IT'S ONLY A MOVING IMAGE
Archives, Access and the Social Contract

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DLF Forum, Philadelphia, November 5, 2007

When I started working with moving images in the early 1980s, archival work felt rarefied, cut off from the world. Archives were not well known and seemed to inhabit a plane quite outside most peoples' experience. Most repositories had a low public profile, and it wasn't easy to access their holdings. When I told people what I did for a living, I felt more humored than respected. This has changed.

Archives are moving
# from the cultural fringes to the center

Today, archival materials permeate the culture, and old and new images and sounds intermix in our media and in our minds. History has moved into the mainstream. More people use archives and special collections, they are more diverse, and most important of all, they're making many more derivative works from archival materials. Though it's tempting to say "The Net made all this possible," it also stems from a redefinition of how people think about history. At the same time, what WE THINK constitutes an archive is being displaced by vernacular definitions of what archives are (I'm thinking YouTube). We will return to this.

Rethinking workflows, processing and access

This area has been a hotbed of change in the past several years. Archives and special collections felt both internal and external pressure to quickly expand access to records, to revisit access restrictions, to leapfrog limitations imposed by scarcity of resources, and to become more technologically adept.
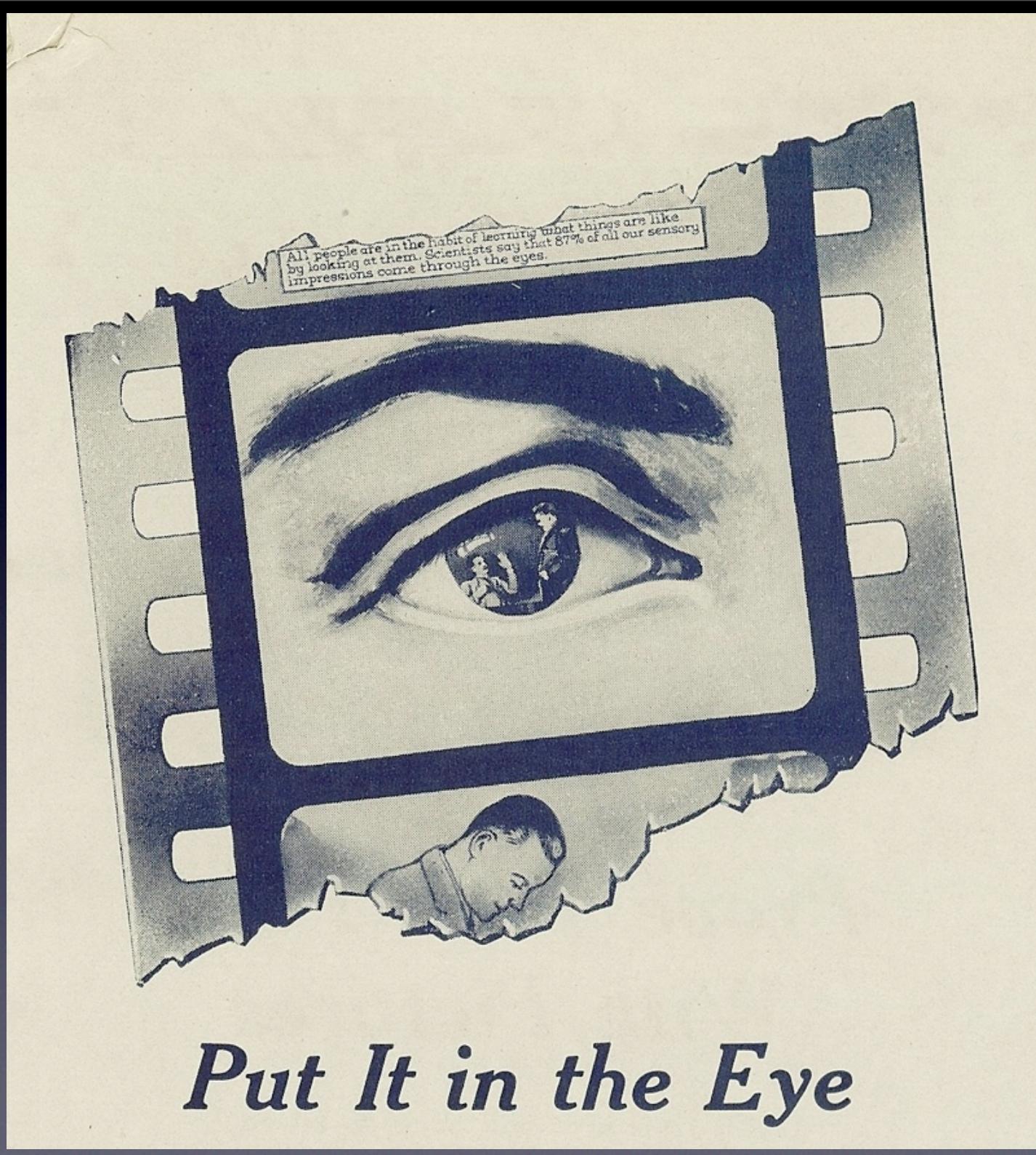
You know better than I do how people are rethinking workflows, scaling processing and description to the characteristics and behavior of collections, and digitizing and exposing materials online. Some of this involves a more intimate embrace of technology. And some — I'm not sure whether it's enough — involves rethinking access.

But the access door seems to get stickier as the media get richer. While moving image collections are growing at an unimaginably rapid rate (though not quite as fast as the moving images that no one's collecting), and commercial online video services are popping up like mushrooms in Mendocino county, access to archival moving images generally remains difficult.

Why is this an important issue? First, there's been immense growth in moving image collections, and all of us are going to have to deal with an accelerating rate of audiovisual acquisition. Second, moving images present the issues and contradictions of preservation and access in their most acute form. So if we can solve the persistent problems of A-V media, it will be a real win for all of us.

