

Hyphenating the Archivist: Cross-Disciplinary Training and Education in Moving Image Archiving

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SUMMARY

With the creation, exhibition, and preservation of moving image materials viewed as separate specialities, filmmakers and film enthusiasts are missing the archival knowledge to care for their own work and collections. As an enthusiast-filmmaker-archivist, I will explore the divide between these spheres and how cross-disciplinary education and training will allow for more comprehensive film archiving.

Introduction

The moving image lives a mechanized lifecycle. This existence is sustained not solely through the modes of creation from pre- to post-production, but also through exhibition and the perpetual act of preservation. The intricate interaction between these segments sustains the moving image as story, experience, history, art, and artifact. This comprehensive system relies not simply on a linear progression to work, but on continually drawing upon itself as a network of shared goals, challenges, and innovations. Archiving, preservation, and restoration can only create a tangible purpose if they are then accessible in the form of exhibition or creative reuse. Correspondingly, creation for the sole purpose of exhibition neglects the longevity of the moving image that preservation provides. Yet the spheres of creation, exhibition, and preservation are often separated at the point of education and training, isolating intrinsically-dependent disciplinaries from each other in a way that constructs a divide within the professional world. Few graduate degree programs exist for moving image archiving, with most universities promoting access to the field via a Master of Library and Information Science degree or a specialization certificate. Similarly, degrees in film do not teach the importance of moving image archival knowledge and practices, whether analog or digital. On a metaphysical level, higher education film programs are increasingly detached from working with physical film or videotape, contributing to a gap in understanding and actualizing the processes of production that shaped moving image history. Those interested in both the art and practice of filmmaking and of archiving are forced to choose between the two or gather skills and training independently of each other. Building a better moving image archivist—one that joins the realms of enthusiast, filmmaker, and archivist—will create professionals equipped to tackle the challenges continually arising within the moving image archiving field.

Rather than discredit the current fruitful collaboration and conversations between those within the production field and those on the archiving side, this approach aims to increase knowledge sharing between specialists and to create stronger bonds between technical spheres by empowering cross-disciplinary individuals. Further, it focuses on cultivating multi-disciplinary professionals that can traverse a job landscape from the smallest, underequipped organizations that could greatly benefit from someone with a broad skillset to the largest institutions that are more inclined to support specialization.

Historical Background of Moving Image Archiving

Considering that film is one of the younger art forms, the history of moving image archiving is especially new. During the studio system, vertical integration meant the mechanisms of production and exhibition were bound together under one entity. Distribution held the place of preservation, which led to early film libraries being designed to support the “commercial exploitation of motion picture products.”¹ Films were only profitable if they were in viewable condition, so maintaining a level of preservation through general handling and care practices had to be stressed by distributors to projectionists. While a manner of preservation for exhibition purposes had existed since nearly the dawn of cinema, the concept of a film archive that aligns with more modern purposes of preservation dates back to the 1930s with the establishment of the National Archives Act and with the scientific studies conducted by the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers, documenting the stability and shelf life of film through advanced aging techniques.² The Museum of Modern Art Film Library’s establishment of the first official film archive in the United States in 1935 laid the foundation of the moving image archiving field

¹ Karen F. Gracy, “The Evolution and Integration of Moving Image Preservation Work into Cultural Heritage Institutions,” *Information & Culture* 48, no. 3 (2013): 371, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43737470>.

² Suzanna Conrad, “Analog, the Sequel: An Analysis of Current Film Archiving Practice and Hesitance to Embrace Digital Preservation,” *Archival Issues* 34, no. 1 (2012): 27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41756160>; Gracy, “The Evolution and Integration of Moving Image Preservation,” 376.

