oral histories on obsolete analog audio formats have been

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<sup>351</sup> Cook, "Archival science and postmodernism," 4.

prioritized, along with other analog tape collections.<sup>352</sup> LAC has not yet addressed the digitization strategy for its film holdings specifically exclaiming,

While this strategy addresses the migration of the majority of LAC's audiovisual collection, the migration of motion picture film has been deliberately excluded from this document. Motion picture film is not currently considered at high priority for migration due to the relative stability of film formats, standards and technology. As such, the strategy to migrate the motion picture film portion of LAC's collection will be elaborated in a separate document at a later date.<sup>353</sup>

LAC points to the stability of film as a medium that is not in crisis within the archive. Echoing Kula's essay "Mea Culpa: How I Abused the Nitrate in My Life," film (regardless of its material base) is the "resilient workhorse" of a commercial industry.<sup>354</sup> The standardization of its formats and technologies allow it to be readily accessible and stable in comparison to other audiovisual formats. Audio and videotape take precedent, and under video formats, LAC lists MiniDV—the master format of the Massecar Collection.

Nevertheless, the digitization of LAC's film holdings are now being supported in-house with a 4K film scanner, which allows audiovisual archivists to make high-definition scans of holdings when materials are requested and copyright is cleared. High-resolution archival scans are saved to LTO for LAC's safekeeping during this process. Being able to do this labour in-house makes a significant difference in terms of swift access. The workflow timeline is much faster than having to send elements out of house, which is time-consuming and costly in regards

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<sup>352</sup> LAC, "Building a Canadian National Heritage Digitization Strategy," Library and Archives Canada <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/about-us/Pages/national-heritage-digitization-strategy.aspx> (accessed July 7, 2017).

<sup>353</sup> LAC, "Library and Archives Audiovisual Migration Strategy," Library and Archives Canada <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/about-us/Pages/audiovisual-migration-strategy.aspx> (accessed July 7, 2017).

<sup>354</sup> Kula, "How I Abused Nitrate," 198.

to permission, insurance, and labour. Scanning films in-house and on request provides the basis for a user-based strategy on how film materials are migrated. Thus LAC's film holdings are now accessible in a more timely manner, and are being migrated using digital archival standards that are being developed internally. LAC is also digitizing films and getting them up online, independent of public requests. Over 300-500 films have been scanned, though some remain inaccessible at this time due to restrictions regarding translation into Canada's two official languages, English and French. Nevertheless, this digitization is happening, though it is not entirely accessible by the public just yet. In addition, films from the Dawson City Film Collection have been digitized, which was made possible with the 4K scanner, for Bill Morrison's latest film *Dawson City: Frozen Time* (2017), produced by Paul Gordon, a LAC film preservationist, who oversaw the digitization process. This creative undertaking reactivated the Dawson City Films and the digitization of the films in turn will allow researchers to be able to access the collection more readily. This digitization work will open up valuable and exciting research opportunities in Canadian film studies.

LAC as a whole has also taken initiative in reaching out to the public and making its activities more transparent. In 2015, LAC began publishing the bi-annual magazine *Signatures*, "to make known and interpret the living cultural, civic, and historical record of Canada as reflected in its documentary heritage."<sup>355</sup> Staff members at LAC are the primary producers and contributors of the magazine, which "provides a behind-the-scenes look at our treasures and the technical expertise involved in acquiring, preserving, and supporting access to our shared

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<sup>355</sup> LAC, "Signatures: The Magazine of Library and Archives Canada," Library and Archives Canada <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/about-us/publications/signatures/Pages/signatures.aspx> (accessed July 7, 2017).

history.”<sup>356</sup> Granting the public a “behind-the-scenes” look into the labour of this memory institution allows the work of archivists and staff to be acknowledged and demystified. LAC has also been encouraging the public to tour the Preservation Centre in Gatineau in 2017 to engage with the activities of preservation in person.<sup>357</sup> Tours of Gatineau Centre have been ongoing for years, though this is the first time LAC has advertised it so prominently.

Building upon this behind-the-scenes look and Cook’s community paradigm is the “Transcribe Library and Archives Canada’s Documentary Heritage” online project, in which the public are encouraged to get involved with transcribing and creating metadata around a specific collection. For Canada 150, LAC is asking for support in the transcription and tagging of the diaries of Lady Susan Agnes MacDonald, who was Sir John A. MacDonald’s second wife.<sup>358</sup> It should be noted, however, that LAC’s first transcription project was The Coltman Report, 1818, which was the inquiry into the offences of the British government on the Métis people, specifically looking at The Battle of Seven Oaks.<sup>359</sup> While this current project is fraught with colonial history, the response from the public has been positive; all sixty-four pages of the diary have been transcribed with keyword tagging.<sup>360</sup> Thus, there have been strides to make the labour of archivists visible by inviting the public to participate in the labour of cataloguing through this

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid.