All people are in the habit of learning what things are like by looking at them. Scientists say that 87% of all our sensory impressions come through the eyes.

Put It in the Eye

How can we begin to collect and expose moving image materials without doing the history of moving image archiving all over again? And how can we take up the challenges these materials pose — which will face most of us if they haven't already — and embrace them, as a way to move towards closer and more productive relationships with our users?

So I'm going to talk for a bit about the mysteries of what I call "moving image exceptionalism," using the idea as a vehicle to try to understand why moving images persist as an island of inaccessibility.

And then I'd like to try to use the example of moving images as a shortcut to exploring some access issues and talking about some possible futures.

A BIT OF (FILM) HISTORY

First —

Almost from the beginning of cinema, pioneers proposed establishing moving image archives. But film posed special storage problems and their proposals were often seen as extreme. It would take until the 1930s for the will to save endangered motion pictures to coalesce into an organizational effort. Pioneer archivists at MoMA, BFI, Cinematheque Francaise organized in 1935. The Library of Congress started selecting films from copyright deposits for retention in their permanent collections in 1942. Over many years, the National Archives received films from many Federal agencies, notably Agriculture and the military.
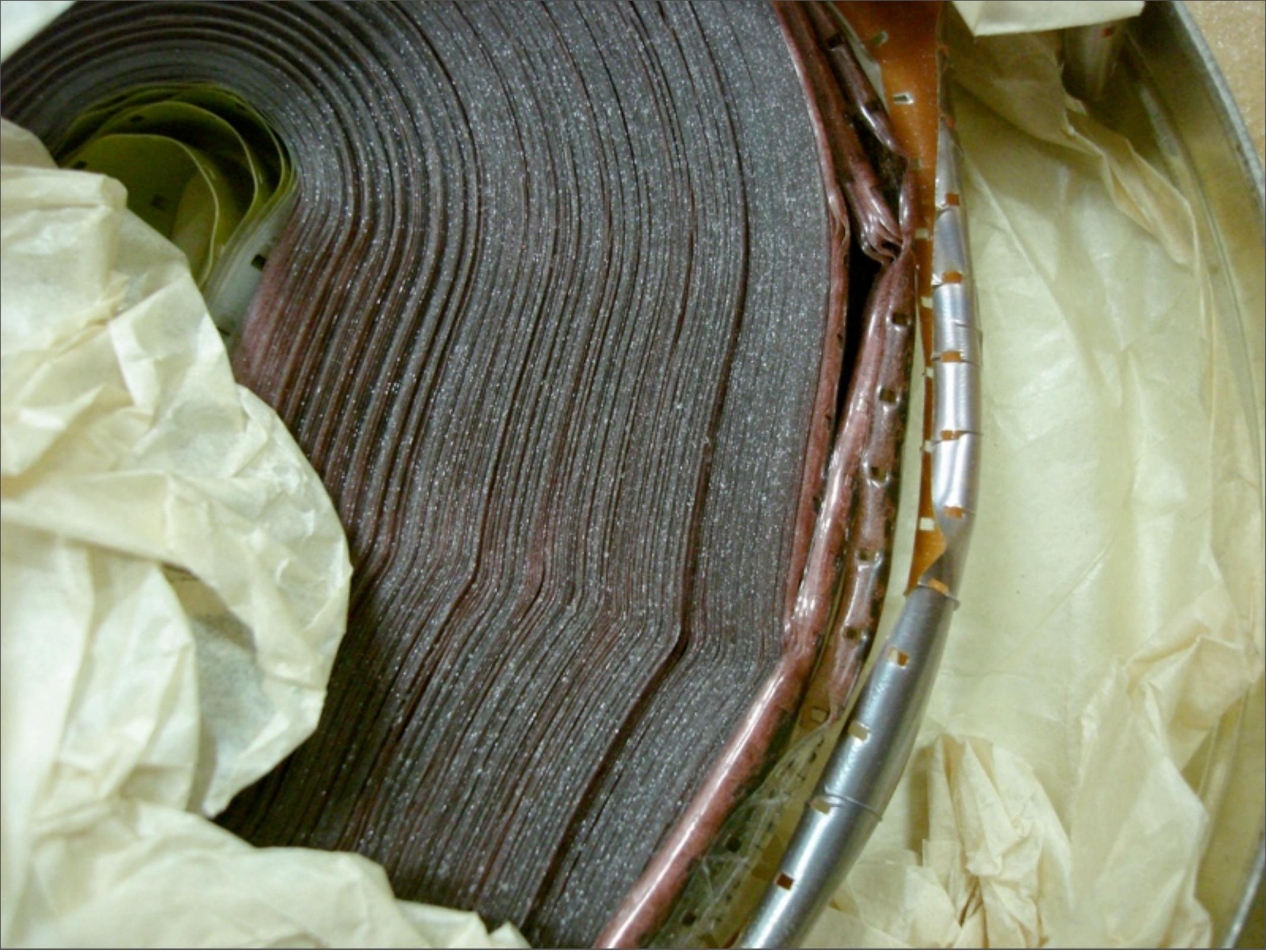
Early film archives took on a complex basket of burdens. They were growing up in a culture that hadn't yet accepted them. This meant that many acquisitions were sourced under unconventional circumstances and archives felt vulnerable to exposure and sanctions. Political censorship and ideological cleansing, copyright issues and the conspiratorial psychology of private film collectors all made their work risky. Holdings, catalogs and metadata were often considered privileged information. This situation continues to characterize many archives, especially those located where free expression may be problematic.

