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**MOTION PICTURE FILM AS A GOVERNMENT RECORD:  
FRAMING FILMS WITHIN ARCHIVAL THEORY AND  
PREPARING FOR THE DIGITAL FUTURE**

By

Heidi Holmstrom

Accepted in Partial Completion  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Dr. Kathleen L. Kitto, Dean of the Graduate School

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## **MASTER'S THESIS**

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Heidi Holmstrom  
July 10, 2012

**MOTION PICTURE FILM AS A GOVERNMENT RECORD:  
FRAMING FILMS WITHIN ARCHIVAL THEORY AND  
PREPARING FOR THE DIGITAL FUTURE**

A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty of  
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by  
Heidi Holmstrom  
May 2012

## **Abstract**

Governments have created and used motion picture films since soon after their invention, but government archivists have an uneasy relationship with films. Historically, the traditional archival literature has overlooked films in favor of a focus on textual records, while the film archive literature is unconcerned with the archival concept of the record. To define the scope of the problem, this thesis demonstrates the paucity of archival literature addressing motion picture film as a government record. Moving forward, motion pictures are examined through a lens of archival theory and set in their rightful place among other formats of government records. It is concluded that while films must be read differently than textual records, they provide evidence, information, memory, and other affordances as found in other record formats. Finally, the thesis explores the properties that must be maintained as a film record is migrated to digital formats in order to ensure that it remains a valid record. It is argued that failing to create an authentic digital record during preservation digitization of a film is the same as deaccessioning the film record from the archival collection. Government archivists have a responsibility to carry out a thorough and documented reappraisal process before such actions may be taken.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Introduction: Government Record or “Just a Dog in a Hat”?.....	1
I. Invisible Movies: Motion Picture Records and Archival Literature.....	14
II. Authentic Images: The Interface of Film and Theory in the Government Archives.....	28
III. Up to the Digital Threshold: Maintaining Authentic Motion Picture Records Across Formats.....	52
Conclusion: Films for the Future.....	75
Bibliography.....	90

## Introduction

### Government Record or “Just a Dog in a Hat”?

The film opens with a shot of a frustrated woman standing over the steaming hood of her disabled car. The style of the automobile sets the action sometime in the 1970s. The woman scans the passing traffic for a police officer or good samaritan, but no one pays her any attention. Moments later, a van approaches. One of the male passengers exclaims, “Hey, I know her. Pull over!” The van turns out to be part of an organized vanpool to the company where both of them work. The young man invites the woman aboard and they happily head to the office. Over the course of the film, the man romances the woman with descriptions of how vanpools can be planned and organized by employees of any kind of company. When the woman decides to join the vanpool program, they learn that they are on the same route and will be sharing a van to work—truly a “happily ever after.”

The above is a description of a film titled *No Fuelin’, We’re Poolin’*.<sup>1</sup> Produced by the Department of Energy during the Energy Crisis of the 1970s, the film introduces the public to one of the many energy conservation programs implemented by the Carter Administration. There were, of course, other ways that the government communicated information about these programs, such as pamphlets and program guidelines, but films can do something these other formats can’t. They allow for visual and narrative dimensions that viewers find familiar because they follow the conventions developed by the film and television entertainment industry. In the case of *No Fuelin’, We’re Poolin’* the informational

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<sup>1</sup> Motion Picture 434-EC-4; “No Fuelin’, We’re Poolin’”; Moving Images Relating to Energy Conservation, compiled 1977-1979; General Records of the Department of Energy, Record Group 434; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

structure of the film is the backdrop to a love story of the kind watched by Americans daily. Even though the production values might be a little lower and the acting a little stiffer than we're used to, the love narrative provides a relatable hook to draw the viewer in and make him more receptive to the film's underlying lessons.

*No Fuelin', We're Poolin'* does all of this, but is it a government record? And, if so, what should a government archivist do to preserve it? Such questions have long been challenging to answer, but I decided to address them in my thesis after realizing that many people in the government archives where I work sometimes fail to take motion pictures seriously as records. Usually it is a very small percentage of the people in an archives who work directly with motion picture films, but many others have the power to make decisions that will affect how the film collection is treated. Ultimately I was spurred to begin my research by what I will call the "dog-in-a-hat" fallacy.

During discussions on plans for preservation digitization of the film collection, the argument was made that if a film doesn't contain information that is patently important—if it is "just a picture of a dog in a hat"—then it should be digitized to a lower-quality file than the important stuff. There was no discussion of archival reappraisal or provenance, and the implication was that such decisions could be made on an item-by-item basis at the time of capture. This suggestion goes against everything I learned in my archival education, but when I began searching the archival literature for writings to support my position, I found very little to help me. If films were mentioned at all, it was usually in a quick admonition that all media should be treated equally, followed by pages focused on textual materials. It soon became apparent that if I wanted a book that could help refute the "dog-in-a-hat" fallacy, I would have to write it myself. Fortunately, I still had a thesis to complete.

My central argument is that motion picture films created or received by government agencies are government records. Archivists should give these motion picture records the same care and consideration they reserve for textual records. This is more important now than ever before because changes in technology are reorienting preservation processes from analog to digital. When a decision is made to digitize a deteriorating film for preservation, archivists must acknowledge that they are trading a physical object marked by indicators of its authenticity for a generic bitstream and file wrapper. In order to ensure that a digitized film remains a valid and authentic record, archivists must identify the attributes necessary to authenticate a film record and incorporate them into the file's structure and metadata. Such decisions can only be made by archivists who accept films as records and understand how they relate to archival theory and use.

I approached my research with a goal of building a framework that archivists can use in order to think about motion picture films as government records. Government archivists have a special responsibility to the public to ensure that the records of democratic government are well managed and accessible. Instead of dismissing films as alien and apart from other record formats, I wanted to demonstrate how they fit into archival theory. That is not to say that films aren't different from other record types, but that those differences do not subordinate them to other formats. They still have evidential and informational values, and help to ensure government accountability and perpetuate collective memory. However, our exploration of film as a government record must begin outside of archival theory so we can better understand the films themselves.

## How Do Government Films Communicate?

Richard Dyer MacCann, author of the most comprehensive study of government filmmaking, understood that film is a unique and effective communications tool. Why use press releases to promote a government program, he asked, when “the program could be promoted instead with drama and color and originality” provided by films?<sup>2</sup> MacCann further argued that, “[t]he only way democracy has ever worked is by enlisting mutual interest in the happiness of others” using “the power of sympathetic identification.” He saw films as tools for creating this identification and therefore useful in the support of a democratic society.<sup>3</sup> It is easy to think of examples of government films that act in this way. Films about public parks can instill a sense of ownership or stewardship in viewers who have never even visited them. Films promoting the sale of government bonds often mix patriotism and star power to make viewers feel good about the idea of pitching in to support their country.

But even if a government film is produced with such democratic aims explicitly in mind, this does not mean that its meaning and effect on the audience are direct and easily deciphered. When we look at a government film that appears to successfully communicate a government policy, Jennifer Zwarich argues that we uncover “the ambivalence at the heart of government film production in democratic contexts.” Though many scholars study government communication as a reinforcement of the government’s cultural hegemony, Zwarich believes that instead of “functioning efficiently as always already configured arms of a cohesive ‘state,’ these films were often sites of negotiation over competing definitions of

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Dyer MacCann, *The People’s Films: A Political History of U.S. Government Motion Pictures* (New York: Hastings House, 1973), 5.

<sup>3</sup> MacCann, 228.

that state and its role in society.”<sup>4</sup> *No Fuelin’, We’re Poolin’* is arguably one of these “sites of negotiation.” It presented one strategy to conserve fuel at a time when gasoline was relatively scarce. However, many of the energy conservation policies put in place to deal with the Energy Crisis were resented by Americans and ended by the Reagan Administration. Even though vanpooling provides environmental and economic benefits, Americans were unwilling to concede to the state a role in limiting when and how much they drive. Although it does represent an abandoned policy, *No Fuelin’, We’re Poolin’* provides evidence of government attempts to change public behavior in the face of resource constraints that government power could not control.

Government officials have often recognized, and sometimes feared, the power of persuasion that films may possess. The 1948 Smith-Mundt Act authorized the Federal government “to disseminate information about the United States and its policies abroad” but it also prohibited the exhibition of such information products domestically.<sup>5</sup> The act applied to the “propaganda” films produced by the United States Information Agency (USIA), even when the content was of great interest to the American people. The film *Years of Lightning, Day of Drums*, a documentary memorializing John F. Kennedy’s presidency, required an act of Congress to be exhibited in the United States on the 1965 anniversary of his death.<sup>6</sup> Even as late as 1972, Senator William Fulbright blocked the National Archives from providing

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<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Zwarich, “The Bureaucratic Activist: Federal Filmmakers and Social Change in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Tick Eradication Campaign,” *The Moving Image* 9, no. 1 (2009): 25-6.

<sup>5</sup> David Culbert, “Public Diplomacy and the International History of Mass Media: The USIA, the Kennedy Assassination, and the World,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 30, no. 3 (2010): 425-6.

<sup>6</sup> Culbert, 426.

access to the USIA film collection.<sup>7</sup> Viewed today, many of the films either really are innocuous or contain blatant propagandistic elements that are too clumsy to go unnoticed. We have to wonder if the Senator was concerned that opening the films to the American public would unleash an insidious force for persuasion, or whether he was trying to save the government from embarrassment. Either way, the USIA films are a useful source to learn about American foreign policy and what the United States government imagined the nation to be, especially when no one at home was watching.

In addition to edited films for distribution, governments also produced great volumes of raw footage. Some of this was footage shot for specific productions, but much of it was created to record events, experiments, or other activities. Speeches by elected officials are a common subject. The National Archives holds unedited footage of scientific tests performed aboard the space shuttle. Even the rough football game films of a public university can be considered to be government motion pictures. Although such unedited footage may appear to be unmediated, we can't always take it at face value. Peter Burke writes, "The power of film is that it gives the viewer a sense of witnessing events. This is also the danger of the medium . . . because this sense of witnessing is an illusory one." Before a filmmaker turns on the camera, decisions may already have been made about focus, lighting, and framing. Action might be staged. The illusion only grows when raw footage is edited into a production and "the director shapes the experience while remaining invisible."<sup>8</sup> This sense of film as complicit in illusion is in opposition to Jean-Luc Godard's oft-quoted "Film is truth, 24 times a second," but there is room for illusion and truth to coexist. We can find truth in government

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<sup>7</sup> MacCann, 174, note 1.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001), 156-9.

films, but we have to learn to read them and see through the layers of illusion inherent in all motion pictures. However, sometimes the illusion is what imbues the film with power and meaning.

Viewers can gain insight on government films when they are considered within the context provided both by other formats of government records and by non-governmental films. When they are held in a government archives, the films are linked to other records by provenance, ensuring that additional information about the programs or actions depicted is readily accessible. Sources created outside of the government can be just as important. Newsreels and kinescoped special reports from television news can show us the things that were happening or the ideas being debated that had an effect on government policies. These types of programs are often collected by government agencies and, being received in the course of business, can be considered as records alongside the films that governments produce. Government archives that have collecting policies allowing them to take in material considered to be of historical importance tend to accumulate the kinds of films that provide context for understanding government films, but researchers may also need to look to other types of repositories for such sources.

### **Motion Pictures as Government Records**

This thesis is organized into three central parts. To define the scope of the problem, it demonstrates the paucity of archival literature addressing motion picture film as a government record. Moving forward, motion pictures are examined through a lens of archival theory and set in their rightful place among other formats of government records. Finally, it explores the properties that must be maintained as a film record is migrated across formats in

order to ensure that it remains a valid record. Rather than providing strict prescriptions for how government archivists should treat film records, the focus is on how to think about them as records. Once archivists learn to do this, they will be able to make better appraisal and preservation decisions that are in line with applications of archival theory to textual formats. At the very least, this thesis should help curb the impulse to treat motion pictures as “less than” other record formats.

Chapter One is a review of archival literature to show how motion picture films have been represented over time. Beginning with the writings of the early English-language theorists, we see how film at turns was ignored or embraced. We find a real enthusiasm for motion pictures surrounding the creation of the United States National Archives, followed by their decline into obscurity in traditional archival theory. During the years that motion pictures were most invisible, a parallel Film Archives movement developed. Although films were central to this movement, it mostly ignored the traditional archival literature’s concern with the concept of the record. Finally, over the past twenty years, we begin to see archivists waking up to the fact that film is marginalized in archival theory. The chapter closes on an assessment of how archival literature has influenced the policies of state archives, discovering signs both encouraging and problematic.

Chapter Two lays out the case for motion picture film’s inclusion in the universe of government records. Geoffrey Yeo’s “Concepts of Records” article series, in which he developed a new, broader definition of the term “record,” provides a framework for thinking about motion picture films as government records. By applying prototype theory and the idea of boundary objects, a more expansive range of record types are recognized as archival. Also useful is Yeo’s discussion of the affordances of records, such as evidence or memory.

Because affordances are viewed as something provided by a record, instead of as a part of the record itself, we don't have to dismiss films because they are different from textual records. By learning how to "read" films, archivists gain access to the properties that will help determine if the film is a record.

Moving on from Yeo, motion picture films are examined for the evidence they can provide, both in the archival and the legal sense. Motion picture records are tested against the archival ideas of the New Paradigm theorists, and though they are not traditional documents, it is found that most government films still fit within narrow definitions of records based almost exclusively on evidential values. Even so, such a tight focus on evidence proves to be inadequate, so the discussion is expanded to include ideas of memory and accountability, and to allow for the accessioning of trustworthy non-governmental films into the archives. Finally, the use of motion picture film records is discussed. Films are often popular for direct use, but it is through indirect use that they reach the broadest audience. If films are excluded from the archives, we lose that popular point of engagement with archival collections.

Chapter Three takes motion picture records up to the digital threshold and asks what properties must be preserved during digitization to ensure the new digital copy is also a record. Distinction is made between digitization for access and digitization for preservation, and it is the latter that is the focus of the chapter. Because authenticity must be maintained across record formats, it is argued that an archives must implement standard operating procedures and have a well defined set of significant properties that will be carried over from the analog record to the new digital version. When identifying significant properties, the archivist should make a decision based on an analysis of archival theory and user preferences. Preservation and conservation principles will also play a role, and archivists

need to consider how to incorporate information about the provenance and custody of the film into the metadata associated with the new digital copy. The chapter contains some suggested categories of significant properties and the ways they may be captured. It concludes with a discussion of the relationship between digital preservation decisions and deaccessioning and argues that a decision to create a digital copy without preserving authenticity must be approached in the same way as a decision to remove an item from an archives' collections.

The Conclusion of the thesis steps beyond the focus of the chapters and examines motion picture film records within the context of other record formats found within a government archives. The way that films communicate information is found to be a strength, both in drawing new users to archival material and in providing a means to study how governments interact with citizens. Such study can support goals of justice and governmental accountability, as we recognize the challenges to power depicted in films and their value in teaching us to be critical consumers of media. Finally, several recommendations are proposed to raise the visibility of motion pictures in the archival literature and within government archives.

The sources consulted for this thesis are mainly works of archival theory and secondary sources in the archival literature. This is because the problem that is confronted is one of a dearth of resources dealing with motion picture film records. By starting with a foundation of established archival theory, the objective of this thesis is to graft a consideration of motion picture films onto existing concepts of archival records. The sources consulted range from the earliest archival manuals to the latest research and guidelines published on the Internet. Every effort has been made to locate the most up-to-date sources

that could apply to the topic. This finished work is envisioned as part of a continuing theoretical dialog and will hopefully contribute to a fuller understanding of motion picture films in government archives that will continue to be expanded in the future.

