

Community Archiving Workshop

Texts

Documentation Coordination: Leonard Cortana

"OK, so there is two sets of stickers with numbers. You have to make sure you put one on top of the box and the same number sticker inside the tape. You need to look at the tapes and try to organise them in a coherent order." Archiving is a very meticulous process that requires making decisions and sometimes trusting your instinct. When they say you have to try to organise the tapes in a coherent order, what does it mean exactly? My coherent order may not be the same as your coherent order but the tapes need to be placed - in time or in a box? Right now they are like orphaned children. "What does it take to archive a collection?" someone asks. Time. Time is all you need. Time to place things in time. But there there is not enough time to take care of the past. Not enough hands to protect history from contamination, crystalline formation, edge damage, stepped pack - even simple things as uneven pressure on tape can destroy it. A big object with a delicate soul. But once you get your head around it, the process is very simple. Cuba 1970s, Vietnam, Cambodia - all of this material is relevant today. A time capsule covered in dust and stored in a cardboard box. When is the last time you held one of these in your hands? Click, click, click, check if it is rewind. None of them are. Pull the red tab of the tape off. That means it can't be recorded over. But the red tab gives a false sense of security and it definitely doesn't give our object immortality.

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Sara Debevec (Serbia)
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DCTV Video-tape Archive and Collective Memories

Archives contain the traces of people's experiences. To know the experiences of people from the past, one can find in the archives their voices, their memories. As collective memories are the representation of the past, archives help the people to make these representations. In the 19th century, historians believed that the truth of the past was located only in the official archives (i.e. State archives, Church and Monarchy documents), but as French historian Marc Bloch said: "Every trace of the human activity is a testimony of the History." That statement makes us think about the places where we can find the traces of the collective memory, and who can produce the representations of the present and the past.

During the second-half of the 20th century, mass media – especially TV – became a main producer of the representations of people's experiences. Contents from mainstream US TV channels were the most known and broadcasted in Latin America in the last decades of the past

century. But as I learned in the Community Archive Workshop at DCTV, there were other expressions of the people's experiences captured in videotapes. Those moving images show not only the everyday life of the subaltern, but the interests and backgrounds of the filmmaker as well. I learned that in the 70's and 80's, some independent filmmakers from New York had a deep interest in Latin American expressions of political resistance, like El Salvador and Nicaragua guerrillas, but they were interested in everyday life people of the minority communities in NY, too. So they recorded a lot of hours of those subaltern experiences to share it in their own communities.

As an historian and as a teacher of the History of the Americas (to undergraduate history students), I found that DCTV videotape archive is a treasure for the reconstruction of the memories of the subaltern that new generations, not only historians, should know. I really can imagine my students researching the DCTV videotape archives. Who were the filmmakers that interviewed the Salvadoran guerrillas in the 80's? What did he or she feel when meeting for the first time the guerrilla peasants? How did this social and cultural contact with the 'Other' change the understanding of the world for these filmmakers? These are only a few questions that I have asked myself since I participated in the DCTV Community Archiving Workshop, and would like to make a research project to answer them. Or maybe one of my students would be able to do it in the future...I hope.

Aymara Flores Moriano (Mexico)
PhD Candidate, Cinvestav, Mexico

The DCTV preservation workshop was for me a fresh look at interesting preservation practice and a good experience as a novice to archiving. For me, the day passed all too quickly. I have the feeling that I had been expecting to get the work done much quicker, while in reality it was such a thorough task that it was in fact quite time consuming. This was not a drawback for the day since it was spent in good company. The communal feeling of the work created in my opinion a great atmosphere. There was a feeling of cooperation and shared goal while the mood remained light and friendly. Pausing to grab coffee and donuts, chat, and get to know the people participating was a part of this, but so was the very nature of the task we were faced with. Working on the spreadsheets was done in teams and coordinating our methods was both important and enlightening. This also brought my attention to how important it is to be thorough, detailed and coordinated in such a project. Having discrepancies in the work was not an option and in the end this proved both a challenging lesson and a very informative one. What I most enjoyed however may have been the very physical nature of the work; handling and examining, touching and getting the tips of my fingers slightly dirty. In a way I felt connected to what I was looking at and cared about what I was taking care of. All in all, the workshop was a great experience for me.

Sigríður Regína Sigurþórsdóttir (Iceland) / NYU - Cinema Studies Graduate Student

The workshop was well coordinated and designed to accommodate the skillset of the people there (whether it was paper/print, analog media, or born digital content). The cataloging protocol was simple but built to extract the most information possible about the materials without being able to play them back. I am happy I came out and gained good experience about archiving at its most basic level. What struck me about the people assembled was the diversity of the backgrounds they came from. For me, the future of the archive depends on the outside

perspectives that people from various backgrounds can bring, whether it be from arts, the sciences, or the humanities.

Jacob Zoborowski (USA) / NYU-MIAP Graduate student

The workshop was great fun. I learned how to better organize metadata in a spreadsheet and how important controlled vocabulary is for organizational purposes. The tasks we performed when collecting metadata are crucial to the cataloging process. First hand experience like this is crucial for an archiving student and even people curious about the archiving field in general. The working environment was warm and welcoming. The footage we were cataloging seemed very interesting just from what we were reading off the tape boxes. The students and faculty running the workshop were very open and willing to answer any question we had. I'd do it again in a heartbeat.

Robert L Anen (USA) / NYU-MIAP Graduate Student