MoMA, the BFI, the Cinematheque Francaise and the Reichfilmarchiv together founded FIAF (Intl Federation of Film Archives) in 1938. This codified a tradition of international cooperation, supplying one another with elements on films that were to be preserved, lending prints for internal screenings, and assisting one another to safeguard material that was too hot to handle openly. This continued even during World War II, when archivists from belligerent countries cooperated to hide sensitive materials or save them from destruction.
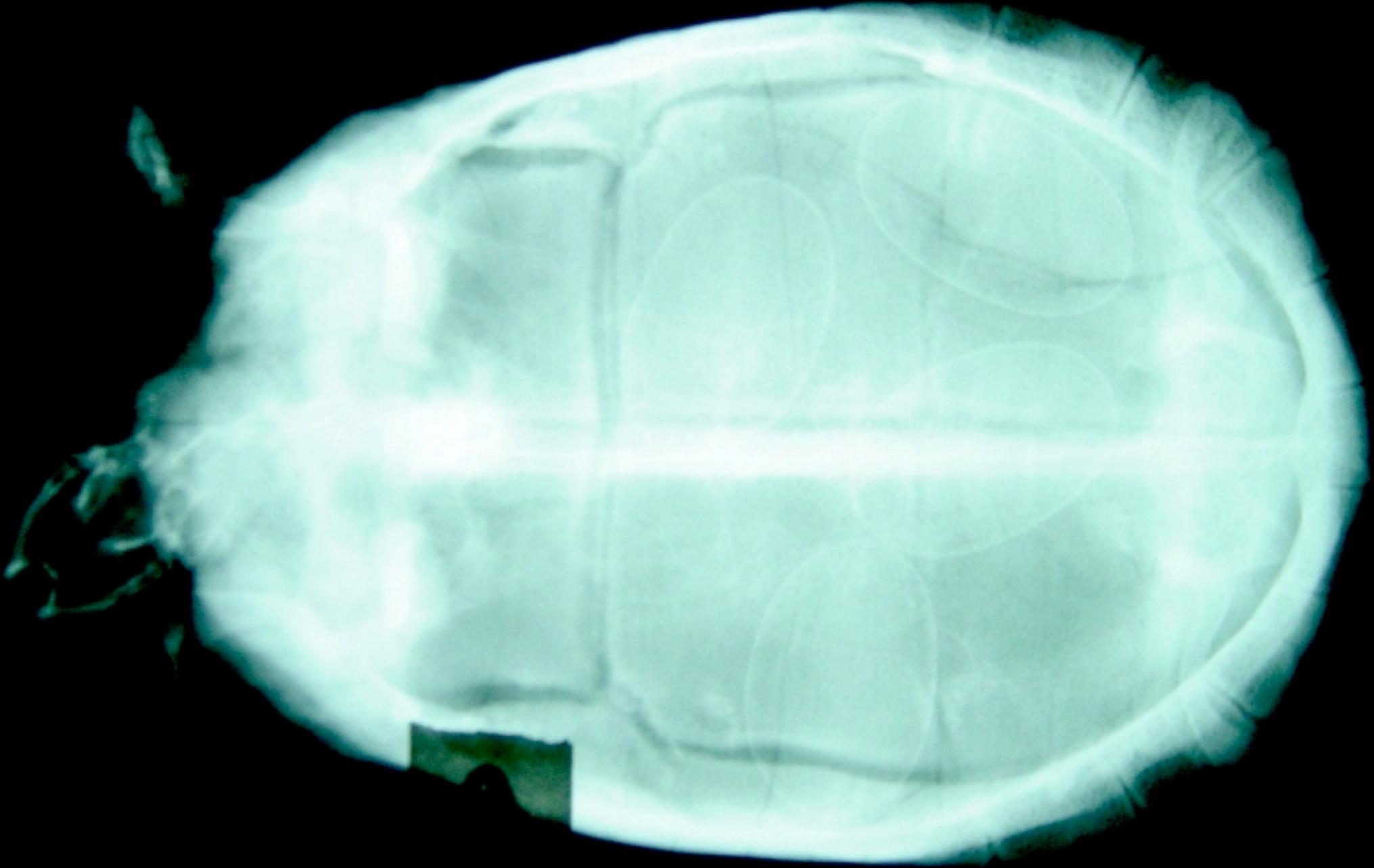
We must sometimes applaud guardianship at the same time we criticize its persistence. This might be one way to think about the legacy culture of film archives whose model remained dominant until very recently. The earliest film archivists were cinephiles who dared to collect physically endangered works or films of uncertain provenance, ignored cultural disdain for the populist medium, courted severe punishment for saving and hiding politically discredited films, flouted copyright laws whose interpretation was even more Draconian then as now, and, last but not least, risked nitrate fires. They loved cinema and achieved much despite their cautious culture and the limitations placed on their activities.

In such a problematic context, collecting took priority over preservation and preservation over access. Access was reserved for trusted parties under controlled conditions. Aside from loans to other FIAF members or carefully-controlled theatrical screenings, access was granted only to qualified parties, always in house, restricted to materials printed from preservation intermediates, and limited by countless conditions. There were reasons for all of these limitations, no matter how anachronistic they may seem to newcomers in the field, and that is why many of the old rules continue to survive.

Pregnant turtle radiograph: Megan Shaw Prelinger

In the past 25 years, hundreds of new moving image repositories have come into being. The field is much more pluralistic, and collections are incredibly diverse. Archival training programs are pumping out graduates. The Association of Moving Image Archivists has over 700 members. The NFPF has preserved 1100 orphaned films. But there are many missing pieces. We lack a sense of where we fit into the culture and the economy. Our missions and goals are atomized rather than aggregated. We are very slowly making peace with technology, but more often it just threatens us. We are taking only halting steps towards opening up our collections for access. And we are terribly underfunded. I'm guessing you could run a hundred film archives for what it takes to run a moderate-sized research library. A cynic might say that we're ripe for predation.