in a manner that helped facilitate the understanding of film as an art and that championed the role of exhibition in spreading that message.³ It wouldn't be until the 1970s, with the rise of academic film libraries and small groups of dedicated film enthusiasts, that preservation would begin to emerge as an indispensable gear in the life cycle of moving images. That decade also saw an increase in literature and industrial films designed to teach librarians who managed film libraries how to properly and routinely care for their material.⁴ Even as video was quickly replacing the need for the technical knowledge of film and projection, video preservation was hardly considered viable, with literature stating that "videotapes are a medium that can and should be enjoyed by library patrons, but this medium should be considered unstable and impermanent, to be enjoyed rather than to be preserved in the public library."⁵ In 1956, two-inch quadruplex videotape debuted, further complicating the field of moving image archiving. Television was designed to be inherently ephemeral with a focus on liveness and authenticity as a marker of an elevated and legitimate art form on par with theater.⁶ While many programs were filmed on 16mm kinescopes, the purpose was for distribution and exhibition, not preservation. Videotape provided the ability to continually record material on the same tape, cutting the costs and time of producing kinescopes. As video became the broadcast standard and found its way into more consumer markets, the focus was on durability rather than stability or longevity, contributing to many of the issues moving image archivists face today.

³ Justin McKinney, "From Ephemera to Art: The Birth of Film Preservation and the Museum of Modern Art Film Library," *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 33, no. 2 (2014): 310-312, <https://doi.org/10.1086/678547>.

⁴ Gracy, "The Evolution and Integration of Moving Image Preservation," 380.

⁵ Susan G. Swartzburg, *Preserving Library Materials: A Manual* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1980), quoted in Gracy, "The Evolution and Integration of Moving Image Preservation," 381.

⁶ Michael Z. Newman, "Video as Television," in *Video Revolutions: On the History of a Medium* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2014), 13.; William Boddy, "Live Television, Program Formats and Critical Hierarchies," in *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 80.

Current Issues in Moving Image Archiving

The field of moving image archiving is plagued by the same issues as the general archival field, such as a lack of funding, storage, time, and staff. However, the most formidable issue facing the field is the digital age. Not only does it compound the existing obstacles, such as storage and management, but it presents completely new challenges to archivists and archival practices. The speed at which digital technology is improving and becoming dominant is requiring archivists to quickly adapt from practices that have been tested and used over a hundred years since the beginning of cinema to a fluid and unpredictable technological landscape marred by rapid obsolescence. This seemingly perpetual transitional era has been often attributed to unsatisfactory preservation capabilities of digital technologies and the lack of solutions for tackling storage or reducing process.⁷ Digital assets do not possess the same “store and ignore” capability that most analog material has due to a precariously misunderstood level of stability and a requirement of routine migration.⁸ While many long-time moving image archivists have a mastery of analog preservation and photochemical restoration practices, many face the daunting learning curve of intricate digital technologies and processes, producing an understandable hesitancy to embrace digital methods.⁹ At this point of transition, there is a greater need for intertwining professionals with expertise that has been shaped by the digital age to recognize the weaknesses in how digital technology is being employed within moving image archives.

Many archivists understand the perceived markers of quality transfers, but this view can be affected by “the training the archivist has received, the equipment available for reformatting,

⁷ Sarah Atkinson, “Digital Film Production Preservation and Access,” in *From Film Practice to Data Process: Production Aesthetics and Representational Practices of a Film Industry in Transition* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 180, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1tqxv49.11>.

⁸ Suzanna Conrad, “Analog, the Sequel,” 34.

⁹ Suzanna Conrad, “Analog, the Sequel,” 31, 37; Giovanna Fossati, “Film Practice in Transition,” in *From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of Film in Transition* (Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 87, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv8bt181.6>.