Because motion pictures share many of the attributes of photographs, audio recordings, and videos, many of the arguments in this thesis are also valid for those formats. However, even motion picture film and video, the most similar on this list, are very different formats, especially in their relationship to digital technologies. In order to keep the scope of this thesis limited to a manageable size, motion picture films are the explicit subject.

Similarly, much of what is covered here could also apply to institutional archives other than those of government. Archivists at religious, corporate, or non-profit organizational archives will find many passages that are relevant to the records produced by the bodies they support. Such archives all contain records reflecting activities and policies of an organization that affect members, shareholders, or donors, much as governmental records illuminate a government's relationship with its citizens. Many institutional archives are also custodians of motion picture film collections. The decision to focus on government archives in this thesis is a matter of scope, but it is also related to the difference in the relationship between the public and the government in contrast to the relationships established with these other organizations. Democratic governments have a responsibility to all citizens within their borders to govern fairly and remain accountable for their actions. Public records are not owned by the government in the way that corporate records are owned by a corporation; they belong to the people. For this reason, it is imperative that government archivists do not exclude motion picture records from the public archives.

Many of the archives that hold large film collections are not governmental or institutional archives, but operate as collecting repositories. Often these are associated with some kind of institution, but they do not act as repositories of official records. For example, the UCLA Film & Television Archive is associated with the University of California, Los Angeles, but rather than focusing on films that are university or state records, its holdings are overwhelmingly made up of donated and collected material. Such collecting archives are most interested in the artistic or historical values of films, rather than their usefulness as records of institutional or governmental activity. Because their mission is so different, this thesis does not address the concerns of collecting repositories. However, in addition to acting as repositories for records, some governmental archives have a mandate to collect historically significant material, including films. Both Chapter Two and the Conclusion consider how these non-governmental films may be integrated into the holdings of a government archives.

There is a sense of urgency regarding film that requires government archivists to be prepared to deal with it soon. Although film doesn't face the same problems of obsolescence as video formats, most film created by governments and government agencies is twenty years old or older. This is not necessarily a problem if it is being stored in the proper conditions, but too often it is not. Films stored at too-high temperatures or humidity are at risk for fading, shrinkage, and other forms of deterioration. Nitrate film stored in the wrong environment is also a fire risk. By this point, much of the film in government collections has been transferred to the archives, but there are likely many government bodies that have held on to their films. As these are eventually offered for transfer to the archives, archivists must be able to make informed appraisal decisions. There is also a great deal of education that must be done regarding digitization and digital formats. Motion picture films are often expensive to

preserve, even more so in a digital format, so archivists need to have the right information in order to advocate for sound practices that will sustain the films' usefulness as government records. Otherwise pressure from administrators might compromise film collections in ways that would never be accepted for textual records.

Motion picture film records deserve to be treated like textual records, even if they are “just a picture of a dog in a hat.” That dog might be the canine star enlisted to sell war bonds or it might be the puppy curled up asleep inside an army helmet after a long day of paratrooper training. When placed in the context provided by other records in a government collection, such “unimportant” images provide insight into how the government communicated with citizens and the activities it was carrying out. In 1938, Fanning Hearon wrote some words about the Depression-era documentary, *The River*, that can also apply to all of the motion picture records held in government archives:

. . . *The River* is public property, the property of the taxpayers, the property of the people. It belongs to you and if you want to see it, it is your inherent privilege to see it for nothing.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Fanning Hearon, “The Motion-Picture Program and Policy of the United States Government,” *Journal of Educational Sociology* 12, no. 3 (1938): 156.

## Chapter One

### Invisible Movies: Motion Picture Records and Archival Literature

According to Roger Smither, film archivists occupy a “proverbially uncomfortable” position. Like the person “who rides two horses or falls between two stools” they find themselves suspended between two disciplines, belonging wholly to neither. They are relegated to the margins of librarianship because of their concern for “non-book” material. When seeking solidarity with other archivists, they are again turned away because the materials they hold are not unique enough to belong to the archival universe and can be disdainfully dismissed as “library” material.<sup>1</sup> Like Smither’s film archivist, motion picture films occupy a similarly uncomfortable position among the records of governmental archives. Over the past seventy years the visibility of motion picture records in the archival literature has waxed and waned, but the cumulative effect of a literature that regards textual as the default record format has been the creation of an enduring uncertainty where motion pictures are involved. A government archivist who is unfamiliar with film formats and functions would have to search deep and wide to locate more than passing references to films treated as traditional records. Fortunately, several archival theorists and practitioners writing in the past decade have recognized the damage done to the archival and cultural record when non-textual formats are ignored. If this attention is sustained, the position of motion picture film in government archives may largely recover from this benign neglect.

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Smither, “Formats and Standards: A Film Archive Perspective on Exchanging Computerized Data,” *American Archivist* 50, no. 3 (Summer 1987): 325.

## Early Perspectives

The template for the archival inattention to film records can be found in the writings of one of our most prominent early theorists, Sir Hilary Jenkinson. Having worked for so long among ancient documents requiring knowledge of seals and court hand, we can forgive Jenkinson for failing to quickly realize the relevance of motion picture films produced by the British government to his work as an archivist. Still, it was not until the late 1930s that he began to acknowledge that not all records created are textual. Such recognition, though, is only briefly displayed. In the 1937 revision of his 1922 *Manual of Archive Administration*, Jenkinson added a short paragraph admitting that the recognition of problems posed by films “cannot be long delayed.”<sup>2</sup> In 1943, he noted that “In the past [archives] have generally been manuscript but that is not a necessity,”<sup>3</sup> and in 1947, he went a little bit further, remarking that “this word ‘Document’ is in our day applied to many things besides the results of pen and ink upon paper or parchment.” Photographic material, sound recordings, and copper plates used in printing charts were all examples given of documents accepted as archival records by the British Public Record Office.<sup>4</sup> Though not mentioned by name, it is likely that by that time motion picture films were also being accepted as records.

In 1952, near the end of his career, Jenkinson wrote an article reflecting on archival developments in England over the previous twenty-five years. In spite of the fact that Britain

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<sup>2</sup> Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration* (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co. Ltd., 1937), 164-5.

<sup>3</sup> Hilary Jenkinson, “The Classification and Survey of English Archives,” in *Selected Writings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson*, eds. Roger H. Ellis and Peter Walne (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2003), 197.

<sup>4</sup> Hilary Jenkinson, “The English Archivist: A New Profession,” in *Selected Writings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson*, eds. Roger H. Ellis and Peter Walne (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2003), 238.

had just come through a war that had seen unprecedented levels of government film production, he failed to mention the proliferation of films, arguably government records, that must have caught the attention of archivists in the Public Record Office.<sup>5</sup> For Jenkinson and many others, motion picture films were simply too removed from the textual archival ideal to warrant much attention. Margaret Cross Norton, an American who shared many of Jenkinson's views on archives and records, also does not appear to have recognized the record potential of films. In 1938, in a discussion of microphotography, she noted that the U.S. National Archives had "a department devoted to making and collecting sound and silent cinema of historical events."<sup>6</sup> Though she did give them brief attention in her article, such historical films, positioned outside of the functions of public administration, are a type of document that Norton tended to view as non-archival. Ultimately, it appears that she misunderstood what the National Archives film department was created to be. It was directed to collect historical films, but it was not a filmmaking body. More importantly, government film production had greatly expanded in the 1930s, requiring the National Archives to be prepared to approach the resulting product as likely record material.

In contrast to Jenkinson and Norton, T.R. Schellenberg, an employee of the National Archives since its opening and perhaps the most influential archival theorist in the United States, included a strong endorsement of the identification of films as records in his 1956 archival manual. He wrote that motion picture films "that are made or received by a

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<sup>5</sup> Hilary Jenkinson, "Archive Developments in England 1925-1950," in *Selected Writings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson*, eds. Roger H. Ellis and Peter Walne (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2003), 271-92.

<sup>6</sup> Margaret C. Norton, "Photographic and Microphotographic Reproductions of Records," in *Norton on Archives: The Writings of Margaret Cross Norton on Archival and Records Management*, ed. Thornton W. Mitchell (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2003), 220.

government in the discharge of specific functions may be considered to be archives. This is the case with films made by a government to record actual events, such as films of combat scenes during a war, or to influence public opinion, or to train civilian and military personnel.” While projection prints of these films might have a place in the library, the negative and other master copies belong in the archives.<sup>7</sup> Schellenberg also supported the inclusion of film records in the archives by championing a definition of records, based on that in the 1943 Record Disposal Act of the United States, that was unequivocally format-neutral. “All books, papers, maps, photographs, or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics” may be records, as long as they are made or received by an institution during the course of business and preserved for their evidential or informational values.<sup>8</sup> Though it has been tested and critiqued over the years, this definition of records continues to influence the definitions adopted by government bodies, providing a clear statement that motion pictures should not be disregarded as possible records due to their difference from textual records.

While Schellenberg did stand up for motion picture film records, he did little to address the fundamental differences between films, which present information visually and are often similar to publications, and textual records, which contain written information and are organized in folders of like material. Many subsequent theorists have dealt with film in the same way; they include a disclaimer that their work can apply to records of all media types, and then spend the rest of the article dealing exclusively with the concerns of textual records.

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<sup>7</sup> T.R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2003), 18.

<sup>8</sup> Schellenberg, 16.

## A Brief Golden Age

This archival tendency to shy away from directly confronting the challenges posed by film records is curious in the face of the enthusiasm with which the nascent National Archives' intention to accept film holdings had been met. In 1935, before the repository was built, the planned motion picture capability was favorably noted in the journal *Science*.<sup>9</sup> The importance of a government film collection to historians was also expounded in the pages of the *American Archivist*. Dorothy Arbaugh wrote that some of the most important films to be included in the Archives "were found in the possession of government agencies in the District of Columbia." She described the types of films being made by different agencies and their relevance for historical inquiry, along with the selection policy for collected non-governmental films.<sup>10</sup> Historian Roy F. Nichols likened a research trip to the National Archives to Alice's trip through Wonderland. The motion picture collection played no small part in generating that wonder: "Biography can now be vivified. Those writing about public figures of the last few years can see them in action again . . . . Also, it is no longer necessary to depend upon fleeting impressions born amid the flutter and flash of the silver screen. The National Archives is equipped with a moviola machine so that Alice can see the pictures under a magnifying glass, run them at a speed to suit herself, and hear the sound recording repeated."<sup>11</sup>

In spite of the interest in a collection of government films, even government records officials were still uncertain when it came to selecting and appraising film records for

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<sup>9</sup> "Motion Picture Films of the National Archives of the United States," *Science* 82, no. 2123 (Sept. 6, 1935): 214-5. The article is based upon reporting in the *New York Times*.

<sup>10</sup> Dorothy Arbaugh, "Motion Pictures and the Future Historian," *American Archivist* 2, no. 2 (April 1939): 107-9.

<sup>11</sup> Roy F. Nichols, "Alice in Wonderland," *American Archivist* 3, no. 3 (July 1940): 152.

permanent retention. Though the National Archives' Staff Information Paper 9, released in 1940 and titled "What Records Shall We Preserve?," again equated motion pictures and other media with traditional record types,<sup>12</sup> confusion remained. In 1946, Solon J. Buck, the Archivist of the United States, released a circular letter to all Federal agencies to address the frequently asked question of "whether motion pictures, still photographs, X-rays, aerial photographs, and sound recordings in the possession of Federal agencies are records of the Federal Government" subject to the National Archives Act. In addition to reiterating a general definition of records, Buck outlined a definition of record character that could more easily be applied to non-textual records.<sup>13</sup> But, because the letter was not a traditional publication, it is unclear how much impact it had beyond the Federal universe.

In the 1950s, about the time that Schellenberg released his *Modern Archives* manual, Hermine Baumhofer contributed two important articles to the *American Archivist* explicitly addressing motion picture film as a government record. Baumhofer was a film archivist in the Air Force's Motion Picture Film Depository at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. The first half of her earlier article outlined the history of federal government film production. Relying in large part on correspondence and interviews with the people who were involved in those film productions, she helped to record and preserve information about a facet of film history that had been overlooked up to that point. The second half of the article outlined the types of films created by the government and identified the characteristics that would require their

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<sup>12</sup> Philip C. Brooks, *What Records Shall We Preserve?*, Staff Information Paper 9 (1940; repr., Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, 1975), 11.

<sup>13</sup> Solon J. Buck for the National Archives, *Record Character of Motion Pictures, Still Photographs, and Sound Recordings, and the Accessioning Policy of the National Archives With Respect to Such Records*, Circular Letter No. 46-5, June 3, 1946, 1-3.

management as archives.<sup>14</sup> Baumhofer's next article was solely devoted to the issue of managing motion picture film as government records.<sup>15</sup> It is thoughtful and comprehensive enough that it could still be used as a guide for managing film records today. Unfortunately, Baumhofer's writings faded quickly from prominence in the archival literature, and films again became a problematic afterthought in government archives.

### **Into the Desert**

Despite the fact that the Society of American Archivists had established a Committee on Audio-Visual Records in 1953,<sup>16</sup> through the 1960s and 1970s the traditional archival literature dealing with motion picture film records is sparse. The SAA did finally hold its first archival film festival in 1975 at its thirty-ninth annual conference,<sup>17</sup> but in the same year an article by Ralph E. Ehrenberg about aural and graphic archival materials omitted any discussion of motion pictures, even as it addressed photographs and sound recordings, which are essentially the component parts of a motion picture.<sup>18</sup> In Maynard Brichford's 1977 guide to archival selection and appraisal, motion picture films are never specifically mentioned in

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<sup>14</sup> Hermine M. Baumhofer, "Motion Pictures Become Federal Records," *American Archivist* 15, no.1 (January 1952): 15-26.

<sup>15</sup> Hermine M. Baumhofer, "Film Records Management," *American Archivist* 19, no. 3 (July 1956): 235-48. Having worked with the films of the Air Force, I can confirm that they are one of the best managed and organized film collections transferred to NARA.

<sup>16</sup> Baumhofer, "Film Records Management," 235.

<sup>17</sup> Hugh A. Taylor, "The Media of Record: Archives in the Wake of McLuhan," in *Imagining Archives: Essays and Reflections by Hugh A. Taylor*, eds. Terry Cook and Gordon Dodds (Lanham, Md., and Oxford: Society of American Archivists and Association of Canadian Archivists in association with The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2003), 70.

<sup>18</sup> Ralph E. Ehrenberg, "Aural and Graphic Archives and Manuscripts," in *A Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory and Practice*, eds. Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walch (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1984), 187-200.

the text, though other media are. In the appendix to the guide, which is intended to help judge the archival value of documents based on functional categories of records, motion picture films are included in the list for “Often Valuable.”<sup>19</sup> While it is heartening to see that films are ascribed some value, the motion picture film can serve many functions in government and should not be defined as a functional category in itself. A film might contain a speech, act as a guide, or be a report—all three of which are classified as “Usually Valuable” in Brichford’s appendix. If motion pictures are always set apart as Other, archivists unfamiliar with films are more likely to overlook them, even when their content, in any other format, would otherwise be accepted into the archives.

At the end of the 1970s, Hugh A. Taylor demonstrated an understanding of the hurdles faced by film and other media in the archives. Archival principles, derived as they were from the study of textual public documents, are not apparently congruent with the characteristics of non-text documents, but Taylor claimed an advantage for motion pictures from an archival perspective: “Film . . . preserves its original order at twenty-four frames a second.”<sup>20</sup> Although this is nice as a catchphrase, government archivists are still responsible for dealing with entities that exist within an administrative context that requires a more wide-angle view. While the internal preservation of provenance provided by a film’s structure is unique among records, Taylor’s article contains no exploration of how motion pictures should be cared for and managed within record groups and series.