YOUR INDUSTRIAL sales movie may become an "orphan" unless you find the answers to some basic marketing first. You must know about market research, distribution, promotion. (*Industrial Marketing*, Oct. 1950)

So, a parenthesis. Over a hundred years of film, perhaps 600,000 US productions. We produced on a mass level, but we collected as an artisanal practice. Easily 1/3 to 1/2 of films were irretrievably lost. What survived was often due to oversights or lucky accidents. And we started very late. Even now LC is scrambling to collect a critical mass of industrial, advertising and educational films. Almost everyone agreed that films were inherently ephemeral and should stay that way — that films were lower-level cultural documents. This is now done and gone, but we're treating TV and online video the same way. When one points this out, we throw our hands up and say, "There's too much! What else can we do?" With few exceptions, we still approach mass media one show at a time. On a positive note, archives are starting to collect Web pages while they're young and fresh.

Canonical moving image archives users

- other accredited archives
- copyright owners & distributors
- approved exhibition venues (museums, cinematheques, some rep theaters)
- cinema studies scholars & their kin
- film/video producers & researchers (often kept at arm's length)

Here are the classical users of moving image archives.

Past and present, each one of these groups might be described as wholesale users: they're typically intermediaries that produce or distribute works that will then find their way to specific groups of the public. Wholesale rather than retail. The public itself isn't welcome, and for a number of very good reasons usually can't be made terribly welcome, on the premises of most moving image archives.

But even today, some moving image archivists would arch their eyebrows in surprise if you dared to suggest that this list might be incomplete.

"wholesale"
to
"retail"

The list is, in fact, outdated. The big development is that recent years archives have gone retail. Their erstwhile patrons have been augmented by members of the public, independent scholars and citizen scientists, an aggressive army of commercial clients, a growing cadre of "archival fans," and of course genealogists (arguably the largest group of textual archives users). This won't be a surprise to many of you.

When and how did this happen?

Until a few years ago, archival access was a downstream process. People consumed derivative works —programs, books, exhibits using archival material — made by the "wholesale" users I just mentioned, who were usually based in production companies or institutions. But now individuals are starting to make their own archivally-based works, which stretch across the continuum from sublime to trivial. Millions also engage in some form of "self-archiving" of their own work using a variety of friendly web services. And of course they upload not just their own work.

entitlement

In fact, as many archivists know, people are beginning to feel quite a sense of entitlement relative to archival collections. They sometimes make demands that are difficult to address. On the positive side, we've ourselves discovered that people develop passionate interest in unedited archival footage; they don't lament the absence of editing, narration and background music, they want to see the original document! And many people remix, reedit and recontextualize the collections. Since we gave almost 2,000 of our own films to the Internet Archive for unrestricted access and reuse, we've seen around 8 million downloads in 7 years, and I'll make a wild estimate that over ten thousand derivative works have been made from them.

Prelinger Archives
Indie / Experimental

Brazil

Profile Views: 708

View My: Pics | Videos

Last Login: 7/3/2007

Slide
Prelinger Archives
playing

00:37

Total Plays: 408 | Downloads Today: 0 | Plays Today: 0

NO PHOTO

Slide   Plays: 219
Download | Rate | Comments | Lyrics | Add

Cornish   Plays: 141
Download | Rate | Comments | Lyrics | Add

New Life   Plays: 48
Download | Rate | Comments | Lyrics | Add

www.slagrecords.com   myspace.com a place for friends   STANDALONE PLAYER

Contacting Prelinger Archives

Send Message   Forward to Friend
Add to Friends   Add to Favorites
Instant Message   Block User
Add to Group   Rank User

MySpace URL:
http://www.myspace.com/prelingerarchives

Prelinger Archives: General Info

Member Since	11/9/2005
Band Website	slagrecords.com
Band Members	Everybody
Influences	The Pastels, Cluster, Moog Music, Early Eletronics, Neil Young Trans Era...
Record Label	Slag Records
Type of Label	Indie

Prelinger Archives's Latest Blog Entry [**Subscribe to this Blog**]

Concert Last Week (**view more**)

[**View All Blog Entries**]

About Prelinger Archives

Loose collective based around things like Slag Records, Open Field Church, juice and São Paulo's west end.

Prelinger Archives's Friend Space

Prelinger Archives has 45 friends.

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There's even an archival fan community that lives on the net. A kind of "archives cult" has sprouted and there's a discernible fan culture, traceable back to peoples' personal investment with archival materials. Here's the MySpace page for a Brazilian band known as "Prelinger Archives Orchestra," fronted by a guy named Eduardo Ramos, that played its first gig in 2003.

It's easy to dismiss fan culture as a lesser kind of engagement, but it often leads academic interest and has great potential to draw attention and funding to an area of study. The vector from online discussion forums to peer review is perhaps shorter than one would think. I'd argue that emergent fields and disciplines need to nurture a fan infrastructure to increase reach and viability. Look, for example, at LibraryThing.

WONDERFUL
AND
UNPREDICTABLE
THINGS
HAPPEN
WHEN
ORDINARY
PEOPLE
GET ACCESS TO
PRIMARY MATERIALS

I realize I'm stating the obvious, but this message needs to take root.
WONDERFUL AND UNPREDICTABLE THINGS HAPPEN WHEN ORDINARY PEOPLE GET ACCESS TO
PRIMARY MATERIALS. This is not the group we were originally constituted to serve. But they're
going to be our new patrons.

What happened to render the "canonical" list of archives users obsolete? Here is a short chronicle of
what happened in the moving image world.