<sup>357</sup> LAC, “Book your tour of the Library and Archives Preservation Centre in Gatineau,” Library and Archives Canada <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/about-us/events/Pages/book-tour-preservation-centre-gatineau.aspx> (accessed July 7, 2017).

<sup>358</sup> LAC, “Transcribe Library and Archives Canada’s Documentary Heritage,” Library and Archives Canada <http://t8.ourdigitalworld.org/en> (accessed July 7, 2017).

<sup>359</sup> LAC, “The Coltman Report 1818 – Inquiry into the offences committed at The Battle of Seven Oaks,” Library and Archives Canada <http://transcribe.bac-lac.gc.ca/en/1/reel/1> (accessed July 7, 2017).

<sup>360</sup> A sample page of transcription and keyword tagging from the diary: <http://t8.ourdigitalworld.org/en/2/reel/5/12> (accessed July 7, 2017).

online portal. Yet the project is still focused on paper holdings, and not audiovisual documents at this time.

These initiatives support the important work of LAC, but not the important work underway at other memory institutions within the total archive network. As noted in Chapter Four, LAC's Documentary Heritage Communities Program (DHCP) does provide funding for projects and initiatives at memory institutions across Canada. The current funding of \$1.5 million annually is promised until 2020, but the possibility of this aid being extended is unknown. While the DHCP provides support for memory institutions, the funding cannot be used to support infrastructure. Thus, while the funding has been important for digitization and access projects, its impact is somewhat limited and short-lived.

As Rick Prelinger suggests, looking to the margins of the traditional archival field reveals the resilient practices of those making-do. For example, the strides that AMIA has made to create an intersectional space for archivists, scholars, curators, collectors, and lab technicians to co-mingle demonstrates the push towards a blended knowledge-sharing network. AMIA's wide range in membership reveals that many of those who are involved in the field of film and media preservation wear many hats at once in a professional or amateur capacity. Many archivists are scholars, artists, curators, and technicians. These channels have the ability to flow in a wide variety of directions given the opportunity and the right sociopolitical conditions.

Local and regional collections need to seek out additional funding through partnerships with public, private, or academic institutions. An example of this is Charles Tepperman's project called [Amateurcinema.org](http://Amateurcinema.org), which is funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). This online database project is bringing together information about amateur films, filmmakers and clubs to help:

- Researchers find out more about amateur movies
- Archivists to identify and contextualize amateur films
- All interested parties to learn more about this alternative world of filmmaking<sup>361</sup>

Through this project, Tepperman has brought together the expertise of small gauge film archivists to help build a searchable database of amateur films located at various archives in North America. The films included in the database are mostly related to the Amateur Cinema League, but it also contains other amateur films that have been deemed of historical importance by film archivists. Archivists included in the project are Karan Sheldon (Northeast Historic Film), Dan Streible (New York University), Dwight Swanson (Centre for Home Movies), and Nancy Watrous (Chicago Film Archives). These archivists have been pivotal in contributing to the Orphan Film Movement, and the rising interest in amateur cinema through their respective institutions that house small gauge film collections. Tepperman's database is currently in the building stages, gathering amateur film metadata from these respective archives, the American National Film Registry, the Media History Digital Library, Archive.org, Library and Archives Canada, and provincial museums and archives. The database does not host moving images, rather, it acts as an information hub bringing together holdings at various memory institutions within the amateur film collection network. Links are provided in the database entry directing users to the home institution collection for film previews. Where applicable, film entries in the database will also provide citations to scholarly works under its list of resources. This feature is extremely helpful to researchers who want to learn more about the film beyond its basic source information and metadata. It is my hope that the Masseur Collection finds a virtual home hosted by Western Archives, and be included on Amateurcinema.org.

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<sup>361</sup> Charles Tepperman, "About Amateur Cinema," Amateurcinema.org <http://amateurcinema.org/index.php/about/> (accessed July 7, 2017).

As for the current status of the Massecar Collection, there appears to be little movement in regards to putting the collection online. When I emailed Barry Arnott, Media Archives Assistant at Western Archives to inquire, I received an automated email stating that he had retired in June 2017. Arnott's retirement marks the exit of the last person at the Western Archives with a personal connection to the collection.<sup>362</sup> When an archivist champions an acquisition they become the keeper of its "archival contextual knowledge," knowing the discreet history of how the collection came to be.<sup>363</sup> This dissertation mapped this institutional and historical knowledge kept by all that were involved in the archival contextual knowledge of the Massecar Collection.