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<sup>19</sup> Maynard J. Brichford, *Archives & Manuscripts: Appraisal and Accessioning* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1977), 22-3.

<sup>20</sup> Hugh A. Taylor, “Documentary Art and the Role of the Archivist,” *American Archivist* 42, no. 4 (October 1979): 419-20.

Like any other records, motion picture film requires preservation and conservation, but such guidance was difficult to find in the traditional archival literature through the 1970s and 1980s. In fact, motion picture film is completely omitted from Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler's 1983 guide to archival conservation.<sup>21</sup> This is perhaps the nadir for archival film, as at the time the guide was written, Ritzenthaler was employed by a government institution with one of the largest motion picture film collections in the country. If film now had so little visibility at the National Archives, what could its position be at other levels of government?

### **The Film Archive Movement**

Even as motion pictures were discounted in the traditional archival literature, there also existed a parallel film archive literature that grew throughout the 1980s and focused on institutions created for the sole purpose of collecting films. Whereas the traditional theorists had a hard time bringing film into the fold of traditional, textual records, the film archives theorists were often uninterested in films that claimed to be government records. For example, in *A Handbook for Film Archives*, put out by the International Federation of Film Archives, the methods of film acquisition outlined are “gift, exchange with other archives, purchase, loan, [and] deposit.” The description of “deposit” given has more in common with the copyright deposit at the Library of Congress than the transfer of archival records to the National Archives.<sup>22</sup> An UNESCO guide to archival appraisal of moving images released shortly after the FIAF guide includes this warning on the first page: “Since moving image

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<sup>21</sup> Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, *Archives and Manuscripts: Conservation* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1983). The 2010 update to this volume does include two whole paragraphs about motion picture film.

<sup>22</sup> John Kuiper, “Acquisition and Selection,” in *A Handbook for Film Archives*, eds. Eileen Bowser and John Kuiper, (Brussels: FIAF Secretariat, 1980), 9-12.

records are seldom part of government records series, and therefore firmly grounded as to provenance and evidentiary function, they are not readily accessible in the context of the activity that initiated their production.”<sup>23</sup> The UNESCO guide, like most of the film archive literature, is more helpful when dealing with non-governmental film.

### **Motion Pictures Return to Archival Literature**

In the 1990s there began a shift in the way that traditional archival theorists chose to approach motion picture film. This shift can be symbolized by Taylor’s opening address to the 1992 “Documents that Move and Speak” symposium. Taylor acknowledged that traditional approaches tended to consider audiovisual records “decidedly ‘odd-ball,’ the exception, almost an aberration within a deposit of predominantly textual material.” He realized that a change was necessary because audiovisual documents were moving toward a more central role in society. As that happens, he argued, archivists must be able to adapt, not just because more audiovisual records are being created, but also because the consumers of archival material will seek out oral or visual, rather than textual, modes of communication.<sup>24</sup> Over the past twenty years, archivists and theorists have had no choice but to take motion picture films more seriously. In fact, when archivists advocate for a particular appraisal

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<sup>23</sup> Sam Kula, *The Archival Appraisal of Moving Images: A RAMP Study with Guidelines* (Paris: UNESCO, 1983), 1.

<sup>24</sup> Hugh A. Taylor, “Opening Address to the ‘Documents that Move and Speak’ Symposium,” in *Imagining Archives: Essays and Reflections by Hugh A. Taylor*, eds. Terry Cook and Gordon Dodds (Lanham, Md., and Oxford: Society of American Archivists and Association of Canadian Archivists in association with The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2003), 188-92.

scheme, the ability to deal with all media in the same way as text is sometimes offered as a selling point, as in the case of Macroappraisal.<sup>25</sup>

Motion picture films have not yet been entirely accepted in the archival literature as likely archival records, but more and more often they have their defenders. In his 2005 SAA guide to selection and appraisal, Frank Boles used his final chapter to insist that archivists must end the “ghettoization” of non-paper-based record formats. He wrote, “The criteria that archivists consider when selecting any set of records applies to all sets of records, regardless of means of inscription and the medium upon which the inscription is made. Thus, the selection processes outlined in the preceding chapters of this manual are intended to apply to all media.”<sup>26</sup> This really isn’t that different from what Schellenberg wrote fifty years before, but given this new emphasis it may soon affect how government archivists approach records. There is no question that the literature is changing. The evolution of the Australian text, *Keeping Archives*, gives us the starkest example of this progression. The first volume, released in 1987, contained only scattered references to motion picture records. By 1993 there was a whole chapter devoted to “Managing Records in Special Formats” with nine pages dedicated to moving images (both film and video). The latest version, from 2008, has an entire chapter titled “Moving Images.”<sup>27</sup> In light of the new tone of the literature, it is time

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<sup>25</sup> See Catherine Bailey, “From the Top Down: The Practice of Macro-Appraisal,” *Archivaria* 53 (Spring 1997): 98 and Terry Cook, “Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives,” *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001): 30-1.

<sup>26</sup> Frank Boles, *Selecting & Appraising Archives & Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2005), 125.

<sup>27</sup> Ann Pederson, ed., *Keeping Archives* (Sydney: Australian Society of Archivists Incorporated, 1987); Judith Ellis, ed., *Keeping Archives, Second Edition*, (Port Melbourne, Victoria: D W Thorpe in association with the Australian Society of Archivists, 1993); and Jackie Bettington and others, eds., *Keeping Archives, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* (Canberra: Australian Society of Archivists, Inc., 2008).

for government archivists to reevaluate their relationship with motion pictures because soon ignorance will no longer be an excuse for neglect.

### **Theory Impacts Practice**

A review of state archives websites is somewhat encouraging.<sup>28</sup> Twenty-four of the websites provide access to a definition of records that can easily be interpreted to accept motion picture film as a record. Some states provide a definition that is explicitly format neutral. The Nebraska State Historical Society uses the following paragraph on its “Government Records” page to explain the nature of a public record: “Public records are the records of government. They are created or received at all levels, from the smallest village to the largest federal agency. They are public because public funds support their creation and use. *They are public records no matter what their format.* They are open for inspection by anyone, unless closed by law” [emphasis added].<sup>29</sup> Also common is a format-inclusive approach, as found in the Alaska General Administrative Records Retention Schedule. Here a record can be “any document, paper, book, letter, drawing, map, plat, photo, photographic file, motion picture film, microfilm, microphotograph, exhibit, magnetic or paper tape, punched card, electronic record, or other document of any other material, regardless of physical form or characteristic . . . .”<sup>30</sup> This approach is similar to that taken by Schellenberg;

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<sup>28</sup> This portion is based on a review of websites for the agency in charge of public records for each of the fifty states. This required looking at websites for state archives, libraries, historical societies, and other state agencies or departments, but in this paper I will use the term “state archives” to apply to all types. I performed the research and accessed the websites on January 7 and 8, 2012.

<sup>29</sup> Nebraska State Historical Society, “Government Records,” <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/research/public/index.shtml>.

<sup>30</sup> Department of Education & Early Development, Division of Libraries, Archives &

though the enumerated formats have multiplied, the results are the same. Whether a definition is format neutral or format inclusive, motion picture films are accepted as a potential record.

Once a state archives has accepted that film records may exist, they don't always treat them in the same way as other records. One trend that is uncovered in an examination of general records schedules is the incorporation of Brichford's mistaken classification of motion picture film as a functional category rather than a format. Of the state general schedules available online, twelve of them schedule motion pictures and other non-text media separately from records scheduled by function. For example, item GAR-038 on the Delaware Public Archives' General Records Schedule for state agencies is titled "Motion Pictures/Video Recordings/Sound Recordings," and covers both non-archival films and those requiring permanent retention. Those considered permanent are films "created to document agency activities and events, public relations, promotions," and more. However, similar functions are also covered in other items on the schedule, such as GAR-020, "Public Relations Files."<sup>31</sup> This introduces us to a paradox often faced by those caring for motion picture film in the archives. Film is set aside to receive special attention, as in the Delaware schedule, and as a result, archivists can't ignore it. Yet, as it is singled out, film is subordinated to more traditional formats as Other. But, if that special recognition is removed

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Museums, Archives & Records Management Program, "State of Alaska General Administrative Records Retention Schedule #100.3,"

[http://www.archives.state.ak.us/pdfs/records\\_management/gen\\_admin\\_rec\\_retention\\_schedule.pdf](http://www.archives.state.ak.us/pdfs/records_management/gen_admin_rec_retention_schedule.pdf), iii.

<sup>31</sup> "State Agency General Records Retention Schedule, Administrative Records, Revised 2011,"

<http://archives.delaware.gov/govsvcs/pdfs/General%20Records%20Retention%20Schedules/State%20Agency%20General%20Records%20Schedule/Administrative%20Records.pdf>.

in order to treat all formats as equal, film will often be overlooked in favor of familiar formats.

In spite of the fact that many state archives have records schedules or collecting policies that should result in the retention of film records, very few advertise their existence on the Internet. Most of the archives that include extensive information about films are calling attention to collections that were donated or acquired from local news stations, rather than transferred from government agencies. In fact, only two state archives do much to attract attention to their motion picture records. Both the New York State Archives and the Ohio State Archives include links to their audiovisual collections at the top of the menus on their home pages.<sup>32</sup> While Ohio does not yet have much more than a listing of film collections (among which are collections from different state agencies), New York has digitized a number of government films and uploaded them to the Archives' YouTube channel.<sup>33</sup>

If state and other government archives follow the trends evident in archival literature, we may soon be seeing more attention directed toward government films. The theoretical conversation must be reoriented so that the focus is not limited to textual records, otherwise we risk the destruction of records that can add dimension and depth to our understanding of governments' past actions and policies. Hopefully, archivists will continue to find their preconceptions about records challenged in books and journals, and then shift their thinking to encompass "oddball" formats such as film. When this happens, both archival institutions and patrons will benefit.

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<sup>32</sup> Ohio Historical Society, "Ohio Historical Society—Resources—State Archives," <http://www.ohiohistory.org/resource/statearc/> and New York State Archives, "New York State Archives Homepage," <http://www.archives.nysed.gov/aindex.shtml>.

<sup>33</sup> "nysarchives's Channel—YouTube," <http://www.youtube.com/nysarchives>.

## Chapter Two

### **Authentic Images: The Interface of Film and Theory in the Government Archives**

Over the past thirty years, the documentary universe has exploded, much like a second Big Bang. Instead of taking the time to prepare and send a physical memo, an e-mail can be dashed off almost at the speed of thought. Where filmmakers were once limited to ten minutes of shooting time on a roll of film, a person can now record for two hours straight before worrying that the capacity of a memory card might be reached. This proliferation of captured information has also meant a proliferation of the records that governments and other institutions must manage. For archivists used to dealing with textual records fixed to an eye-readable, physical medium, the challenges presented by electronic records have forced a reevaluation of the concept of a record. Some have responded by arguing that a narrow definition should be adhered to; a definition that would give archivists and records managers a better chance of keeping up with the record creators. At the same time there is a perspective, influenced by postmodernist theory, that fears that limiting the definition too much will lead to further marginalization of the powerless in society.

The fact that these debates have not been definitively settled provides an excellent opportunity to revisit the status of film as a government record. As the thinking on records remains in flux, film's differences from textual records are similar to the differences between electronic and traditional records. Throughout the debate, electronic records have gained status and recognition from records professionals and there should be no reason why motion picture records cannot do the same. Much of the archival literature stimulated by a

confrontation with electronic records can be adapted and applied to motion pictures. Film captures and presents evidence and information in different ways than textual records, but the perspectives it offers are in demand by users. After a thorough consideration of what it means for a motion picture film to be a record, it is hoped that archivists and archival theorists will recognize the values they bring to the aggregated collections in a government archives.

### **Motion Picture Films and “Concepts of Record”**

One of the most intensive meditations on the concepts behind records, and also one of the most useful when thinking about motion picture film, is Geoffrey Yeo’s two-part article series published in the *American Archivist* in 2007 and 2008.<sup>1</sup> Over the course of the articles, Yeo develops an inclusive definition of the term “records,” characterizing them as “persistent representations of activities or other occurrences, created by participants or observers of those occurrences or by their proxies; or sets of such representations representing particular occurrences.”<sup>2</sup> This definition is broad enough to include paper documents, electronic databases, and also motion picture film in the universe of records. But, even more important for motion pictures than Yeo’s ultimate definition is the path of reasoning he takes to get there. Using his discussions of prototype theory, boundary objects, and the affordances of records, we can help to illuminate what it means for a film to be a record, including the inevitable differences that exist between film and textual means of representing government activities.

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Yeo, “Concepts of Record (1): Evidence, Information, and Persistent Representations,” *American Archivist* 70 (Fall/Winter 2007): 315-343 and Geoffrey Yeo, “Concepts of Record (2): Prototypes and Boundary Objects,” *American Archivist* 71 (Spring/Summer 2008): 118-143.

<sup>2</sup> Yeo, “Concepts of Record (2),” 136.

Prototype theory is a theory in psychology exploring how humans approach categorization. A person holds a particular mental prototype for a category, allowing for graded membership in the category, based on how similar or dissimilar something is to the ideal form. The mental prototype for a category is not absolute; each person will conceive of the prototype based upon her own experience with the category.<sup>3</sup> It is useful to consider the characteristics of the prototype of a record in order to understand the gap that most archivists see between motion picture films and more-uncontested record formats. Yeo identifies several characteristics of the prevailing prototype: A record is a document. It is written and printed on paper. It is created within an institutional framework and is kept within that context.<sup>4</sup> It is not difficult to think of others: Records fit neatly into record groups and series and are easily described in that way. They are used by researchers producing textual products. They are not produced for publication or distribution beyond the organization that created them.

In this view, motion picture films, if they fall into the category of record at all, are very distant from the prototype. This is not due to a defect of film as a medium, but to a defect in the prototype. Archivists need a new prototype for records, not just to accommodate film and other audiovisual records, but also to encompass electronic records. By identifying records as “persistent representations” rather than documents, Yeo has opened up the definition of a record to include these formats. However, the process of archivists and records professionals incorporating such shifts into their own mental prototypes of a record will likely take some time to complete. Government archivists working with film will have to

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<sup>3</sup> Yeo, “Concepts of Record (2),” 119-20.

<sup>4</sup> Yeo, “Concepts of Record (2),” 122-4.

play a vocal role in ensuring that their organizations incorporate film into the record prototype before the shift is complete.

Just as we can identify a prototype for records overall, there is also a prototype of motion picture film records that must be examined. It is influenced by the overall prototype and shares some of its same weaknesses. A prototypical film record can be considered to consist of original camera film, either negative or reversal, edited or uncut. It will have been created or collected by a government agency, undergone laboratory procedures according to a defined standard operating procedure, and then kept by that government agency before transfer to the archives. The record will also include auxiliary documentation detailing the actions that have been performed on the record by the agency or its proxies.<sup>5</sup> While it would be very nice indeed if all motion picture film records complied with this prototype, in many cases, if not most, the material available for transfer to the archives deviates from the desired elements. For example, the archivist may receive a single projection print and no other material to attest to how the film was used or altered by the agency. This can be traced back to lax treatment by agencies unconvinced that the films they created or collected were analogous to the paper records they expected to transfer to the archives. Fortunately, the physical characteristics of motion picture film help to mitigate some of these challenges.