1960s: Oldskool TV docs: war, disasters, movie stars!
      "Official" materials: newsreels, gov't films
1970s: Key compilation features:
      (*Gizmo, Brother Can You Spare A Dime*)
      Nostalgia craze begins, heavy "retro" marketing
1980s: Media business opens up, many new distro outlets
      Cable, homevideo need cheap airtime
      Archives flower: *Atomic Cafe,* music videos, countless
      commercials, corporate videos, cable docs,
      MTV on-air promo, etc.
      Ephemeral films resurface
      AUDIO AND VIDEO SAMPLING
1990s: Remixing infects art world
2000s: Remixing moves from art to amateurism

Starting in the 1970s, media began to look quite different. We see the emergence of hitherto unseen archival material in TV and documentaries — industrial, advertising, amateur, educational, purely evidentiary films and similar visual documents. These more populist genres edged out more "official" materials, such as newsreels and government films, and began to increase popular consciousness of archives. "Where did all this stuff come from?" people asked. Atomic Café, made in 1982, was an important waypoint. The efflorescence of media distribution outlets acted like a magnet to pull images out of archives. I'd also point in passing to the emergence of sampling and remix culture, which I think has a non-trivial connection to archives.

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It may be obvious to many of you, but moving image archives don't just collect theatrical "movies." Much more film is unedited than edited; much more videotape exists than film; and much more digital video than either film or tape.

Fuzzy statistics

- At least 4 times as many ephemeral (educational, industrial, advertising) films as features were made. Perhaps < 50-60% exist, somewhere
- For each release print = at least 1 to 8 rolls of master or preprint elements, plus outtakes, if they exist
- No one knows how much amateur film still exists (to say nothing of amateur video)
- Millions of ephemeral videos now produced each year
- Estimated videos online ≈ 120 million
- Estimated online at YouTube ≈ 24 million
- The most numerous "genres" are the least studied

It's easy to pile up interesting statistics like this, but they tend to have little more than a silencing effect. That said, we can see that moving images of evidentiary value far outnumber those that were produced intentionally to entertain. And I'm not even talking about surveillance video.
One thing worth pointing out is that no one knows in the aggregate how much of which formats are held in special collections and archives, and no moving image archivist knows how much is out in the world waiting to be formally collected. We've come a long way from the relatively bounded universe of, say, Early English Books Online.

Master Hands (Jam Handy Organization for Chevrolet Motor Company, 1936)

Today, TV productions, public exhibitions, advertising, and ambient video (images just playing on the wall, which I would bet will be the primary archival market of the future) all rely heavily on ephemeral, non-official, non-Hollywood material. Personal and local experience has triumphed over more official narratives, and commonplace ideas of what history is and what it might be have broadened. Again, this has tended to encourage grassroots interest in historical material.

	Al Babeleyia Sat Channel		Atlantic Bird 4	EWTN US	A	Galaxy 11
						Galaxy 15
	Al Baghdadia	A	Badr 4	Faith TV	A	Galaxy 3C
			Hot Bird 8			AMC 1
			Nilesat 102	Familyland TV Network	A	Agila 2
	Al Fayhaa TV	A	Hot Bird 6			AMC 4
			Atlantic Bird 4			
			Galaxy 25	Federal Judicial TV Network		Galaxy 26
	Al Forqan TV		Arabsat 2B	Florida Knowledge Network	A	AMC 3
	Al Masar TV	A	Express AM22			
			Atlantic Bird 4	Florida Lottery	A	AMC 3
	Al Mowseliyah TV		Atlantic Bird 4	FordStar Dealer Network		AMC 4
	Al Rafiden TV	A	Nilesat 102	Fox Soccer Channel Jamaica	A	Intelsat 805
	Al Salam TV		Express AM22	Fox Türk	A	Türksat 2A
			Atlantic Bird 4			Eurobird 3
			Optus B3			
	Al-Forat Satellite TV Channel	A	Hot Bird 7A	Fox Türkiye	A	Türksat 2A
			Eutelsat W1			
			Nilesat 101			
			Galaxy 25	Future TV USA	A	Badr 3
	Al-Iraqiya 2	A	Arabsat 2B	Gavel to Gavel Alaska	A	AMC 8
			Badr 4			
			Atlantic Bird 4			
	Al-Iraqiya 3 Sports	A	Badr 4	Global Christian Network	A	AMC 4
			Atlantic Bird 4			
			Badr 4	God TV US	A	EchoStar 9/Ga

And I also haven't mentioned TV. The Television Archive, a sister project of the Internet Archive, has collected about a million hours of broadcast TV since April 2001. It's all sitting on hard disk, prevented by law from even educational distribution. There are many other similar collections.

The slide shows slivers from the list of Iraqi and US satellite services.

Lost generations

- Growing body of unprocessed moving images: (2000 ARL survey indicated 35% video, 37% audio remain unprocessed; *film not mentioned*)

- Most moving image archives haven't been systematically surveyed

- Born-digital moving image materials that first appear online: we can only guess — not being widely collected

We're going to have to survey the field, even as we admit that we cannot and should not collect it all. Film has lived in special collections for years, much of it unprocessed and unseen. Video is now flooding in, and would be coming in even faster if we were able to collect all we should. We can't.

regionalism and the lure of the local

But others are out there collecting, quite often outside major research institutions. Regional and specialized archives are incubating innovative practices, many of them community-based, like Home Movie Day and urban home movie recovery and revival projects. New ideas are originating at the periphery and many of them will infuse the center.

Garden for the Environment,
San Francisco

There are hundreds of new public moving image collections in the US alone, and their proliferation testifies to interest in archives. As soon as it gets darker, these people will watch an archival film about gardening, and there'll be loud BOOS when Pop starts spraying the vegetables.

At the same time, we are seeing a growing disconnect between archives and users. The emerging user communities (often younger people) don't see why their ability to access collections should be limited by institutional priorities, low budgets or online unavailability. They come from a world that increasingly works on Internet time, where knowledge is rapidly being made freely available in digital form at little or no apparent cost. To these users, whose numbers are growing, there is little reason why archival access should be a sticky door. Do we educate them about realities? Do we try to make it easier for them to get material? Or do we ignore them? NO MATTER WHAT PATH WE CHOOSE, ACCESS STARTS TO GET COMPLICATED.

value
begets
enclosure

With the emergence of new distribution media and the practical elaboration of Long Tail business models, the perceived value of archival holdings is increasing. Archives are now strategic repositories, and archivists have become de facto gatekeepers to valuable collections. The prototypical narrative of this change is the transition of the Hollywood studio libraries from quiet bunkers in neglected corners of the lot into secure, temperature- and humidity-controlled vault buildings filled with "media assets" whose book value figures prominently on the corporate balance sheet. Greater perceived value causes fences to rise from the ground and walls to be built.