I received a response to my inquiry about the status of the Massecar Collection in July 2017, and while archivists would love to move this collection online for accessibility, the time and labour to do so is currently not a priority for the archives. It is however Western Archives intention to eventually move the collection online, and at that time would entertain collaboration with Amateurcinema.org.

It would be advantageous for the Western Archives to allow the Massecar Collection to not only be available online, but also free to download and remediate with open use rights. The success of the Prelinger Archives on Archive.org has come from the freedom to download and reuse the footage due to the films being under public domain. Prelinger encourages and celebrates the use of these ephemeral films entering into new cinematic contexts. Artists turn to Archive.org and specifically the Prelinger Archives as a source for archival footage to rework into their artistic practices.

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<sup>362</sup> Charlie Egleston left Western University in 2010 to join Fanshawe College's faculty in the Advanced Filmmaking Program. Media Archivist Alan Noon retired from the Western Archives in 2011.

<sup>363</sup> Cook, "Archive(s) Is A Foreign Country," 519.



In terms of remixing the Massecar Collection, Charlie Egleston, who worked on the digitization of the films, was commissioned by Western Archives to create a film about the acquisition of the collection called *Star of the Town* (2007) using footage from the Massecar films and interviews he conducted with archivist John H. Lutman, John and Mary Kirkland, and Marion Massecar. The result was an experimental documentary about Massecar's practice and the impact these small town films had on citizens. Massecar captured a way of life that was in the midst of a post-war transition. Egleston's film highlights the impact of revisiting the past through moving image, and how these films mark the shift from rural small town life into the growth of industry within larger cities in Ontario. Egleston was given special access for this project, but the potential to remediate and weave this footage into other artistic modes of practice through online accessibility would give the collection an active new life. The Prelinger Archives could be a blueprint for archives with audiovisual collections that come under free use. It is Prelinger's celebration of remediation that allows these moving images to have an active life. The Prelinger Archives are archives for the future—anticipating the ways in which our relationship to old media will need to remain tangible and tactile through the ability to rework it.<sup>364</sup>

To close, I would like to gesture back to Prelinger's list of characteristics of an accessible and thriving moving image collection in Chapter Four, as a reminder that principles of access and community engagement should be paramount for archives, inviting transactions with repeat, expert, and novice users as a civic function.<sup>365</sup> Canadian audiovisual collections and the institutions that house them are admittedly unique and face different limitations. Yet adopting these characteristics into mandates could be a way to incorporate the community paradigm into

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<sup>364</sup> Prelinger, "It's Only A Moving Image: Archives, Access and the Social Contract."

<sup>365</sup> Rick Prelinger, "The Future of Memory."

the total archives network. As the Massecar Collection demonstrates, meeting the criteria of Prelinger's list may require a DIY approach. The DIY total archive approach to the Massecar Collection treated access as a key part of this acquisition, yet years later, the collection now feels like an afterthought. Moving the collection online would give Western Archives the chance to reexamine their workflows to expand access and use by a community of researchers and citizens. In turn, it would allow the work done for the acquisition of the collection to be reinvigorated, which provides a civic community function within the towns featured in the collection. Online access to the collection via Western Archives website could then be connected to Amateurarchive.org allowing for a transactional space for research to happen within a larger community of scholars beyond the regional interests in the collection. Linking the collection into a network would allow new users to discover the collection and help keep it active. Thus, the collection needs to move online in order to be reactivated and recognize the work that these outsider citizen archivists did to bring the Massecar Collection into official regional history.

Moving forward, archives as a whole will need to formulate ways for online digital databases to support both online and offline collections by having comprehensive finding aids, and front-end support for researchers. The notion of access needs to move beyond its digital definition to include support for researchers who want to access restricted offline (i.e., analogue) audiovisual collections. Transparent copyright support would help researchers and archivists work towards access solutions, especially around gated collections like the CBC archives. Researchers, in turn, should be entering an agreement with archives to share the resulting curated samples, publications, and other research outcomes they produce while engaging with a collection. This exchange of labour would support more detailed finding aids and metadata tagging that could benefit future researchers. Knowledge-exchange could in turn generate new

users to a collection and create a transactional space of engagement. Thus, the archival ecosystem could be activated by its various contributors, bringing archivists, researchers, artists, and the public into one interactive forum.

Finally, in order to thrive, archives need to be reframed as active communal spaces that individuals contribute to, rather than being seen as passive institutions that simply store national memory. The Massecar Collection is one example of how an archival ecosystem was briefly activated by dismissing the precautionary principle of traditional archives in exchange for access to the histories of over ninety small towns captured in motion.

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