The complex physical form of motion picture film makes it very difficult for the records to be tampered with in an undetectable way. If an archives is in possession of a roll of original camera negative with no splices, you can be virtually certain that the record now

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<sup>5</sup> My description of the film record prototype is influenced by National Archives and Records Administration, *Managing Audiovisual Records, Second Edition*, National Archives and Records Administration Instructional Guide Series (College Park, Md.: National Archives and Records Administration, Office of Records Administration, 1996).

is materially the same as the record when it was first created, aside from possible fading and the scratches that come with use. Any effort to alter the image to sustained effect would be immediately apparent during a standard inspection. Even in an edited film, alterations leave visible traces. Someone who is familiar with motion picture film can ascertain to a high degree of certainty what was done to a film to put it into its current state. The existence of such “extrinsic characteristics of authenticity”<sup>6</sup> contributes to the establishment of diplomatic authenticity for the film, even when the chain of custody is muddied. While such films may not possess all the characteristics of the prototypical record, or even the prototypical motion picture record, they are not distant enough to preclude their inclusion in the category of “record.”

Yeo’s musings on the concepts of record also incorporate the sociological theory of boundary objects. The archival object he uses to illustrate this concept is the report, as it can be seen both as a record and an information product, having a place in both the archival and library worlds. These boundary objects do not necessarily sit exactly at the boundary between two categories, but they have characteristics that can place them in more than one location.<sup>7</sup> The boundary object concept is very useful when considering films for inclusion in the category of record. While some films, such as those recording gubernatorial speeches or military combat, are accepted as representing the activities of government, others are more similar to the reports that Yeo identified as also belonging to the category of information products. Although many government films, like reports, were created for public dissemination, at the same time they also provide evidence of what the government was

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<sup>6</sup> Nancy Bartlett, “Diplomatics for Photographic Images: Academic Exoticism?,” *American Archivist* 59, no. 4 (Fall 1996): 490.

<sup>7</sup> Yeo, “Concepts of Record (2),” 130-2.

telling the public about its policies. It may straddle the border between the categories, but the produced government film has a strong claim to the designation of record. Additionally, it is common to see government films that also belong to categories such as museum artifact or art. In fact, several government productions have won Oscars.<sup>8</sup> Archivists should never allow a film's similarity to another category to be the sole ground for excluding it from the archives. If it meets the requirements necessary to be considered a record, it belongs in the context provided by the other records of the creating agency.

A third component to the record concept that Yeo explores is that of the affordances provided by records. He uses the term "to refer to the properties and functions provided by a resource," and likens it to the "values" of records described by Schellenberg. Records, as persistent representations of activity, provide us with evidence and information. Other affordances identified include "memory, accountability, legitimization of power, a sense of personal or social identity and continuity, and the communication of such benefits across space and time."<sup>9</sup> When considering the "properties and functions" provided by records, it is essential that we recognize that film records provide these things in different ways than traditional, textual records. This is not to say that film records don't provide evidence, information, or memory, but that these properties are shaped differently by our experience of the record.

When a motion picture is created by a government agency, it is usually because someone has determined that making a film is the best way to meet the needs of the agency for a particular purpose. Because films and other audiovisual formats are much more difficult

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<sup>8</sup> For example, *Nine From Little Rock* and *December 7<sup>th</sup>*.

<sup>9</sup> Yeo, "Concepts of Record (1)," 329-31.

(and expensive) to produce and manage than paper records, we must accept that the agency deliberately chose to produce a film rather than a textual record.<sup>10</sup> Films are often called “documents that move and speak” and their ability to capture and reproduce what is happening in “real time and space”<sup>11</sup> broadens the capacity of archives to meet the research needs of their users. For example, military training films teach troops how to identify enemy planes by watching how they move, hearing how they sound, and seeing their silhouettes from different perspectives. Other formats might be able to meet some of these goals independently, but not all three at once.

In order to understand the affordances that motion pictures provide, archivists must, as Hugh Taylor says, “resist reading the ‘new’ media in a literal, textual manner and begin to learn unfamiliar grammar, syntax, and semiotics, and then teach our users to do the same.”<sup>12</sup> Elisabeth Kaplan and Jeffrey Mifflin provide some of the tools to help us do just that. They identify three levels of visual awareness that we must navigate to understand the evidence and the information provided by visual records, including motion pictures. The first, superficial level, determines what a film is “of.” What is depicted? The second level, the film’s “aboutness,” requires a knowledge of the context in which the events depicted

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<sup>10</sup> Ralph E. Ehrenberg, “Aural and Graphic Archives and Manuscripts,” in *A Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory and Practice*, eds. Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walch (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1984), 187.

<sup>11</sup> Louise Curham and Robyn Gamble, “Moving Images,” in *Keeping Archives, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, ed. Jackie Bettington and others (Canberra, ACT, Australia: Australian Society of Archivists, Inc., 2008), 594.

<sup>12</sup> Hugh A. Taylor, “Opening Address to the ‘Documents that Move and Speak’ Symposium,” in *Imagining Archives: Essays and Reflections by Hugh A. Taylor*, eds. Terry Cook and Gordon Dodds (Lanham, Md., and Oxford: Society of American Archivists and Association of Canadian Archivists in association with The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2003), 186.

occurred. What is the image really about? The third level incorporates abstract elements, such as editing, camerawork, and filmmaking conventions at the time the image was shot. How does the way in which the film was shot affect our perceptions of the content, and how would it have affected the perceptions of the original audience?<sup>13</sup> For many films we also must consider how sound is used. Because film must be read differently from text, archivists should become familiar with its conventions. Otherwise they risk accessioning items with marginal evidential value and overlooking those that are strong sources of evidence. Similarly, important information may remain just below the surface for those who neglect to become audiovisually literate.

In some cases the immersive, audiovisual nature of motion picture records can magnify how an affordance operates for record users. Yeo puts memory near the top of his list of the affordances of records, and both textual and film records are used to illustrate and shape memory in our society. Because it allows us to see and hear representations of past actuality, film is already more analogous to how we remember the past. If you are prompted to think about Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, it is likely that some of the images your mind associates with that topic, whether you lived through the sixties or not, are King speaking in front of the Lincoln Memorial as well as the reverse shot of the reflecting pool surrounded by an immense crowd. Your "memory" of the event may even be in black and white. These images come from a United States Information Agency film titled *The March*, a federal record now found at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). The power of film to extend memory and a real feeling of engagement to people

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<sup>13</sup> Elisabeth Kaplan and Jeffrey Mifflin, "'Mind and Sight': Visual Literacy and the Archivist," in *American Archival Studies: Readings in Theory and Practice*, ed. Randall C. Jimerson (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2000), 79-81.

with little proximity to a historical event is described by Alison Landsberg in her work on what she dubs “prosthetic memory.” These memories “are neither purely individual nor entirely collective but emerge at the interface of individual and collective experience. They are privately felt public memories that develop after an encounter with a mass cultural representation of the past, when new images and ideas come into contact with a person’s own archive of experience.”<sup>14</sup> Recognizing films as records with a place in the archives grants these institutions greater power to affect citizens’ shared memories of experience. The importance of this power should be acknowledged and any lingering resistance to the acceptance of film alongside textual records abandoned.

### **Motion Picture Films as Evidence**

Evidence and information have long been counted by American archivists as the primary affordances of records. In the face of the growing volume of electronic records, some archivists began advocating a redefinition of what it takes for something to be a record in order to help control the coming flood. They demoted informational values and focused on evidence as the only value that matters when evaluating records for inclusion in the archives. The conflict between evidence and information has been present in the discipline since the time of Jenkinson and Schellenberg, but vocal proponents of this “new paradigm” are prolific evangelists for a strict definition of records. In addition to valuing records for the evidence they provide, these theorists also argue that for something to be a record it must also be

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<sup>14</sup> Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 19.

trustworthy as evidence in the legal sense.<sup>15</sup> The renewed focus that this places on custody and the authenticity of records has important consequences for archival materials, such as film, for which digitization will soon be a necessary component of preservation. These and related issues will be addressed in the next chapter, but first we must examine how an evidential focus, as opposed to an informational or cultural focus, impacts how archivists evaluate government films.

For “new paradigm” theorists, the object of a record is often identified by the term “transaction.” Records give evidence of transactions. This idea is not a new one in American archival literature. Margaret Cross Norton wrote about government archives’ responsibility for preserving records of “business transactions” in the 1930s.<sup>16</sup> As it is typically used today, the word “transaction” connotes an exchange, usually of money, information, or services. It is difficult to see how motion picture films fit with that use of the word, except perhaps in the case of films created by a government to impart information to citizens. But, to transact can also mean to do or carry on<sup>17</sup>; in this case “business transactions” can be recognized as the activities of business. Recent definitions of the term “record” tend to stress the congruity of transactions and activity.<sup>18</sup> Richard Cox links the words when, in arguing for the primacy of

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<sup>15</sup> Frank Boles, *Selecting & Appraising Archives & Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2005), 24-6.

<sup>16</sup> Margaret C. Norton, “The Scope and Function of Archives,” in *Norton on Archives: The Writings of Margaret Cross Norton on Archival and Records Management*, ed. Thornton W. Mitchell (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2003), 13.

<sup>17</sup> The definitions of “transact” in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary include “to carry on business” (intransitive) and “to carry on the operation or management of: do” (transitive).

<sup>18</sup> For example, see Philip C. Bantin, “Electronic Records Management—A Review of the Work of a Decade and a Reflection on Future Directions,” *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science*, Volume 71, Supplement 34 (2002): 47-81. Citation is found on page 11 of the document version available at [www.indiana.edu/~libarch/ER/encycloarticle9.doc](http://www.indiana.edu/~libarch/ER/encycloarticle9.doc) (accessed February 11, 2012).

evidential over informational values, he writes: “Warrant—policies, procedures, best practices, legal, and other reasons for creation of records—leads to records that are evidence of activity (transactions) . . . . If records professionals focus on evidence and the needs for it, they will capture most, if not all, of the information needed.”<sup>19</sup>

Cox’s description of warrant provides us with a list of several reasons that governments create records. The list also can be used to describe why governments make films. In the federal government, a primary purpose of the Department of Agriculture since its founding has been the distribution of information.<sup>20</sup> The films created by the department fulfilled a policy requirement, by communicating information in a way that would reach and be understood by a mass audience much more effectively than pamphlets or articles. Even in government agencies that do not see information distribution as their reason for being, many use films or videos in order to educate citizens about the policies they are tasked with carrying out. In the military we tend to see films required by procedure, as many of them document specific actions taken during war, such as bombing runs over Italy in 1943 or Vietnam in 1969. Such films undoubtedly provide evidence of the activities (or transactions) of government.

Most government-produced films fit into three general categories. First are those that are documentary in the strictest sense. Usually consisting of unedited raw footage, these are the films that record legislative press conferences, space shuttle launches, or geographical surveys. These films are the most patently evidential in the sense of directly recording the

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<sup>19</sup> Richard J. Cox, *No Innocent Deposits: Forming Archives by Rethinking Appraisal* (Lanham, Md.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2004), 172-3.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Dyer MacCann, *The People’s Films: A Political History of U.S. Government Motion Pictures* (New York: Hastings House, 1973), 52-3.

activities of government. A second category is the informational film, used to educate the audience. This form of information dissemination is often used to provide information to the public about existing government programs and how to take advantage of them. Sometimes, the dissemination of information is central to the mission of a government agency, and a film is the most effective form of communication. In both cases, the films provide a more accessible form of evidence of government activity than any number of reports and studies that might cover the same topics. Finally, related to the informational film, is the point-of-view film. Sometimes known by the more culturally-loaded sobriquet “propaganda,” these films are deliberately created to advocate a particular point of view. While they include the films of the United States Information Agency (USIA) and war films such as the “Why We Fight” series, this category also contains films produced by state tourism offices to convince vacationers to visit. In addition to being principal information products of offices tasked with adjusting perceptions, these attempts to shape public opinion often reveal evidence of the aspirations of a government even when they don’t perfectly reflect its policies or the reality on the ground.

In addition to films produced by government agencies are those collected by agencies during the course of business. Sometimes collecting documents or films is part of an agency’s mission, as in the case of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The CIA record group at NARA contains films of all types that were collected during investigations. During wartime, the military often captured films from enemy forces and governments. In more mundane cases, government agencies acquired and redistributed films from private sources if they bolstered the agency’s efforts to educate the public about an issue. Though not created

by governments, films received and used by government agencies can reflect the agency's mission and actions.

While all such films provide evidence of governmental activity, users must learn to read what is being communicated. Just as films provide different affordances than other record formats, we should not expect them to be evidential in exactly the same way as textual materials. They don't contain footnotes or citations, and may appear more naturalistic than a prepared memo or report. It is true that in order to engage film as evidence, we need "a kind of source criticism that takes into account the specific features of the medium, the language of the moving picture."<sup>21</sup> This is where Kaplan and Mifflin's work on "reading" visual records can be put to use. For example, when analyzing the USIA film *Tomas and the Huks*<sup>22</sup>, we can say that on the most basic level it is a children's film using puppets to tell the story of a young boy lured into becoming a Communist guerrilla in the Philippines. However, the film is really "about" much more. It can be considered as one small part of the American anti-Communist campaign, waged through propaganda, combat, and military aid throughout the Cold War. The fact it was directed at children shows the broad scope of the USIA's anti-Communist information activities; any child who could be prevented from accepting the ideology of the Huks was one fewer guerrilla to threaten America's allies in the future. On an abstract level,<sup>23</sup> we can see how the filmmakers, as best they were able when their actors

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<sup>21</sup> Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001), 155.

<sup>22</sup> Motion Picture 306.4665; "Tomas and the Huks," ca. 1952; General Records of the U.S. Information Agency, Record Group 306; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>23</sup> For help in learning this aspect of reading movies, a good basic text is Louis Giannetti, *Understanding Movies* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2005).

were puppets, use camera positioning and angle to increase the menacing aspects of the Huks.

Another facet of the evidential value of records is linked more closely to the legal definition of evidence. Rule 901(a) of the Federal Rules of Evidence requires that for an item or record to be admitted to the court as evidence “the proponent must produce evidence sufficient to support a finding that the item is what the proponent claims it is.” Archival records tend to meet the requirements of a more specific provision in Rule 902(4) on self-authenticating evidence, which allows the admission of public records certified as correct by “the custodian or another person authorized to make the certification” or with another accepted form of certification. The custodian, often an archivist, who provides the certification must do so based on his knowledge of the recordkeeping systems that brought the record in question into his care, as well as knowledge about other characteristics of the record. Both Cox and Philip C. Bantin link the preservation of evidence to the maintenance of a record’s content, structure, and context.<sup>24</sup> Without understanding the structure or form of a record, and its context of creation, an archivist cannot attest to the reliability of the record’s content. As described previously, because motion picture films sometimes traveled outside of the custody of the appropriate recordkeeper, understanding their structure and context is of even greater importance in ensuring that their content provides evidence when measured against rigorous legal requirements. Fortunately, the structure and context of the majority of motion picture records can be verified to a degree that allows archivists to provide the certification necessary for them to be accepted as evidence in the legal sense.

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<sup>24</sup> Cox, 174 and Bantin, 11.