In two years, YouTube built an easy-to-access online collection (≈24 million videos) that I'd argue has become the world's default media archives. Everything anyone does to bring moving image archives online will now be measured against YouTube's ambiguous legacy. It offers a sense of completeness: a massive collection of old and new video, from video of Malcolm X's complete speeches to clips of the moose I saw wandering in people's front yards in Anchorage. It sticks to preview mode, presenting visually degraded Flash video, and it's being sued right and left, but most rightsholders will rightfully regard what it does as promotion. Best of all, it invites users to upload almost anything, annotate with relative freedom and network with one another.

And there's the possibility that archives have in fact lost altogether to commercial services. Media archives have faced such opposition internally and from copyright holders that they tend to take baby steps towards expanding online access. Now that YouTube has raised public expectations (while lowering quality expectations), it's hard to see how any institution can equal them. Not to overdramatize, but I think archives lost this one. --- (Of course, YouTube is not an archive in any sense of the word - it doesn't do preservation, lacks a guarantee of persistence, and lives to be a commercial service)

moving image exceptionalism

But let's put aside worries about the future and roll back the clock...

So what do I mean by moving image exceptionalism? Here are a few quick attributes.

Moving image exceptionalism

- format(s) and fragility make people uneasy

FORMATS AND FRAGILITY:
--> Hundreds of formats, each with special characteristics and a distinct workflow;
handling equipment fast becoming obsolete, many unpreserved works exist in a single copy
nitrate, vinegar syndrome -- special storage needed
disks are very young, flash memory even younger
--> round, heavy, smelly objects on rectangular shelves

Moving image exceptionalism

- format(s) and fragility make people uneasy

- expensive to touch

MOVING IMAGES ARE EXPENSIVE TO TOUCH:
--> technology is born and dies quickly
--> cost of reformatting
may need specially trained staff
specialized vendors are expensive
 --> often the "LOGICAL" decision is to let it sit on the shelf

Moving image exceptionalism

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- access has historically been contingent on processing, cataloging & preservation

Here's where moving images meet Greene/Meissner. Access to archival moving images has traditionally been coupled with preservation. In order to make collections accessible to the widest possible number of users, we must now consider digitization that primarily serves access. Digitization expands access and confers other benefits on collections, including especially visibility, which often drives preservation.

Unbundling access from preservation, cataloging & description

- Digitization confers visibility on collections, which can help drive preservation (what's this?)

- This isn't our first massive paradigm shift on preservation (film/film copying to cold storage)

- Expose unpreserved and uncataloged collections online

- Users as partners in description & contextualization

- Ask forgiveness rather than permission

- Put reading copies on open shelves

- Default to access rather than enclosure (and ritual)

- Honestly identify and expose unencumbered (or mostly-unencumbered) materials

Much of this has been discussed, and much is being done in the textual and visual materials world. It's summed up very well in "Shifting Gears," a new paper by Ricky Erway and Jennifer Schaffner. But interestingly enough, these ideas are deeply controversial in the moving image archives world, and they're not being actualized. At least for me, this is a unsettling instance of exceptionalism.
--We don't know what preservation means any more.
--Archives hold many materials that aren't encumbered by copyright or donor restrictions, but it often isn't in their interest to expose them because of staff and financial constraints.

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- "seething bundle of rights"

¶ Some films are complex bundles of rights. Although probably no amateur films post-1923 are in public domain, that doesn't reduce the vast traffic in home movies and their exposure in the public sphere -- they sell for big $$$ on eBay.
¶ many rightsholders are quite often unknown or unlocatable -- the orphan works problem
¶ AND IT NEEDS TO BE SAID THAT WE HAVE HUGE PUBLIC DOMAIN IN THE U.S., AND ARCHIVES CONTROL LOTS OF PD MOVING IMAGES. For a number of reasons, this seems to be soft-pedaled.

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- powerful rightsholders & donors engender excessive deference

¶ We are excessively deferential to claims we haven't received from rightsholders we often can't identify
¶ but who wouldn't be scared of studios, TV networks, estates of authors and celebrities?
¶ we hear about crackdowns on "pirates" and imagine we are next
¶ fear of offending, fear of missteps; fear of fear itself

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- "Hollywood models" (copyright maximalism, DRM) infect library and archives world

Archives and libraries are unintended receivers of moving images -- no one models protocols for us.
Into this vacuum, corporate models creep. We embrace them as substitutes for user-centered access models that some call "impractical" or "unthinkable."
Many forms of moving images, like home movies and orphan works, have no functional model for addressing and handling rights.
Then there's DRM, electronic locks that restrict use, including fair use, of cultural materials for cultural purposes.
We worry about "losing control over our collections." This sometimes leads archives and collections to contemplate exogenous security solutions and controls, some of them made in Hollywood. Isn't that losing control?

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- flux of culture industry business models fascinates and stupefies many noncommercialists

Entertainment industry business models are in flux and will change quickly. LET'S NOT ETERNALIZE THE PRESENT.
There will be more Googles. In contrast, some of us have been around for hundreds of years.
These are not our models. Can we let them blow over us?

[We exist to support research and education.]

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Among archivists, and especially moving image archivists, there are many differences of opinion about whether we should move beyond legacy forms of access and, if so, how.
Some wish to preserve the theatrical experience as it's been experienced for a century.
Others accept the existence of surrogates, more or less (there's a spectrum from carefully crafted DVDs to "pictures of movies" – eg online derivatives)
Others (such as in some museums) hope to keep a model of scarcity (as Lessig puts it) alive.