and the types of uses to which the materials are likely to be put.”¹⁰ As a vital piece of equipment, digital film scanners are increasingly easier to use, providing high resolution and accurate color and light control, but, depending on the model, have glaring restrictions in providing customization of frame rate, codec, and container of the output file. For example, a scanner that only scans films at 24 frames per second produces issues in creating preservation transfers for non-standard, non-commercial film gauges, such as amateur and home movies filmed at 12, 16, or 18 frames per second. An argument may be made that the few frames added or lost during reformatting hold little impact on the integrity of the transfer if solely for access—especially with ephemeral films that can only benefit from digitization—yet one must consider the technical and ethical questions raised by altering the moving image work. Further, in adopting such digital technologies, the moving image archival field creates the opportunity to support dominant players (i.e. studio films), but devalues a myriad of films outside of that realm.¹¹ The everchanging prospect of preserving and restoring born-digital and digitized moving image materials complicates the infrastructure of film archives, stressing “the interplay between film production and archival practice [as] paramount.”¹² While the dutiful archivist recognizes their relationship, a filmmaker is more trained to understand how principle something like frame rate becomes in contextualizing and preserving the modes of production and a creator’s intent. Understanding “the history, context, and materials of the original production” has always been essential for preservationists and restorationists in making informed decisions on how and when to clean up damage and when to compensate for the variations in “color, exposure, and contrast.”¹³ This skill set becomes even more pertinent with the seemingly limitless potential of

¹⁰ Karen F. Gracy, “Ambition and Ambivalence: A Study of Professional Attitudes toward Digital Distribution of Archival Moving Images,” *The American Archivist* 76, no. 2 (2013): 360, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43490359>.

¹¹ Gracy, “Ambition and Ambivalence,” 369.

¹² Fossati, “Film Practice in Transition,” 39.

¹³ Bill Brand, “Artist as Archivist in the Digital Transition,” *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* 12, no. 1 (2012): 94, <https://doi.org/10.5749/movingimage.12.1.0092>.

digital tools to perform repairs and replicate color tinting, toning, and grading. The need to restore versus the urge to restore raises the complexity of ethical questions surrounding authenticity and nature of the original.¹⁴ Overall, the issues posed by the digital age allow the next generation of professionals to apply their curated and multi-disciplinary interests, knowledge, and training.

The Development of Training & Education Programs

Throughout its short history, moving image archiving existed as a field that was fully an on-the-job learning experience, crafted out of necessity to serve within general archival and library institutions. Professionals learned their work through apprenticeships or transferable skills pulled from a filmmaking, exhibition, or laboratory background. Beginning in the mid-1990s, questions were raised on whether the field was a profession and, if so, how the professionalization of moving image archiving could be legitimized. Outlined in the 1990 *Curriculum development for the training of personnel in moving image and recorded sound archives* created by UNESCO, “no university, film or tv school specialise[d] in AV archive operations.”¹⁵ In 1995, Ray Edmondson wrote an article titled, “Is Film Archiving a Profession?,” citing the lack of university-level training courses, accreditation standards, code of ethics, and any method of defining the profession and its principles as the barriers of classifying the career path as a profession.¹⁶ It became clear that moving image archiving needed both the structure of an academic institution and the legitimacy it would provide for those wanting to enter the field. The structure of university-level courses would address moving image archiving as “an ongoing process of activities along a continuum that includes curatorship, laboratory

¹⁴ Brand, “Artist as Archivist in the Digital Transition,” 94.

¹⁵ “Curriculum development for the training of personnel in moving image and recorded sound archives,” UNESCO, 1990, 2, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000086598>.

¹⁶ Ray Edmondson, “Is Film Archiving a Profession?,” *Film History* 7, no. 3 (1995): 247, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3815091>.

preservation, storage management, cataloging, and access.”¹⁷ Early professionals in the field recognized that moving image archiving was a system composed of varied skill sets and processes, and that the way to improve the efficiency of the work was to train the next generation of professionals with that flexibility and knowledge. Providing training and education that would “meet the divergent needs of this profession” would not be an easy task and, in fact, was acknowledged as “one of the biggest challenges in the immediate future.”¹⁸ This challenge has proven to be bigger than previously understood.