## ***Nazi Concentration Camps: A Case Study in Evidence and Beyond***

Although there are many examples of film used as evidence in legal cases, perhaps the most famous piece of filmic evidence is *Nazi Concentration Camps*, admitted by the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg after World War II. The film is a 6,000 foot documentary, created by selecting and editing from 80,000 feet of film recorded by Allied forces during and after the liberation of the camps. The film includes narration taken from reports submitted by the military personnel who shot the footage.<sup>25</sup> The use of this footage and the photographers' reports as legal evidence of the Holocaust is not congruent with a determination of evidential value in the archival sense, since in the archives the focus has traditionally been on evidence of *government* activities and transactions. However, by examining the context of the creation and use of *Nazi Concentration Camps*, and the broader usefulness of films documenting the Holocaust, we begin to understand that appraising government motion pictures only for their evidential value can be overly limiting and could lead to the loss of film records that play a myriad of important roles in our society.

Much of the source material for *Nazi Concentration Camps* was filmed by American military units, including the Army Signal Corps and the Army Air Forces. These government records are now housed at NARA.<sup>26</sup> Though the films effectively capture the horrors of the Holocaust, that multi-year event is not their primary evidential focus. Using definitions of record that stress evidential values above all else, these films should be viewed as evidence of the activities of the United States military. In this case the activities include liberating the

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<sup>25</sup> Lawrence Douglas, "Film As Witness: Screening Nazi Concentration Camps Before the Nuremberg Tribunal," *Yale Law Journal* 105 (November 1995): 454.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Lawrence Gellert, *The Holocaust, Israel, and the Jews: Motion Pictures in the National Archives* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1989) is the published finding aid. The entry for *Nazi Concentration Camps* is on page 33.

camps and attempting to comprehend what had happened there. From the new paradigm perspective, these films are valuable only secondarily as evidence of the atrocities committed by the Nazis or for the documentary information they provide.

In spite of this, *Nazi Concentration Camps* and the other films have taken on the role of standing as some of the most powerful evidence of what the Holocaust was. In addition to acting as evidence of Nazi crimes during the Nuremberg Tribunal, *Nazi Concentration Camps* was used as recently as 1985 to prove the truth of the Holocaust in a Canadian trial of a Holocaust denier.<sup>27</sup> Motion picture film is especially well positioned to provide such evidence. John Kuiper notes that film can “confirm and make vivid for future generations the nature of actions which might, from written evidence alone, overwhelm judgment” if only written or verbal descriptions survived.<sup>28</sup> In addition to these extra dimensions of evidence and information provided by the films, Landsberg identifies the power they possess to provide meaningful links to the past as one of their affordances. She argues that “mass media have begun to construct sites—what I term *transferential spaces*—in which people are invited to enter into experiential relationships to events through which they themselves did not live. Through such spaces people may gain access to a range of processual, sensually immersed knowledge that would be difficult to acquire by purely cognitive means” [emphasis in original].<sup>29</sup> The images of the Holocaust in film records produce a visceral emotional reaction that becomes linked to our memory of the images on the films, and also our “memory” of the events themselves. This is likely the reason Steven Spielberg chose to

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<sup>27</sup> Douglas, 478.

<sup>28</sup> John B. Kuiper, “The Historical Value of Motion Pictures,” *American Archivist* 31, no. 4 (October 1968): 389.

<sup>29</sup> Landsberg, 113.

film *Schindler's List* almost entirely in black and white: he was tapping into a connection between image and emotion that had already been formed in those who had experienced documentary images of the Holocaust.

### **Memory, Accountability, and the Non-Governmental Film**

If we accept that American military films can be highly valuable for more than the evidence they provide of military transactions or activity, we must confront what this means for our understanding of film records. There are many non-governmental films created that, although not providing evidence of government activity, do provide other affordances that are valuable in our society. These may include information about historical events or regionally important industries that eventually affects the decisions made by governments at all levels. Some provide us with a sense of shared memory or experience that links us to the national community. Others help to enforce government accountability by shining a light on issues that officeholders might find easier, and more politically convenient, to ignore. Many government archives already look beyond the records of government when deciding what to accession. For example, 44 USC § 2111 allows NARA to accept films from private sources and many state archives have collecting policies allowing the donation of non-governmental material.<sup>30</sup> If a government archives does choose to accept films from other sources it must ensure that a thoughtful collecting policy exists in order to limit the collected material to that which provides the affordances it wants to highlight.

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<sup>30</sup> For an example see Idaho State Archives, "Donate Materials to the Archives Collection," <http://www.history.idaho.gov/isa-collections-donations> (accessed March 17, 2012).

Memory is an important factor to consider. Aside from Landsberg's prosthetic memory, films also provide a source of cultural memory. Less personal and visceral than the prosthetic variety, cultural memory, as identified by Jan Assmann, "comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose 'cultivation' serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image."<sup>31</sup> This kind of memory is part of the cultural glue that binds citizens together as Americans, Texans, or New Yorkers. Cultural memory is tapped when a Washingtonian watches films about salmon hatcheries or the lumber industry and feels a connection to the community of which she counts herself a member. In addition to providing a general sense of cultural memory, films can also be viewed as objects of memory. In his own contemplation of the many values provided by films, John G. Bradley reflects that World War II combat footage "was taken at a terrific cost of human lives." Bradley argues that such films are entitled to a close evaluation before a decision is made to dispose of them.<sup>32</sup> In addition to providing memory, film can act as memorial.

A concern with memory animates Mark Greene as he argues that the "new paradigm" should be considered as a recordkeeping paradigm within a larger archival paradigm, lest we diminish the importance and usefulness of archives. Greene also writes about the importance that non-governmental records can play in documenting history and enforcing government accountability, referring to both the recordings of the White House War Room after the

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<sup>31</sup> Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," trans. John Czaplicka, *New German Critique* 65 (Spring-Summer 1995): 132.

<sup>32</sup> John G. Bradley, *The Proposed Government Film Repository* ([Washington, DC]: National Archives, [1945]), 5-6.

assassination attempt on Ronald Reagan and the Zapruder film.<sup>33</sup> Without the preservation of these sources, both our documented national history and our understanding of how a government reacts to crisis would suffer. Reto Tschan similarly contemplates the appropriate balance between evidence and other values in archival appraisal. He concedes that appraisal “must be based on the needs of the creator in fulfilling their own administrative and legal functions, but that an archives which preserved only those records created by governmental or organizational bureaucracies would fail to meet our expectations of the role which archives have come to play in providing a sense of national and cultural history.”<sup>34</sup> In order to meet the needs of our users, archivists must look for documentary heritage outside of the institutions of government.

If government archivists decide to accept non-governmental films into their collections, there still must be requirements to assure that they are useful for purposes of evidence, information, memory, or accountability. Though a film may purport to depict a particular subject, if the provenance is unknown the reliability of its content is suspect. Terry Cook recognizes a symbiotic relationship between evidence and values such as memory, stating that, “Without reliable evidence set in context . . . memory becomes counterfeit, or at least is transformed into forgery, manipulation, or imagination. Without the influence of and need for memory, evidence is useless and unused.”<sup>35</sup> When a non-governmental film is accessioned into the archives, archivists must be sure that any necessary contextual information about the film is acquired at the same time. For a home movie, this could include

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<sup>33</sup> Mark A. Greene, “The Power of Meaning: The Archival Mission in the Postmodern Age,” *American Archivist* 65 (Spring/Summer 2002): 48.

<sup>34</sup> Reto Tschan, “A Comparison of Jenkinson and Schellenberg on Appraisal,” *American Archivist* 65, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2002): 195.

<sup>35</sup> Terry Cook quoted in Boles, 39.

a written narrative from the donor explaining when and where it was shot, and identifying the people featured. Newsreels often contain much of the information necessary to identify their content within the image, such as the date, the subjects covered, and the company that produced them. In selecting non-governmental films for acquisition, archivists should do all they can to ensure they are accepting “accurate documentation that will stand up to scrutiny in future contexts.”<sup>36</sup>

### **Using Motion Picture Records**

A final area we must consider in this exploration of motion picture films as government records is the use that the records experience. Some archivists, such as Greene (formerly of the Minnesota Historical Society), have argued for a use-based approach to records appraisal. Greene agrees with Brichford that “use of the archives and the growth of its reputation,” though not perfect, is “the surest proof of sound records appraisal.”<sup>37</sup> As a part of his research, Greene analyzed the use of different types of records in the Historical Society’s railroad collection and discovered that “the percentage of use for correspondence, *audio-visual material*, executive department subject files, and engineering records is proportionately much higher than the percentage of space these series occupy within the total body of railroad records” [emphasis added].<sup>38</sup> While motion picture films would likely make up only a portion of the audio-visual material, the popularity of audio-visual records indicates

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<sup>36</sup> Grace Lile quoted in Randall C. Jimerson, *Archives Power: Memory, Accountability, and Social Justice* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2009), 358.

<sup>37</sup> Mark Greene, ““The Surest Proof”: A Utilitarian Approach to Appraisal,” in *American Archival Studies: Readings in Theory and Practice*, ed. Randall C. Jimerson (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2000), 342.

<sup>38</sup> Greene, 319.

that users want access to material with images or audio, both attributes that may be provided by films. The concentration of user-perceived value in audio-visual records may be linked to the fact that their creation was probably more deliberate than the creation of textual records. Ralph E. Ehrenberg notes that the creation of “nonscript, nonprint materials,” often requiring multiple people to perform the work of “compilation, editing, printing and processing” and costing more to create, tended to “weed out” trivial records before they were executed and fixed.<sup>39</sup> As motion pictures are often the most expensive and difficult format to create, the effect on them would be even greater than on photographs or audio recordings. Since the films accessioned by an archives are often only a slice of the films produced, those in the archival holdings should represent the best of the best.

Government films are used by different types of researchers for many purposes. For example, Air Force films might be viewed by airplane buffs. All types of films are used as source material for historical and scholarly research.<sup>40</sup> But, since government films often don’t have the same copyright restrictions as films created by private production companies, a great deal of their use is among filmmakers and television producers. While all of the forms of use described above are examples of direct use of motion picture records, this final form brings archival material to indirect users. As Mary Jo Pugh writes, “Indirect users may never enter an archives or archival Web site, but benefit nevertheless from archival information by

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<sup>39</sup> Ehrenberg, 187.

<sup>40</sup> Some examples include Devin Orgeron, “Nothing Could Be Finer? George Stoney’s *Tar Heel Family* and the Tar Heel State on Film,” *The Moving Image* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 161-82; Thomas Cripps and David Culbert, “*The Negro Soldier* (1944): Film Propaganda in Black and White,” *American Quarterly* 31, no. 5 (Winter 1979): 616-40; and Bo Jacobs, “Atomic Kids: *Duck and Cover* and *Atomic Alert* Teach American Children How to Survive Atomic Attack,” *Film & History* 40, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 25-44.

using the many and varied products arising from their direct use.”<sup>41</sup> For a popular television production, this could mean an audience of millions. Some of the direct users of archives are researchers working for stock footage houses. These businesses<sup>42</sup> produce a multiplier effect when they order copies of government films and sell further copies to filmmakers who never set foot in the archives, but use the archival material in highly visible productions. The outlets for historical programming expanded rapidly with the growth of cable television, and programmers looking to fill their schedules will keep on returning to government archives for the footage to illustrate their programs.

Although government films are heavily used in documentary programming, most viewers probably never realize it. Because many government films are public domain and acquired second-hand through stock houses, the archives that holds the original materials does not always receive credit. Most viewers probably don’t realize the source of what they see unless they are already familiar with the footage being used. The most ethical users of government film collections are likely to give credit where it is due, but attribution is not guaranteed. This is a problem that archivists must address, as film collections are expensive to preserve, and it will be easier to justify their existence to archives administrators if the true scope of their reach is recognized. The importance of the use of government films in documentary film and television productions should also have an impact on the methods of film preservation an archives decides to employ. While it may be quicker and cheaper to capture film in lower resolution video formats to preserve their content, this diminishes their

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<sup>41</sup> Mary Jo Pugh, *Providing Reference Services for Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2005), 37-40.

<sup>42</sup> An example is the International Historic Films Stock Footage Library, located on the Internet at <http://www.historicvideos.com/stock/>.

usefulness for filmmakers and television producers who now broadcast almost exclusively in high definition. Archives that have employed standard definition videos as reproduction masters in the past may now find that they have to return to the film original to provide the quality and resolution that users want. If use really is “the surest proof” of archival value, archivists must do nothing to compromise the characteristics that ensure constant and far-reaching use.

Films are valued by many users precisely because they provide affordances, such as evidence, information, and memory, differently than other record formats do. The challenge for those working with film in government repositories is in helping their colleagues to understand that just because films are “read” differently than text, doesn’t mean they aren’t valid records. This is especially important as digitization workflows are designed and implemented. By using prototype theory and the idea of boundary objects to think about motion pictures, we can encourage archivists to question their own assumptions about what a record looks like and how it communicates. When testing government films against even the narrowest definitions of records, which value the evidence provided above all else, most films are found to be sources of evidence about government activity. On top of that, films often provide evidence of how government communicates with citizens, enhancing their value further. When a broader definition of records is used—one valuing information, memory, and accountability in addition to evidence—films cannot be denied as a powerful force in the archives. In some cases, as in that of Landsberg’s prosthetic memory, film is able to evoke responses in viewers that no textual record is able to replicate. In order for motion picture records to continue to be trusted sources of all possible affordances, archivists must

do nothing to compromise their integrity as records as they are ushered across the digital threshold.

## Chapter Three

### Up to the Digital Threshold: Maintaining Authentic Motion Picture Records Across Formats

Having considered the interface of motion picture films with the concept of a government record, the next step is to turn toward the challenges presented by the digital future. Over the next decade, we can expect motion picture records to routinely be moved into the digital realm, either because of the current ease of access provided by digital formats or the shift in preservation methods caused by growing uncertainty surrounding the availability of film stock. When an analog film is transferred to a digital format, it must jump a substantial gap between the two technologies, at the risk that the characteristics that provide for its authenticity as a record might be lost. A digital copy that does not preserve sufficient information about the structure and context of the record will have little value as evidence, or anything else, especially if the analog film source is destroyed. Lilly Koltun sees the irony in the belief “that data is ‘salvaged’ or rescued by transference . . . to digital formats; present readability is bought at the cost of even greater ephemerality and more rapid intervals of future reformatting.”<sup>1</sup> This chapter does not attempt to address how to extend the life of digital versions of motion picture films once they have been captured. Instead the focus is on identifying the essential characteristics, both intellectual and structural, that must be included in order to create a digital representation that is worth maintaining.

In order to plan for motion picture digitization, an archives must first understand what the purpose of the digital files will be. Are they being created because it is easier to play a

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<sup>1</sup> Lilly Koltun, “The Promise and Threat of Digital Options in an Archival Age,” *Archivaria* 47 (Spring 1999): 125.

file on the research room computer than to maintain a flatbed film viewer? Are they intended to provide access to holdings over the Internet? Or are they intended to act as replacements for film elements that are deteriorating past the point of usability? Access and preservation uses of digital capture technologies tend to produce very different digital products. Access files are simple to view with standard software and can easily be moved over computer networks, but they don't contain enough information to act as a master from which derivative copies should be made. Conversely, a preservation file (or sequence of files) will often contain so much information that its movement ties up bandwidth and playback requires specialized software. Mike Coyne and Mike Stapleton, writing a report for the U.K.'s Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), found that for moving images "the needs of access and preservation diverge, to a greater extent than with other common form[s] of digital object[s], and files that are made available for easy access are not usually the most appropriate ones for preservation purposes."<sup>2</sup> In order to make better decisions about which digital formats are appropriate for which purposes, we need to be aware of what copying and reformatting does to a record.