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This could be a lecture in itself.
for years scholars preferred textual records to visual or moving images
the perception that moving image records are something short of "primary evidence" persists
-- Panther New Haven story
this has started to change, but not fast enough

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- moving image archivists live and work in bubbles

The moving image archives field developed in isolation. Until a few years ago, there were no training programs in the US. now there are several that are pumping out trained archivists –– These programs have opened up discourse around important issues and helped create interest in neglected areas, but many older archivists have not been exposed to newer ideas. And, perhaps it's due to cinephilia, but moving image people tend to look inward rather than out.

Lessons of moving-image exceptionalism: how not to repeat the past (I)

- Get a fresh start with born-digital materials
- Don't hobble digitized materials with newborn restrictions
- Don't let corporate models infect (or inflect) libraries and archives
- We aren't backup repositories for media companies, publishers or search engines

¶We need to make a fresh start with born–digital and get it right this time.

¶Lead us not into temptation. Let's default to openness rather than enclosure. Don't let the precautionary principle prevail over the propagation of culture.

¶Our corporate partners may be interested in working with our holdings (which is good), but that doesn't mean we have to adopt or internalize their business models, which will evolve much more quickly than ours, quite possibly into irrelevancy.

¶We can do partnerships without losing our autonomy and without undervaluing our collections.

Lessons of moving-image exceptionalism: how not to repeat the past (II)

- How can we be goals-driven and user-focused while saving collections?
- Where isolation is endemic and budgets precarious, users can be powerful allies
- Workflows are not sacred. The Greene-Meissner message hasn't got through to moving image collections
- The legacy of enclosure is long-lasting
- Cosmopolitanism & hybridization serve our interests: libraries ←→ archives

¶Goals-driven and user-focused. This has been hard to achieve in the moving image archives world. We have saved many collections. Now it's time to achieve greater ambitions.

¶Isolation. Users are a powerful and little-used constituency who can link us with the world and help us find support for our activities.

¶Workflows. We need to privilege access; we have many private rituals that tend to defer access, sometimes indefinitely.

¶Enclosure. What sometimes seems to be a no-brainer decision to "protect" materials may haunt us and future users for a very long time.

¶Hybridization. "Outside lies magic," as the geographer John Stilgoe says. Archives have much to learn from libraries; both have much to learn from geeks; innovation happens on the periphery. Our own discourses and practices constantly need a refresh.

I often wonder why libraries and archives mirror so many of the constraints and hierarchies of the world around us, when it would be just as reasonable for the WORLD TO LOOK TO US FIRST for leadership around issues of access to culture and information. It seems to me that we could do more than just set an example — we could be a FORCE FOR CLARITY AND MINDFULNESS when it comes to deciding how culture is made visible and distributed. I'm not just talking about the realms of research and education, but throughout society. This is critical as technology evolves, and as culture and business become ever more intertwined.
So, a few last thoughts.

the implicit social contract
with our users (and society)
is defined above all by access

Regardless of who pays the bills, libraries and archives depend on social and cultural consensus for legitimacy and the support we need to survive. Whether spoken or unspoken, this consensus rests upon the perception that our institutions fulfill a valuable cultural role. I believe this perception will be strengthened or weakened largely in relation to the character and depth of access we provide.

Preservation may be our raison d'etre, but access is our connection with the world.
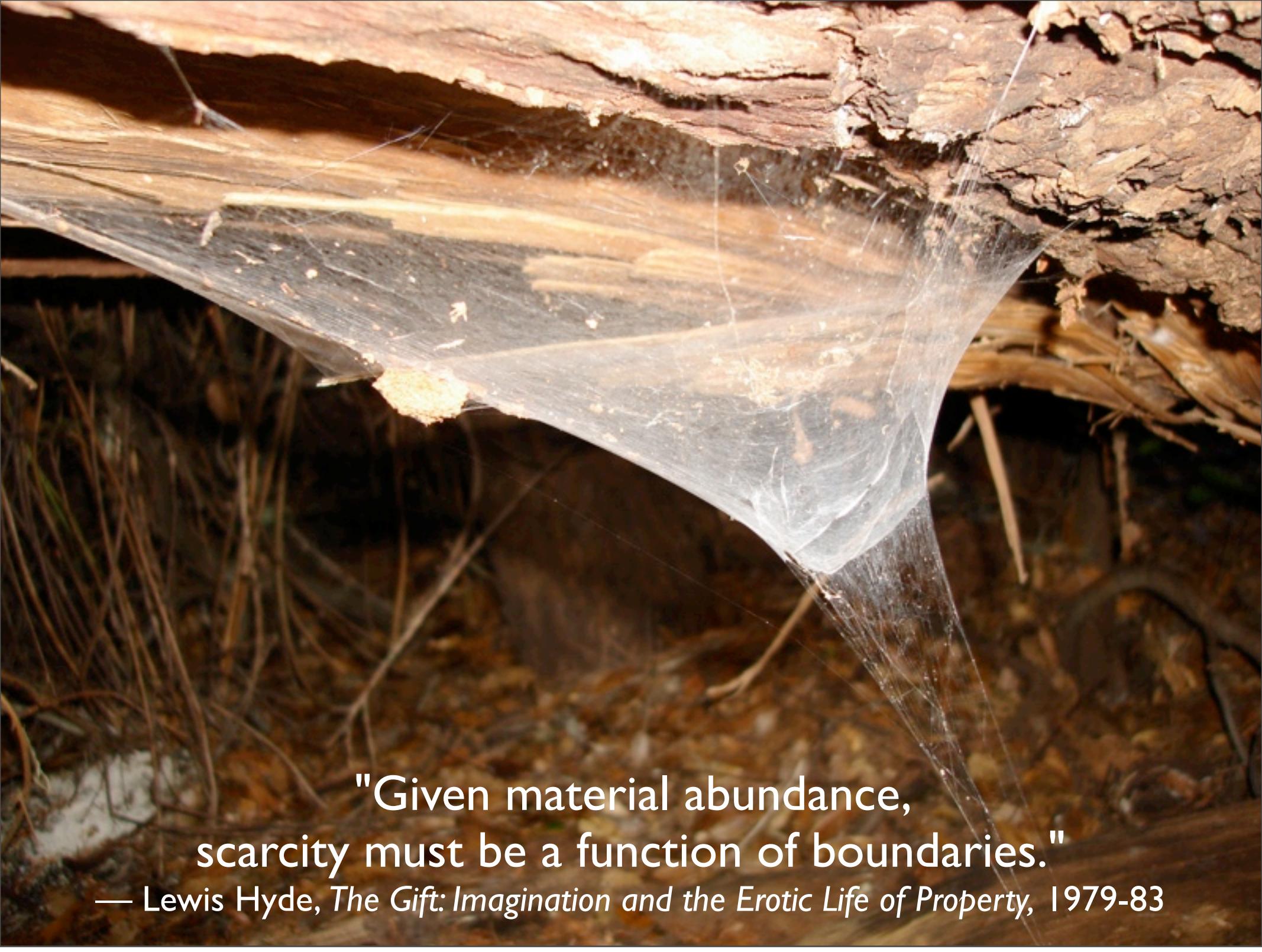
Access is a spectrum; openness a practice