Even after thirty years of the development of professional education and training, the field remains relatively small with few programs designed to address the issues inherited from historical production and the influx of new challenges posed by the digital age. Current well-known programs include New York University’s Moving Image Archiving and Preservation Master of Arts (MA), University of Rochester’s L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation MA, UCLA’s MLIS with a Media Archival Studies specialization, and University of Amsterdam’s dual-MA in Media Studies and Preservation and Presentation of the Moving Image.¹⁹ This is not an extensive list but represents most of the viable options for English-speaking students. Related moving image archiving education can often be found within the umbrella of Information Studies, such as the example of UCLA’s program. While the flexibility of MLIS programs offers discoverability for those with a general interest, moving image archiving requires an adaptable and extensive skill set created through combining archival theory and hands-on technical knowledge. This is an aspect that has gotten lost amongst the structure of academia and has led to repeating the cycle of motion picture archiving education

¹⁷ Gregory Lukow, “Beyond ‘On-the-Job’: The Education of Moving Image Archivists: A History in Progress,” *Film History* 12, no. 2 (2000): 146, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3815367>.

¹⁸ Lukow, “Beyond ‘On-the-Job’,” 139.

¹⁹ “Education,” The Association of Moving Image Archivists, accessed February 4, 2024, <https://amianet.org/resources/education/>.

and training possessing a dependency on an apprenticeship, on-the-job structure. As a result of deemphasizing technical skills in academic programs, a job or internship is not a supplementary training experience that allows one to put into practice the skills they learn in the classroom. Rather, it is the first exposure to the specific issues of the field that depend on technical knowledge. What is needed to shift towards more self-determinated pathways is paradoxically an understanding that moving image archiving education benefits from encompassing the general body of moving image disciplinaries and their roles and the specialized skill set each facet contains, whether professionalized or not. Nearsightedness in terms of focus solely on what is gathered through archival or film studies on an academic level presents the danger of shrinking or dividing the field into an intellectualized process versus a creative or technical one. While “the knowledge and research skills of a film historian are essential tools for discovering or assessing the value of a collection,” the argument that those best suited for a career in the film archive are PhD scholars trained as film historians ignores the knowledge and the skills of the filmmaker, artist, or creator in the process of the archive.²⁰ Integrating the role of the creator in moving image archiving education provides the opportunity to instill the archivist with the critical, theoretical, and technical foundations that go into making a film or video.

The connection between the practices of the film industry and the archive has always been integral towards developing workflows that will sustain each field. Learning the changing mechanisms of production is vital in advancing the moving image archiving field at a pace that won’t leave it behind. Scholar Giovanna Fossati lays out the importance of this process:

Archivists need to know the technology used to make films today in order to be able to best preserve and restore these films tomorrow. Being familiar with current changes in film production practices is also necessary for film archivists in order to understand where changes in archival practices originate from and where they might be headed.

²⁰ Haden Guest, “The Archive and Academia,” *Cinema Journal* 49, no. 3 (2010): 106-107, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40800740>.

Understanding the transition in the film medium is, indeed, the very first step for rethinking film museums of the future.²¹

Cross-disciplinary training and education becomes even more vital in the digital age with the unique challenges it poses for archivists whose expertise lies mostly in working with analog material and for filmmakers lacking information on how to store and care for their born-digital works. While the structure of film education and training shares many of the same issues that complicate moving image archiving, the divide between the spheres is evident in the lack of courses teaching archival skills to film production students. On the filmmaking side, students learn the tools of production (which are now mainly digital) but are not instructed on creating longevity or preserving their works beyond an exhibition run. Archiving is considered so far detached from the present that it's difficult to see it as an integral piece in the motion image life cycle. Archival principles are often at odds with processes of how experimental filmmakers make use of degradation and damage to create their works, highlighting the contradictory nature of each facet's training.²² Independent creatives and artists interested in moving image archiving are often dissuaded from pursuing the field because of the barriers of institutionalized knowledge or the formalized nature of academia that tends to minimize their skills as professionals. Combining the education and training of moving image creators and archivists and by giving multidisciplinary professionals a mediated status in problem-solving, the moving image field will benefit from innovative solutions that pull from academic, technical, and creative strategies without having to continuously source specialized knowledge that otherwise might possess obstacles.

²¹ Fossati, "Film Practice in Transition," 45.