Motion pictures and other photographic records are usually created as sources from which copies will be made. Images shot on negative film must be printed to positive stock in order to be easily viewed. With each new generation of copy, there is a small amount of information lost. If you look at a fine grain master printed from an original negative, you will see much more depth to the image than in a print several generations removed from the

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<sup>2</sup> Mike Coyne and Mike Stapleton, "The Significant Properties of Moving Images," [http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/preservation/spmovimages\\_report.pdf](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/preservation/spmovimages_report.pdf) (accessed February 25, 2012), 13. The only version of this report on the JISC website is labeled as a draft. I e-mailed JISC to locate the final report but received no response.

negative, in which many shades of grey have been flattened to black. Digital technology allows us to choose whether to use a film original to make a product akin to the fine grain master, or, just as easily and without the work of printing the intervening generations, a copy that discards or distorts visual information. Ray Edmondson argues that when information and contextual meaning are lost during migration from one format to another the result is a change in the content of the record. From this perspective, a loss of image or sound quality also counts as a change in content.<sup>3</sup> At present, all widely-available forms of digital capture result in a loss of image quality, so archivists need to ask themselves how much quality loss is acceptable for their purposes.

Unfortunately, too many archivists don't make the distinction between digitizing for access and digitizing for preservation, and government archives are some of the most visible offenders. Paolo Cherchi Usai warns:

For the public servants operating in a governmental department, the distinction between 'digital preservation' and 'digitization' is too subtle to be noticed, let alone internalized; on the other hand, they are aware that 'digitization' means 'access,' and are keen to insist that public collecting institutions embrace the digital gospel in the name of wider availability of the national collections. What seems more difficult for the bureaucrat or public opinion to comprehend is that regardless of the amount of money allocated to film and sound archives, there is no such thing as a simple answer to the question of how a national audiovisual collection can be made permanently available to the public by digital means.<sup>4</sup>

Too often we are confronted by people, some of them archivists or archival administrators, who think that if something is digitized and uploaded to the Internet it will still be available in the same format ten or twenty years from now. There may not be much harm if archivists

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<sup>3</sup> Ray Edmondson, *Audiovisual Archiving: Philosophy and Principles* (Paris: UNESCO, 2004), 47.

<sup>4</sup> Paolo Cherchi Usai, "Are All (Analog) Films 'Orphans'?": A Predigital Appraisal," *The Moving Image* 9, no. 1 (2009): 10.

think about access copies in this way, but if they do not distinguish between digital access and preservation copies, then the existence of these government records is at risk.

Because it is common within government-run archives to confuse digitization for preservation and digitization for access, Cherchi Usai also sees a threat to the analog films that have the structure, context, and content to stand as an undisputed record copy of a film. Many decision-makers in government archives seem to think that once the films have been digitized, “the need to handle analog carriers will no longer be a concern.”<sup>5</sup> This perspective endangers motion picture film records and counts on an expensive solution for a problem of obsolescence that does not exist. Whereas most older videotape formats are rapidly becoming obsolete due to physical instability and difficulty finding playback equipment, film does not have those problems. Most motion picture film is stable when stored correctly and the format specifications have remained the same for over a century. A seventy-year-old roll of 35mm film can easily be played back on equipment that continues to be manufactured today (albeit in smaller numbers and for more specialized purposes than in the past). Edmondson reminds us that we should never prematurely discard the original film copy when such an action will have the effect of closing off the option of using a better migration technology in the future. In his eyes, this is “a fundamental matter of curatorial integrity.”<sup>6</sup>

Reformatting has always been a part of film preservation, but in the past the accepted method was a film-to-film transfer. Even after a film begins to deteriorate and shrink, as long as it is stored properly there is a long interval in which printing a new copy remains feasible. The currently accepted analog procedure is to print from a nitrate or acetate base onto a

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<sup>5</sup> Cherchi Usai, 11.

<sup>6</sup> Edmondson. 61-2.

polyester base that has the potential to last for half a millennium. To overcome the fading inherent in color dyes, separate black-and-white masters can be printed for the yellow, cyan, and magenta layers of the image, though this technique is often too expensive for most archives. To minimize the visibility of scratches caused by normal wear and tear, a film can be printed with a wet-gate printer that uses a chemical with optical properties similar to film base to temporarily fill in base scratches during printing. Whatever the technique used, the new film element will bear the marks of its progenitor. By looking at the new copy, it is possible to see where splices were made in earlier generations or where damage was repaired. The information written on the original film leader is often visible at the beginning and end of a printed film. With many printing processes, the edge codes of a film that give information about stock type and the year it was produced are also printed through onto the edge of the new copy. These traces can help a film archivist or preservationist reconstruct a rough history of the film with a good deal of confidence. This is important when attempting to locate the most original film element or trying to determine if a film has been altered over time.

While film-to-film reformatting creates a predictable product—each frame is reproduced in a sequence to be viewed at a constant rate—digitization throws open the door to variation. Some forms of digital capture are designed to approximate the properties of analog film, whereas others give the archivist great control over variables such as frame rate, image size, and image or audio quality. Prior to the advent of digital imaging, archivists had the option of printing smaller-gauge reduction prints or transferring films by telecine to analog videotapes for access, but, because these techniques destroy information in the image, they are not archivally accepted forms of preservation. A similar principle must be followed

when digitizing motion picture records. When the goal is preservation, government archivists should use the least destructive capture process and file format that can be supported by their institutions. The rest of this chapter will explore the issues that archivists must confront when they plan to digitize film records for preservation. While much of the discussion will also apply to access formats, the standards for creating an authentic digital copy of a film are highest when that copy will be replacing a deteriorating film as the record copy. That process deserves intense scrutiny.

### **Issues of Authenticity**

Issues of authenticity loom large in the age of digital records, but the concept has long been central to archival theory. Margaret Cross Norton wrote of the record custodian's "legal and moral responsibilities in regard to that maintenance of the authenticity of the records."<sup>7</sup> When migrating film records from analog to digital formats, these responsibilities do not change. However, when a record's format is altered, as James M. O'Toole and Richard Cox ask, "What happens to the integrity, authenticity, and reliability of the record in the process?"<sup>8</sup> Many archival theorists have worked to answer this question as it applies to digital records that must undergo a change of format for their continued preservation.

Luciana Duranti believes authenticity refers "to the fact that a record is what it purports to be

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<sup>7</sup> Margaret C. Norton, "The Purpose and Nature of Archives," in *Norton on Archives: The Writings of Margaret Cross Norton on Archival and Records Management*, ed. Thornton W. Mitchell (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2003), 26.

<sup>8</sup> James M. O'Toole and Richard J. Cox, *Understanding Archives & Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2006), 31.

and has not been tampered with or otherwise corrupted since its creation . . . .”<sup>9</sup> Writing from a legal perspective, Stephen Mason states that, “Proving the authenticity of a digital object means providing sufficient evidence to convince an adjudicator that the object that has been retrieved is a faithful representation of what is claimed to be the ‘original,’ or a reliable representation of the object that was relied upon by the originator.”<sup>10</sup> The maintenance of authenticity for digitized motion picture records thus requires two components: first, a well-defined and enforced standard operating procedure for the digitization process to prevent corruption of the record as it is transferred to a digital format; and, second, the capture and maintenance of the significant properties that attest to its status as a record.

The necessity of a standard operating procedure is supported by Duranti, who argues that authenticity is “protected through the adoption of methods that ensure the record is not manipulated, altered, or otherwise falsified after its creation.”<sup>11</sup> By standardizing the methods of digitization, archivists can help prevent the introduction of uncertainty into the status of the digitized record. If a digital preservation copy is created from film the same way every time, the fact that the resulting files have an expected structure can support the contention that a film’s content was not altered by its movement across formats. A well-documented and enforced procedure will act as part of the evidence necessary to prove that the digital representation can be trusted. A standard operating procedure may include checklists that must be followed in order to create a digital product. It can also define acceptable ranges for image capture, setting limits for the white and black levels. In this way, archivists can ensure

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<sup>9</sup> Luciana Duranti, “The Impact of Technological Change on Archival Theory,” 4, [www.interpares.org/documents/ld\\_sevilla\\_2000.pdf](http://www.interpares.org/documents/ld_sevilla_2000.pdf) (accessed February 14, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Mason, “Rethinking Concepts in Virtual Evidence,” *ICFAI Journal of Cyber Law* 7, no. 1 (2008): 52.

<sup>11</sup> Duranti, 5.

that information loss is minimized, provide a ready answer to questions about the capture process, and offer a view of the bridge between analog and digital representations of a record. An institution should consider opening the content of the procedure to the public, as this will help build trust in the archives' capability to produce authentic digital preservation files.

Any standard operating procedure should be designed in a way that ensures the significant properties of a film record are captured and maintained in the new digital record copy. Archivists and information professionals dealing with born-digital materials have written much about the significant properties (sometimes called significant characteristics) that must be maintained as a digital record is migrated between formats over time. Margaret Hedstrom and Christopher A. Lee see significant properties as those that affect a digital object's "quality, usability, rendering and behavior." Such properties are not absolute, but are selected for preservation after being weighed against "institutional priorities, available resources, limitations of available preservation methods and technologies, and anticipated use."<sup>12</sup> The definition of significant properties developed by JISC's InSPECT (Investigating Significant Properties of Electronic Content over Time) Project similarly highlights the function of the properties to be preserved; significant properties are "The characteristics of digital objects that must be preserved over time in order to ensure the continued accessibility,

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<sup>12</sup> Margaret Hedstrom and Christopher A. Lee, "Significant Properties of Digital Objects: Definitions, Applications, Implications," in *Proceedings of the DLM-forum 2002, Barcelona, 6-8 May 2002*, (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2001), 218, [ils.unc.edu/callee/sigprops\\_dlm2002.pdf](http://ils.unc.edu/callee/sigprops_dlm2002.pdf) (accessed January 16, 2012).

usability, and meaning of the objects, and their capacity to be accepted as evidence of what they purport to record.”<sup>13</sup>

At a workshop on significant properties organized by JISC, the British Library, and the Digital Preservation Coalition, Stapleton presented more specifically on digital moving image material. He argued that the significant properties of moving images “may be understood at different levels of granularity.” At the level of a single frame, they are similar to those captured for raster and vector images, such as resolution, bit-depth, aspect ratio and color information. When the single frames are combined into a sequence, additional properties emerge that govern the speed and order in which the images are displayed during playback.<sup>14</sup> Just as a motion picture film is more complex than a simple paper document, digital moving images are more complex than text files. There are more characteristics that must be considered when the significant properties are defined and decided upon.

Though the above definitions were developed in reference to digital records, they can also be useful to archivists who are migrating motion pictures from film to a digital format. Stapleton’s description of digital moving images can just as easily be applied to analog motion pictures, in which a frame is similar to a photograph, but the aggregation of frames creates a different kind of record that provides information and evidence in a different way. The determination of significant properties for film digitization also must include a consideration of what is necessary to preserve the accessibility, usability, and meaning of the record. Ultimately, because digitization forces a motion picture to shed the physical carrier

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<sup>13</sup> Ixchel M. Faniel and Elizabeth Yaker, “Significant Properties as Contextual Metadata,” *Journal of Library Metadata* 11 (2011): 156.

<sup>14</sup> Helen Hockx-Yu and Gareth Knight, “What to Preserve? Significant Properties of Digital Objects,” *International Journal of Digital Curation* 3, no. 1 (2008): 145.

that helped provide markers supporting its authenticity, archivists are forced to make choices about what exactly will be preserved in the new digital record copy. As Hedstrom and Lee wrote, these decisions will be affected by an institution's resources and priorities, but they should also accommodate the expected uses of the digital record. Above all, the digitized film should include enough information about content, context, and structure, either in the file or associated metadata, to stand as an authentic record copy.

### **What Should We Think About when We Think About Significant Properties?**

When an archivist begins to plan for the use of digitization as a means of motion picture preservation, he must contemplate how the change in format will affect the usefulness of the record and the affordances it provides. This exercise will allow the archivist to more confidently determine the significant properties to be captured with the record. At the most basic level, archival theory advocates that "records ought to be preserved as completely and coherently as possible, with critical information about context and connections preserved."<sup>15</sup> The digital file should incorporate information that allows it to remain intellectually connected with the other items in its series and record group, and be structured so that it will be displayed in a way that mimics the playback of the original film copy. Further, in addition to having "durability and utility for research use," the digital motion picture must also have utility for duplication "equivalent to the records in their original form."<sup>16</sup> To be considered an

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<sup>15</sup> O'Toole and Cox, 107.

<sup>16</sup> National Archives and Records Administration, *Intrinsic Value in Archival Material*, Staff Information Paper Number 21 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1982), <http://www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/archives-resources/archival-material-intrinsic-value.html> (accessed January 11, 2012).

authentic record, the digital version must be able to stand in for the deteriorating analog original for all purposes that have traditionally and legally been required of it.

Archivists should be sure to seek out the user perspective when researching significant properties. Many users will be happy with a DVD copy of a film, but that format has little utility for others. Scholars, who are frequently concerned with questions of provenance and film form, will often want the ability to examine physical copies of a film and study them frame by frame. Scholars Kristen Thompson and David Bordwell ask that archivists “remain committed to making films available in something as close as possible to their original form.”<sup>17</sup> While preservation digitization of a deteriorating original means that there may no longer be a film copy left to examine, some archivists have recommended scanning techniques that capture the entire film from edge to edge, including the information contained within the perforation area.<sup>18</sup> If an archives has equipment capable of this kind of scanning, it may want to pursue such methods. Otherwise, the information contained in the perforation area could be gathered and stored separately as metadata, though such an approach might disappoint some scholars. Other users who would find a DVD lacking are filmmakers and television producers. If a digital preservation file does not preserve a high enough level of quality, it will lose some of the usefulness the film version had for these purposes. For example, if a film is captured as a standard definition file, inserting it into a film documentary will highlight the poor quality when it is blown up to be projected on a theater screen. Television documentarians also favor high definition material where standard

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<sup>17</sup> Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, “‘Dear Archivist . . .’: An Open Letter on Access to Film Collections,” *Bulletin FIAF* 45 (October 1992): 38.

<sup>18</sup> Greg Wilsbacher, “Workflows for Digitally Preserving Film” (presentation, Association of Moving Image Archivists Conference, Philadelphia, Pa., November 2-6, 2010).

definition copies were once acceptable, as History Channel productions like *Vietnam in HD* demonstrate.

The requirements of the scholar and the filmmaker suggest that the significant properties captured in a digital preservation format must include a versatile, high-quality representation of an image's content. If the needs of such "high-level" users are accommodated, those using the material for purposes with less-stringent requirements will also find that their needs are met. Geoffrey Yeo similarly argues that, because many records are also boundary objects with importance to many different user communities, archivists have a responsibility to avoid limiting their significant properties to those required by a single user community.<sup>19</sup> However, Stephen Chapman and Anne R. Kenney take a different approach and argue that the capacities of the original analog record should determine the significant properties of a digitized film. They point out that these capacities are much less changeable than user needs and an institution's service objectives.<sup>20</sup> Although this perspective would assure that the significant properties selected provide the best possible representation of the analog original, this is often not a practical standard for most government archives containing motion picture records. While scanners that can capture 8K or 16K resolutions do exist, they are currently out of reach for archivists working under budget and storage constraints. If slightly lower resolutions are able to meet the practical

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<sup>19</sup> Geoffrey Yeo, "'Nothing is the Same as Something Else': Significant Properties and Notions of Identity and Originality," *Archival Science* 10 (2010): 104.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Chapman and Anne R. Kenney, "Digital Conversion of Research Library Materials: A Case for Full Informational Capture," *D-Lib Magazine* 2, no. 10 (1996), <http://www.dlib.org/dlib/october96/cornell/10chapman.html> (accessed January 15, 2012).

needs of all users, this may inform the selection of significant properties relating to resolution and quality.