[LEAST OPEN]

content archived and unavailable
content available for in-house research access with permission
content available for in-house research access without permission
content circulates within controlled world (e.g., print loans)
content licensable by special arrangement
low-resolution streaming video copies available online
high-resolution streaming video copies available online
content not interoperable with content in other collections
quotation allowed without reproduction
quotation allowed with reproduction (e.g., frame grabs)
reference-quality, time-coded, Elmo, defaced study copies furnished
broadcast-quality or projectable copies furnished
user-controlled copying in-house
low-resolution downloadable copies available online
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content licensable by simple arrangement
content interoperable with other collections
content freely available for reuse with restrictions (e.g., noncommercial use)
content freely available for sharing online
content freely indexable, crawlable, navigable by noncommercial web services
content freely indexable, crawlable, navigable by anyone
content freely available for any reuse without restriction
component parts of works (e.g., shots, segments, audio tracks, edit lists) available freely online without restriction

[MOST OPEN]

But we need to model access, especially open access. Don Waters is right to criticize "faith–based assumptions that only beneficial consequences will follow from providing open access." On the other hand, many of us have put materials online out of an inarticulate faith that mass discovery might enable authorship, scholarship and research among new groups and in new ways, and we are seeing exciting consequences. This has certainly been my own story. How can we anticipate user demand, rather than react to it? What's an optimal and dynamic model of access that evolves over time? Another way of asking this: How can we uphold a dynamic social contract with our users? These are the kinds of strategic questions that we need to pursue.

"Given material abundance,
scarcity must be a function of boundaries."
— Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property,* 1979-83

The same technologies that potentially enable access on a level that we've never seen also enable an unprecedented level of enclosure. All of us will have to decide which tools we want to use and which we'd rather lay idle. Larry Lessig talks about the "model of plenty" supplanting the "model of scarcity." Plenty and scarcity aren't characteristics that we discover about collections, but attributes with which we choose to clothe them.

I am convinced that openness, and I use the word knowing that it's a young word and still imprecise, will be critical to our futures. Openness will enable us to survive as primary, trusted repositories in a confused cultural and media landscape. We want people to knock on our doors. If they don't find what they're seeking in official, trusted repositories, they'll grow to depend on the YouTubes of the world. Copyright kinks (and, perhaps more significant, access constraints) already force countless film studies professors into the netherworld of bootlegs. It would be better to find ways to make people come to us.

Let's take a leaf from environmentalist practice and think about how our activities affect our CORE MISSIONS. How do our projects, our digitization initiatives and partnerships affect PRESERVATION AND ACCESS? What if we were to draft regular preservation and access impact statements, akin to environmental impact statements? How does Scanning Project A affect access to our collections? What impact will Video Digitizing Project B have upon the preservation of the bits? Impact statements could help us understand which individual projects best move us forward, and ultimately to develop a shared sense of value about projects that have often been difficult to assess.

We have light.
We have eyes.
We can see.
We can find out.
We can see different colors.
We can see different shapes.
We can see different sizes.

We can not see in the dark.
We have no light.
We look and look,
but we can not see.
We can not find out.

Unlike many of my copyfighting friends, I believe that the extreme positions of today's copyright wars will appear quaint in a few years. But it will take real work to get to that point. Many conflicts over access to and control over culture reflect generational divides. And there are real generational inequities in the current copyright system. I'm a boomer, and much of my cultural heritage has already risen into the public domain. This isn't the case for so-called "Genxers" and Millennials, who have much less latitude to tell their own histories cheaply. This, plus the unsettled orphan works situation, may encourage change, which would be very much in all of our interest.

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In recent years cultural materials have developed a singular tendency to escape enclosure, and I tend to think many limits on access will loosen in time. The present system of copyright and contractual controls is evolving because it needs to; it doesn't even work well for its prime beneficiaries. Culture, like water, dust and small animals, is hard to enclose.

Dawn, not sunset

Moving images are over 100 years old, and we're still wrestling with them. Quite understandably, we embraced the media forms that were easiest to collect and seemed most important at the time. We now need to do just the opposite — to collect the materials that are the most challenging TO SOURCE, TO STORE AND TO SERVE, in every medium. We need to lead on the access problem, not leave it to others to solve on our behalf.

And if we're going to do the impossible, we might as well start early.

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Thank you!