²² Laura Kissel and Carolyn Faber, "Lost, Found and Remade: An Interview with Archivist and Filmmaker Carolyn Faber," *Film History* 15, no. 2 (2003): 209, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3815512>.

The Enthusiast-Filmmaker-Archivist

The need for adaptable professionals is not a new concept for the field. Archivists recognize the limits of their knowledge and what is gained through collaboration with other sectors. Achieving a more generative partnership first relies on endeavoring to better “understand the needs, behaviors, and expectations of the filmmaking community,” as both contributors and users of archival collections.²³ Strides have been made in forming bonds across disciplines through the establishment of professional associations, initiatives, and non-profit organizations that aim to incorporate all mechanisms of the moving image field. Groups like the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) stress a diversified community by cultivating a membership body of projectionists, preservationists, collectors, scholars, and hobbyists. The unique goals of their vision support not only professional education, but public knowledge sharing that “fosters cooperation and communication among the individuals and organizations concerned with the acquisition, preservation, description, exhibition, and use of moving image materials.”²⁴ Creating physical spaces that accomplish this are also vital. Archivist and filmmaker Carolyn Faber credits the Orphan Film Symposium as important in leading a crossover and creating meaningful dialogue between archivists, filmmakers, scholars, and laboratory specialists.²⁵ Even so, sustainable models within the moving image community that not only bring together separate disciplines but blend artistic and preservation education and access within and outside of professionalized spheres deserve exposure and support to truly unite the field.

Some institutions are providing tangible opportunities to strengthen the connection between the archivist and the filmmaker. As an understudied demographic of archival users,

²³ Laura Treat and Julie Judkins, “First There Is the Creative Decision, Then There Is the Dollar Decision”: Information-Seeking Behaviors of Filmmakers Using Moving Image Archives,” *The American Archivist* 81, no. 2 (2018): 374, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48617861>.

²⁴ “Overview,” The Association of Moving Image Archivists, accessed February 4, 2024, <https://amianet.org/about/overview/>.

²⁵ Kissel and Faber, “Lost, Found and Remade,” 211.

filmmakers have “remained largely unheard in conversations concerning access, discovery, and use.”²⁶ The UCLA Film and Television Archive’s inaugural artist-in-residence program will provide the unique opportunity for an artist to receive “the time and support necessary to access and work with the Archive’s unique resources, as well as reach new audiences and make new connections with Los Angeles’ cultural community.”²⁷ Other organizations are aiming to build systems of knowledge, education, and training that appeal to and promote multi-disciplinary and emerging moving image contributors. The Share That Knowledge Initiative between the Austrian Film Museum and the Slovenian Cinematheque aims to create strategies for knowledge transference within archival institutions. The initiative focuses on how the tacit or intangible knowledge that an archivist has is not easily recordable or expressed and how “[w]ithin many archives there is a lack of continuity within knowledge transfer across generations, as it is not acknowledged and undertaken in a methodical manner.”²⁸ Their research highlights the importance of cross-disciplinary education and training in alleviating boundaries of knowledge sharing. Bay Area Video Coalition (BAVC) is a nonprofit coalition that began in 1976 as a group dedicated to “encourag[ing] independent video-making in the Bay Area.” In 1994, they created a Preservation Department in partnership with the Getty Research Center.²⁹ Today, BAVC provides workshops on video production and editing, fellowships for independent media makers, and digitization and reformatting of video and audiotape for artists and cultural institutions around the world. BAVC advocates for and supports artists while also understanding the need to incorporate preservation into that system. Another example of combining the modes of creation, exhibition, and preservation is newly founded non-profit organization Teach Archive Preserve

²⁶ Treat and Judkins, “First There Is the Creative Decision,” 388.

²⁷ “Apply: 2024 Artist-in-Residence Program,” Archive Blog, UCLA Film & Television Archive, published December 4, 2023, <https://cinema.ucla.edu/blogs/archive-blog/2023/12/04/artist-in-residence-program>.

²⁸ “About,” Share That Knowledge, accessed April 4, 2024, <https://sharethatknowledge.com/about/>.