While technological limitations may force archivists to compromise on resolution, that is no reason to give up on exacting requirements for significant properties. The duplication of motion picture films has always introduced a qualitative change in the visual information in the copy, no matter whether the duplication is carried out for restoration, preservation, or a projection print.<sup>21</sup> In spite of this, the extent of the change introduced during duplication can be limited by applying traditional principles of preservation. The first rule of archival conservators and preservationists is the “Rule of Reversibility,” which Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler presents as, “To the degree possible, a conservator should not undertake any procedure or treatment that he or she cannot later, if necessary, undo without harm to the document.”<sup>22</sup> In the case of digital film preservation, the deterioration of the film original has already forced the preservationist to perform an irreversible action—the migration from an analog to a digital format. The Rule of Reversibility can, however, be applied in how that transfer is performed. For example, a film should always be captured at its native frame rate (usually 24 frames per second), because once it is converted to a video frame rate (29.97 frames per second for standard NTSC) the film frames as they existed in the original have been interpolated and no longer exist discretely. Similarly, if a digital process does not capture all of the information visible in a film frame, that information will no longer exist

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<sup>21</sup> Andreas Busche, “Just Another Form of Ideology? Ethical and Methodological Principles in Film Preservation,” *The Moving Image* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 3.

<sup>22</sup> Mary-Lynn Ritzenthaler, *Preserving Archives & Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2010), 336.

and cannot be recovered. If a video frame rate or masked image is necessary for use, a derivative access file can always be created from the preservation master.

Apart from the content of a film, users are often also interested in the context in which the film was created and used. The provenance and custody of a film affect its authenticity and should be linked to the digital preservation copy through metadata. Yeo reminds us that although the archival ideal calls for secure and continuous custody of records, “in practice we know that things rarely work this way.” He further suggests “the possibility of finding significance in features that result from later intervention as well as those bequeathed by the initial creator.”<sup>23</sup> Some films, after they have been used for the purpose of their creation, are found to be useful for a different purpose. To help direct the film toward that new purpose, a prologue or additional titles and credits may be spliced on at the beginning or end. Understanding this process and where in the chain of custody (or outside of it) this occurred is essential for understanding the record that is now in an archives’ holdings. Coyne and Stapleton support this perspective, advocating for the inclusion of provenance as a significant characteristic and defining it as, “A statement of any changes in ownership and custody of [a] resource since its creation that are significant for its authenticity, integrity, and interpretation.”<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that this definition differs from the general archival definition of “provenance,” which focuses on a record’s origin or source and what they reveal about its significance and relationship to other records.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Yeo, ““Nothing Is the Same as Something Else,”” 94-5.

<sup>24</sup> Coyne and Stapleton, 39.

<sup>25</sup> See the entry for “provenance” in Richard Pearce-Moses, “A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology,” [http://www.archivists.org/glossary/term\\_details.asp?DefinitionKey=196](http://www.archivists.org/glossary/term_details.asp?DefinitionKey=196) (Accessed April 22, 2012).

What does an archivist do when she is uncertain of the custody of a motion picture record? This can be the case even when a government agency still ostensibly has control of a film. For example, the National Audio-Visual Center of the federal government's General Services Administration contracted with WRS Motion Picture and Video Laboratory to store and make projection prints from original camera rolls and reproduction masters. After WRS shuttered its film lab, the films sat for several years in an abandoned storage warehouse before they were transported to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).<sup>26</sup> These kinds of custodial anomalies should be noted along with the contextual information that may be counted as a significant property of the film record.

Even in such cases where the custodial history of a motion picture film is unknown, the film itself often provides clues as to any changes it may have undergone since its creation. These clues include “the condition of the perforations, the splices, or the edge numbers” and all contribute to the assessment of a film's history.<sup>27</sup> An analysis of such clues was carried out on one of the most famous films now in NARA's custody—the Zapruder film—by the Assassination Records Review Board, which looked at the physical characteristics of the film in order to investigate the trustworthiness of the information it contains.

[The board] engaged the Eastman Kodak Company to study the original film and the three surviving first-generation copies, looking for additional evidence to explain anomalies between the film and the operating properties of the Bell and Howell home movie camera used by Zapruder, whether the ‘edge print’ of

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<sup>26</sup> Laurel Macondray and Ed Carter, “Flashlights, Flatfoots, and Flanges: The National Archives and Records Administration Repatriates Films from an Abandoned Lab” (presentation, Association of Moving Image Archivists Conference, Philadelphia, Pa., November 2-6, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> Busche, 16.

the original contained any additional evidence, and issues concerning the chain of custody of the film.<sup>28</sup>

Archivists need to understand what the different types of physical evidence inherent in a reel of film can convey about the record's authenticity before making a decision to use digital means for preservation. Much of the physical evidence will be identified as integral to understanding the context and provenance of a film, and belongs among the significant properties selected for preservation across formats.

### **Some Suggested Categories of Significant Properties**

Once the archivist has considered all of the factors explored above, he can finally begin defining the significant properties that will meet his preservation needs. There will always be a degree of choice involved, because it will never be possible to reproduce every property of the original.<sup>29</sup> It will be possible to embed some significant properties in the resulting digital object, but others will require supplementary metadata. Archivists may refer to existing metadata schemas, or develop their own schema, in order to accommodate the significant properties necessary for the perpetuation of authenticity.<sup>30</sup> Archivists working with films may want to consider looking at the CEDARS (CURL Exemplars in Digital Archives) Project and the PREMIS (Preservation Metadata: Implementation Strategies) schema to see how significant properties related to provenance and preservation actions may be represented. The PBCore schema provides an extensive example of moving image

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<sup>28</sup> William L. Joyce, "Classified Federal Records and the End of the Cold War: The Experience of the Assassination Records Review Board," in *Archives, Documentation and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, eds. Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), 241.

<sup>29</sup> Coyne and Stapleton, 28-9.

<sup>30</sup> Coyne and Stapleton, 6-7.

metadata, including elements that can be used to very specifically identify an audiovisual item and represent its properties.<sup>31</sup> Most important, according to Brian F. Lavoie, is that “Preservation metadata supplies a context for the archived object; this context is essential for securing the object’s long-term accessibility and usability.”<sup>32</sup>

Fortunately, the capture of many of the significant properties of a film record can be facilitated through the choice of the digital format to be used. In digitizing to a particular format, information about the content, rendering, and structure of a motion picture record can be fixed to replicate the properties of the film. The right format for film preservation will be determined by the significant properties deemed necessary by the archivist, and will allow the capture of the necessary frame rate, resolution, bit depth, color gamut, and the appropriate relationship between the audio and image.<sup>33</sup> To accommodate the widest range of uses and present a faithful representation of the film image, digital cinema formats such as DPX (Digital Picture Exchange) should be considered, but if the resources to work with DPX are not available other uncompressed formats may be used to prevent film records from deteriorating past the point when they can be reformatted for preservation.<sup>34</sup> If a government archives lacks the resources to produce digital preservation masters of the desired format, it

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<sup>31</sup> Information about the CEDARS Project can be found at <http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/metadata/cedars/>. PREMIS is hosted by the Library of Congress at <http://www.loc.gov/standards/premis/>. PBCore can be found at <http://pbcore.org/>. All sites last accessed April 23, 2012.

<sup>32</sup> Brian F. Lavoie, “Preservation Metadata: Challenge, Collaboration, and Consensus,” *Microform & Imaging Review* 33, no. 3 (2004): 131.

<sup>33</sup> Coyne and Stapleton, 8

<sup>34</sup> For a slightly-dated, simple overview of file formats, see Library of Congress, “Curator’s View for Moving Image Content,” [http://www.digitalpreservation.gov/formats/content/video\\_curator.shtml](http://www.digitalpreservation.gov/formats/content/video_curator.shtml) (accessed February 11, 2012). Selecting the right file format will require careful and extensive research of the available options.

is best to retain the analog copy after digitization in case new resources become available in the future that would allow capture of additional significant properties.

While the more technical significant properties are fixed in the file format of a digitized film record, other significant properties are captured by archival personnel as metadata. These properties, relating to the context of the record, should begin to be identified and logged before digitization of the film ever occurs, since “the earlier the metadata is created in the production process, the more likely it is to be created at all.”<sup>35</sup> In addition to information about a film’s place within a series and record group or about its custody and accessioning, archivists will be well served by the inclusion of information tracing the physical history of the film and an account of the preservation decisions made prior to and during digitization.

Because a physical reel of film bears the marks of the actions that were done to it since its creation, the archivist should commission a forensic history of the film that will become linked to the digital preservation object and identified as a significant property. This history, which may be recorded in narrative or list form, should be prepared by someone who is knowledgeable about motion picture photographic processes and the work performed by film labs. Because the physical copy of the film will no longer be available for examination, any features that might raise questions about the authenticity of the film as a record should be addressed. This could include the number of splices, and whether they are routine or the result of a repair or removal of content. If the A and B Rolls for a production do not sync up,

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<sup>35</sup> Science and Technology Council of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, *The Digital Dilemma 2: Perspectives from Independent Filmmakers, Documentarians, and Nonprofit Audiovisual Archives* ([Hollywood]: Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, 2012), 45-6.

the write-up should include an identification of the part of the film that was likely removed or added to have that effect. Film preservationists who handle films daily are usually able to recognize when something about a film is an oddity. If nothing strange is identified for a film with imperfect custody, a future user of the digital copy could refer to this forensic history and be satisfied to a high degree that even though the chain of custody is unclear, the film's content and affordances were not altered since its creation. If discrepancies within the physical copy are identified and described the user will likewise be able to decide whether the record has been compromised to the point that it is no longer useful for her purposes.

Another property related to a film's context is a description of the preservation need being fulfilled by the digital preservation process, which should also include a description of how that process is carried out. As described above, migrating a motion picture from an analog form to a digital one causes an unavoidable loss of characteristics and information that were contained by the record's physical form. For this reason, archivists must carefully document exactly why digital preservation is necessary.<sup>36</sup> The deterioration that necessitated the reformatting should be described so future users will understand why they cannot gain access to a film version of the record. Additionally, as a film is digitized, limitations in the scanning equipment may force film preservationists into workarounds to ensure that the digital representation maintains the structure of the physical film. For example, if a tape repair on an intertitle prevents the film from moving through the scanner gate, it may be necessary to repeatedly scan a single intertitle frame to be inserted for the frames where the

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<sup>36</sup> The SAA Code of Ethics states “[Archivists] thoroughly document any actions that may cause changes to the records in their care or raise questions about the records’ authenticity.” Society of American Archivists, “SAA Core Values Statement and Code of Ethics,” <http://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-core-values-statement-and-code-of-ethics> (accessed March 25, 2012).

film got stuck. It would be dishonest to hide such a change from users. If undocumented alterations introduced during capture are discovered at a later time, they will throw the overall authenticity of the digital representation into question.

### **The Relationship Between Digital Preservation Decisions and Deaccessioning**

Digital preservation is an expensive and storage-intensive undertaking. The systems necessary to digitize film at high levels of quality require a considerable financial investment and extensive staff training or the hiring of new staff already possessing digitization experience. The digital storage demands of such a program are also very high, as a terabyte of data can often be generated in a day or two. Even if an archives chooses to contract out the digitization to a qualified film lab, the storage issue cannot be avoided. For this reason, some in the archives might argue that films should be digitized for preservation at lesser quality levels, and therefore smaller file sizes, according to their content or other factors determined on a case-by-case basis. Such suggestions should be approached with great caution. Since films, like all records, are embedded within the context of series and record groups, what happens to that aggregation when the authenticity of some of its members is compromised?

Digitizing to sub-standard file formats for preservation is similar to deaccessioning as a crisis management technique, except in this case the storage crisis is digital rather than physical. Karen Benedict long ago warned us that “crisis management techniques are usually unsatisfactory when scrutinized in relation to overall objectives. They are short-sighted, short-range, and meant to provide immediate results regardless of the long-term

consequences of the action.”<sup>37</sup> If films are digitized without capturing the significant properties necessary to demonstrate their authenticity as records, the effect is the same as deaccessioning. The content may still exist, but it is no longer useful as a record in the same way it was when contained on a film carrier.

Though often viewed as a last resort, deaccessioning is an acceptable collections management technique, but only when it is approached carefully and thoughtfully. In order to justify a decision to deaccession archival records, a thorough reappraisal of the records must be carried out and documented by the archivist. Menzi Behrnd-Klodt argues that if a decision is made to deaccession, “the archivist should prepare a written recommendation summarizing the reappraisal process and the reasons for the planned course of action . . . .” The archivist should find agreement from supervisors and administrators for the decision and the documentation of the action should be retained indefinitely.<sup>38</sup> The same process should be followed if films are to be replaced by digital files that fall below preservation standards.

This approach is even more important in light of the recognition that archivists wield great power during the appraisal process. As they use this power, they must be very transparent about what they are doing. Terry Cook argues that archivists have an obligation to explain: “why [a] choice was made; which appraisal criteria were used; which concepts of value or significance were choices based on; which methodologies were employed; and

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<sup>37</sup> Karen Benedict, “Invitation to a Bonfire: Reappraisal and Deaccessioning of Records as Collection Management Tools in an Archives—A Reply to Leonard Rapport,” *American Archivist* 47, no. 1 (Winter 1984): 46.

<sup>38</sup> Menzi L. Behrnd-Klodt, *Navigating Legal Issues in Archives* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2008), 64-5.

which of the archivist's personal values were reflected in decisions taken."<sup>39</sup> Because governments are centers of power in our society, government archivists undoubtedly are responsible to approach reappraisal decisions with the needs of all citizens in mind. When migrating film records to digital formats and selecting the properties that will be maintained as significant, we must strive for transparency. After all, Yeo writes, "Transparency—publicizing the decisions we have made and not seeking to pretend that they are anything other than constructed outcomes of fallible appraisal processes—is as crucial as an awareness of their consequences."<sup>40</sup>

Because of the power they do hold, government archivists and archival administrators have a responsibility to the public to educate themselves about the implications that digitization could have for all the records in their care. This is doubly important when it comes to the digitization of motion pictures, both because there are so many more dimensions that must be captured than for traditional records and because most archivists have historically been unfamiliar with records in moving image formats. It is one thing to make a carefully considered and documented decision to deaccession a film record and another thing altogether to accidentally destroy a record because of a poorly planned digital preservation project. Archivists must be able to recognize the difference between digitization for access and digitization for preservation. A standard definition video capture may be adequate for access purposes, but it contains less than one sixth of the visual information captured in a preservation 4K scan of the same film. In order to ensure that digital preservation methods result in motion picture records that retain their utility for the majority

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<sup>39</sup> Terry Cook, "Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives," *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001): 34.

<sup>40</sup> Yeo, "Nothing Is the Same as Something Else," 111.

of users, archivists must be knowledgeable and willing to fight for procedures that will preserve the authenticity of film records as they migrate from analog to digital formats, even in the face of high cost and storage demands.