²⁹ “About BAVC Media,” Bay Area Video Coalition, accessed March 14, 2024, <https://bavc.org/preservation-fellow/>.

Exhibit (T.A.P.E.). Based in Los Angeles out of Whammy! Analog Media, T.A.P.E. is “dedicated to facilitating support for analog media through free digitizing, education, hands-on training, equipment rentals, and volunteer opportunities.”³⁰ They hope to collaborate with larger institutions like the UCLA Film and Television Archive to program tape-based media and screen video art that is otherwise inaccessible. Furthering the development of organizations such as these will increase accessibility to equipment and education outside of institutional barriers and will expand the visibility and understanding of archival work’s place within the moving image network.

Ultimately, we should be striving to not only create better archivists, but better archives by tapping into unconventional pathways. Often excluded from discussions within the structure of the moving image field due to a non-professionalized connotation, the role of the fan or enthusiast is a vital aspect of moving image creation and preservation. The enthusiast, in their own right, is a scholar of sorts, just as the professional archivist needs to be a scholar to best understand and care for the material they steward. The term “enthusiast” gives space for the knowledge of the amateur archivist—those without a formalized degree or training—to contribute to the functionality of moving image archiving. The enthusiasts, as fans and collectors, are often “the most vital archivists of media that are more valued by audiences than by institutions,” using their passion to contribute to building alternative archival collections that have the power to unlock “historical treasures.”³¹ Their contributions highlight the importance of archival work on not just a cultural or historical level, but a personal one as well. Enthusiast archivists are infusing the field with unique perspectives, are often “unafraid to look to the periphery for new ideas,”

³⁰ “Home Page,” TAPE, accessed April 10, 2023, <https://tapeanalog.org/>

³¹ Elana Levine, “Alternate Archives in US Daytime TV Soap Opera Historiography,” *JCMS: Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 60, no. 4 (2021): 179, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cj.2021.0051>.

and are “adept at identifying poorly examined areas of moving image history and culture.”³² The investment with the histories recorded and told by moving images is often the entry point for many who go on to pursue the field within an institutional setting. Nevertheless, without the passion or personal investment, the archival field—professional or nonprofessional—lacks a core of purpose. The enthusiast represents the moment of convergence for developing the hyphenated, multi-disciplinary archivist that has the ability to traverse changing landscapes and create new pathways towards comprehensive moving image archiving.

Conclusion

As a young art form and field, moving image creation and archiving has developed in a short amount of time and has had to adapt to a rapidly changing landscape with complicated questions to address. The professionalization of the moving image archiving field has created a legitimized and viable career, but work is required to continually improve the structure to prepare the next generation of archivists to be able to meet the needs of the field. The digital age has consistently necessitated ongoing conversations and collaboration between the mechanisms that sustain the moving image. While intrinsically co-dependent, a widening gap exists in understanding the process and needs of both the production and preservation worlds. Reducing this requires individuals equipped to apply technical and creative skills to advance knowledge surrounding analog and digital materials. Additionally, these professionals will be able to mediate differences between discipline perspectives and foster more collaborative, generative practices and spaces. Moving image archival education and training should be geared towards developing multi-disciplinary learning within the classroom, on the job, and in

³² Rick Prelinger, “Archives and Access in the 21st Century,” *Cinema Journal* 46, no. 3 (2007): 117-118, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30130532>.

non-professionalized spaces. Organizations and initiatives creating a place to accomplish these goals are taking the first step in making a more united field where filmmakers are learning to care for their work and archivists are better informed on the technology and creative approaches used to create works. Emerging and amateur archivists also hold a place as essential contributors in advancing archival work and recognizing their contributions provides new approaches to assessing collections. Encouraging more Enthusiast-Filmmaker-Archivists will forge new opportunities across the field to form more archivally-conscious creators and to reimagine moving image archival work to effectively support the needs of our communities and cultural heritage. Our mechanized moving image network aims to benefit from the innovations and knowledge of a shared space and multifaceted community.

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