Fortunately, most film, especially when stored correctly, is stable enough that preservation actions, either digital or analog, are not immediately required. This means that there is time for capture technologies to improve and for storage costs to come down before high-level digitization will be required. Government archivists also have time in which to carefully plan how digital preservation of motion picture records will be carried out. The sooner they can start this planning and the more stakeholder perspectives they consider, the better off they will be when film stock is no longer available for film-to-film preservation techniques. This planning should result in the creation of standard operating procedures, to control how digitization is carried out, and the definition of significant properties, which will ensure that all the elements necessary for an authentic digital record are captured from the film original. In this way, a motion picture record can still be available to provide evidence, information, and memory long after the original reel has deteriorated to dust.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> The caveat here is that archivists and their allies in information technology fields must solve the challenges of preserving digital information over time. At this point, such problems have not been satisfactorily solved. As this thesis is concerned more with the initial creation of digital moving image files rather than their maintenance, I will leave such questions to the computer scientists and information technology professionals.

## Conclusion

### Films for the Future

In 1964, former President Harry Truman starred in a twenty-six-part television documentary titled *Decision: The Conflicts of Harry S. Truman*. The documentary focused on Truman's life and presidency, and included discussions that addressed the many decisions Truman made as president, including the decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan. After production, Truman requested that all of the outtakes be sent to his presidential library for continued preservation. The outtakes include clips of Truman reading from a script and clips of him ad-libbing. There are also interviews of people who knew and worked with Truman throughout his life.<sup>1</sup> The fact that Truman himself requested that the outtakes be preserved in his library indicates that he thought they would add to an understanding of his presidency. Much of the information covered in *Decision* already existed elsewhere, either in textual government records or in Truman's own written memoirs, but the way it is communicated in a visual and aural medium convinced him that it was worth keeping alongside those other sources.

Unlike Truman, government archivists rarely have firsthand knowledge of the making of the films they must evaluate for inclusion in the archives. Instead, archivists must use their knowledge of archival theory and practice to make the appraisal decisions that determine what will be preserved and made available to posterity. If they remain ignorant of how motion picture films fit into concepts of records, we risk losing that part of our documentary

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<sup>1</sup> Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, "New Films and Sound Recordings Featuring Harry S. Truman Opened at Truman Presidential Museum & Library," <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/news/screengems.htm> (Accessed April 16, 2012).

heritage. Fortunately, archival scholars and theorists are beginning to recognize the damage that omitting discussions of motion picture film records can cause. As they receive more attention, films could eventually be lifted out of the non-text “ghetto” described by Frank Boles.

One way to begin incorporating motion pictures into archival theory regarding the definition of records is by problematizing the ways archivists have traditionally approached records. Geoffrey Yeo’s writings tend to serve this function. By highlighting prototype theory and the idea of boundary objects, Yeo is asking archivists to revisit their preconceptions about what a record is, with the expectation that through such lenses the weaknesses of a restrictive concept of records will be made clear. Similarly, by focusing on evidence or information as an affordance *provided by* a record, instead of something that is *contained within* a record, archivists are no longer able to dismiss motion pictures because they are structured and communicate differently than textual documents.

Understanding that motion pictures provide evidence differently than textual documents, we are able to engage with the thinking of the New Paradigm theorists who advocate for a strict definition of records based exclusively on evidential values. Virtually all of the films produced or received in the course of government business provide evidence of government activities or transactions, whether they are raw footage or produced for public consumption. Even though the new paradigm is strongly oriented toward discussions of textual documents and electronic aggregations of data, the definition is not restrictive enough to exclude film records. Even so, archivists should avoid limiting the criteria for identifying records by too much. As we saw in the example of the Holocaust films, something that the New Paradigm would recognize as important only because of the evidence it provides of the

activities of the United States military is also hugely important for other purposes. These films provided evidence of the horrors of the Holocaust and helped bring accountability for the perpetrators. The images have lived on in world memory to both memorialize the victims and act as a reminder that we must remain vigilant against a repeat of such genocide.

The government archives can also be a home for motion pictures that come from outside of the government. Sometimes the inclusion of such films will provide extra dimensions of memory, accountability, and even evidence, when placed in context with government films. Archivists cannot, however, accept films that we cannot trust to represent the events or policies they purport to depict. At the same time that a donation of non-governmental film is being considered, archivists should also request any information from the donor that will help authenticate the film's content. Fortunately, the physical structure of the film can often help provide clues to its authenticity. When the archivist allows the donation of a trustworthy and authenticated film into the collections of the government archives, the film is granted the same status as the films already in the collection and should not be treated differently from the records of government agencies.

The motion pictures in a government archives, whether government films or collected materials, are popular with researchers and are often used in ways that bring broad public exposure. Though films are used as sources for published works, they are also frequently used as source material for film and television documentary productions. Archivists have a responsibility to the users to ensure that nothing is done to the film that will unreasonably compromise its usability and its value as a record. Digital technologies offer an opportunity to expand access to government film records, but they also introduce a threat. If preservation digitization is carried out without adequate planning, archivists may find themselves keeping

digital files that are not authentic records and that won't even be accessible five years later. One of the biggest mistakes that can be made is to digitize films and discard stable originals that, at this point in time, are likely to outlast any digital copies made from them.

Faced with a deteriorating film record, archivists must do all they can to ensure that when creating a digital preservation master all of the properties necessary to authenticate the film as a record are captured. This can be done through the development and use of standard operating procedures that are designed to capture all of the significant properties of film records. To identify these properties, government archivists familiar with motion pictures will need to take into consideration how the record is likely to be used as well as traditional preservation and conservation principles, such as the Rule of Reversibility. Because the structure and content of the physical reel of film contains many clues to a film's authenticity, information about physical characteristics and anomalies should also be captured with the reel's content. Many of the significant properties of a film will be preserved by the choice of digital file format, but the rest may be stored in metadata associated with or embedded in the digital file.

Digitizing to the level of quality necessary for a true preservation file is expensive to do, and the large volume of data created will require active and perpetual management. Archivists should treat the decision to capture a government film record at a lower quality level in the same way as a decision to deaccession the record. Because of the public trust in government archives to secure and preserve records of the activities of government, archivists have a responsibility to document such decisions and never make them in an ad-hoc manner. Even if something seems to be insignificant, in the larger context of a repository's collections it may hold importance. At first glance, based on their physical

condition and organization, the outtakes of President Truman's *Decisions* documentary might look like they should have stayed on the cutting room floor. But with knowledge of how their content supplements other documentation about his life and presidency, Truman was able to recognize their value. Government archivists must be sure that they don't overlook the value of the films they encounter in the archives.

### **Motion Pictures in the Stacks**

Motion pictures share the government archives with many other record types, and though the formats are often physically segregated, they are connected intellectually within record groups and series. As discussed previously, the affordances of motion picture records include evidence and information, but sometimes films only provide a piece of the picture. Many activities of government are recorded in multiple record formats that must all be consulted to thoroughly understand what has occurred. For example, there are many motion picture records of the D-Day invasion of Normandy, but while they give viewers a good idea of the conditions faced by the soldiers landing on the beach, you can't write a history of the D-Day invasion without consulting records in several other formats, including textual and cartographic. In other cases, a film can stand alone to explain a policy or government activity from a particular perspective, but leave out the kind of information that is not well represented by the conventions of the motion picture format. *No Fuelin', We're Poolin'*, discussed in the introduction, is one such film. It is able to communicate the parameters of the vanpool program and how someone at a participating employer could sign up, but it doesn't explain how the vanpool program was funded or how its route-building software was designed. To learn these things, a researcher will need additional program documentation.

This is not because the film has failed as a record of the program, but because it was designed to present information about vanpooling visually within a narrative structure.

Edited films produced by the government are interesting, because in addition to being records of a government program or policy, they are also records of government communication with the public. While the agency officials developing a government program may regard all of its parts as significant, they might choose to emphasize certain characteristics in publicity films in order to make the program clear and simple to understand. The high-level view of government programs that is favored by film provides an excellent source of context for a researcher working with various formats of government records. While textual records often provide evidence and information when viewed in the aggregate, a film on the same topic is often a clear statement that achieves similar objectives. Films also give a good indication of the primary goals or features of a program, providing a set of publicly known benchmarks for its success. Because of this, a program can be evaluated by comparing its achievements to the goals outlined in the film. If it failed to live up to promises of the film, a program probably wasn't successful.

Motion picture records are also valuable in government archives because they provide an accessible point of entry to the collections for people who otherwise might not use the archives. Many people in the United States don't understand the importance of the records in the public archives and are unfamiliar with the arrangement of archival records. If such a person does find himself in an archives, given a choice, he would probably prefer to view a DVD copy of a film related to his topic of interest rather than read through boxes of folders containing relevant textual records. In our society, television and movies, even with their limitations, are preferred formats for learning information. Almost as soon as the commercial

film industry was founded, the educational film industry sprang up beside it. In some cases, a record in a motion picture format might pique the researcher's interest in a topic enough that he decides to seek out more information contained in other records in the archives' collection. Digital copies of films posted on an archives' website can also help to invite engagement with the collections among users who are unable to travel to a particular repository.

### **Accountability and Social Justice through Film**

Archives and archivists play a significant role in shaping our nation's documentary heritage, and they can either acknowledge or shrink from the power they hold. Randall C. Jimerson writes, "Accountability and open government provide essential prerequisites for political and social justice. Archivists concerned about their role in society can provide a valuable foundation for social justice initiatives by fulfilling their professional responsibility to document all aspects of society, all segments of the populace."<sup>2</sup> Motion pictures created by government agencies do not often take on the perspective of marginalized groups in society, because many of them are made to document or promote government power. Even so, we can find examples of government films that shed light on individuals or groups working for justice and accountability in the face of that power.

The United States military produced thousands of reels of unedited footage of military activity that are now held at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). While we might expect those films to be used to legitimize the military power of

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<sup>2</sup> Randall C. Jimerson, *Archives Power: Memory, Accountability, and Social Justice* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2009), 260.

the state, we can sometimes find that power being challenged. For example, in 1971 residents of Okinawa donned fake gas masks to protest the presence and movement of American nerve gas in close proximity to their homes. Both the protests and the removal of the nerve gas were extensively documented on film.<sup>3</sup> Even the films of the United States Information Agency (USIA) sometimes contain challenges to dominant narratives. In the years following the 1957 integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, that incident featured in at least five USIA films, including one devoted solely to the event.<sup>4</sup> It may be surprising to learn that the United States government highlighted this incident during the Civil Rights struggles of the 1960s, but it is more understandable when we remember that the USIA films were legally barred from exhibition in the United States. These films, pointing out Federal support for civil rights, were created to help ward off charges of hypocrisy from international viewers who could see the disconnect between what the USIA had been saying about race relations in America and what was happening on the ground.<sup>5</sup>

Government archivists performing appraisal should give careful consideration to films that show such contestations of dominant power structures, so those views don't get shut out by a monolithic picture of government and society. Still, that doesn't mean that films reflecting dominant narratives should be disregarded. Because they document decades of information dissemination, government films are uniquely positioned to provide tools for

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<sup>3</sup> Films showing protests include Motion Pictures 111-LC-56939 and 111-LC-56940; Motion Picture Films from the Army Library Copy Collection, compiled 1964-1980, documenting the period 1950-1980; Records of the Office of the Chief Signal Officer, Record Group 111; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. An example of a film showing the removal of the gas from the island is Motion Picture 111-LC-56404.

<sup>4</sup> See Melinda M. Schwenk, "Reforming the Negative through History: The U.S. Information Agency and the 1957 Little Rock Integration Crisis," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 23 (1999): 288, 294.

<sup>5</sup> Schwenk, 289-90.

critiquing current government communication. When you watch a military film from Vietnam and hear the phrase “winning hearts and minds” thrown at you it quickly becomes clear how little times have changed, especially when you heard the same thing on the news the night before regarding Afghanistan. So far, most studies of government communication through films have focused on propaganda, but there would be great value in a work exploring the subtler rhetorical and visual devices used in government films. If they were effective in the past, they are probably still being used by government agencies and officials today.

In addition to the motion picture records accessioned from government agencies, archivists should consider implementing collecting policies to expand government film collections beyond material created or received by the government. This will document a wider swath of society. Many archives already do this. For example, NARA has accepted non-governmental films since its founding, and the donated Universal Newsreels are one of its most heavily-used audiovisual collections. Newsfilm collections are helpful for providing societal and historical context for films about government programs and policies, but they were also produced by one of the dominant voices in public discourse. While reporters were often skeptical of government, especially as television news programs replaced newsreels, national and local reporters were more likely to produce stories that concerned the mainstream of American society, and not the marginalized. Unfortunately, since shooting and processing motion picture films was fairly expensive, there may not be many films depicting some segments of the population. Government archivists may want to take a more active role in soliciting or seeking out motion pictures from donors who come from communities outside of the American mainstream before the films that exist disappear.

## **Moving Forward in the Government Archives**

As we work to convince government archivists to take motion picture film seriously as a record, it is worth further considering the paradox identified in Chapter One. When archival literature and records schedules consider film separately from textual records, film is given an aura of the “Other” and its validity as a record may be questioned. However, if film is not singled out, it is ignored by archivists who are oriented toward textual material. This problem is compounded by the fact that arrangement and description, preservation, and access issues are different for film than they are for traditional formats. For example, although films are located within record groups and series that may also contain textual material, films often must be arranged and described at the item level, since a single title may have many reels of film associated with it. Where motion picture films diverge less from traditional record formats is in the area of selection and appraisal. Films, like other records, are appraised based on the affordances they provide, such as evidence and information. Because motion pictures will never make it through the door of government archives if they are not found to be records during the appraisal process, the heaviest part of the burden falls on appraisal archivists and theorists to ensure that their approach to records is format-inclusive. Most of them probably won’t do this on their own. Archivists who work with films should take the opportunity to reach out to their colleagues and advocate for a shift in appraisal thinking, while continuing to recognize that film records must be handled differently from text in other areas of archival work.

Chapters Two and Three explore the significance of the use received by film records. When direct users of archival material use motion picture records in television and film productions, this exposes huge numbers of indirect users to the archives’ holdings. In order to

continue to allow this and other uses, archivists must ensure that digital preservation of a film original produces a digital version of the film that contains all of the significant properties, including resolution and quality, necessary to maintain the authenticity of the record.

Unfortunately, when motion picture records are used in new productions, their source is not always clear to the viewer. This is especially true in the case of government archives, which hold large amounts of public domain material. When viewers are unaware that what they are seeing came from a government repository, it doesn't necessarily hurt the archives, but we miss out on a chance to engage a potential user and supporter. It's even worse when the administrators of an archives don't realize the extent of exposure that the film collection receives. If the resource allocators are unaware of the broad public exposure to such films, they will be less likely to provide the budget or infrastructure necessary to continue to provide the same level of access.

Because archivists can't enforce attribution in the case of many government films, especially when so much of the footage has been copied and sold by stock houses, they must turn to different avenues to spread awareness of the use motion picture records receive. The growth of social media has provided a platform that anybody can use to disseminate information. Many government archives already have Facebook pages and Twitter feeds, so it would be easy to begin a project of tracking where films from the holdings show up on television or in theaters. Since many television series and documentaries have their own websites, posts could be linked to information about the production. If feeling ambitious, archivists could even set up a contest for fans or followers of the archives to identify films and television productions from the past that incorporated film records from government sources. This would help promote user engagement and build up a list that illustrates the

reach of government films. Social media platforms, in addition to reaching the public, are also often monitored by archival administrators. If they are constantly reminded of the use the films in their holdings receive, they may be less reluctant to give the film collection and its preservation the support they need.

Before archivists are able to implement a preservation digitization program for motion picture film, they will need to educate themselves about digitization standards and processes. Failure to understand the implications of the choices that must be made when migrating film from analog to digital formats threatens the authenticity of the film record, and its future usefulness. Unfortunately, most of the resources available concerning motion picture film preservation are not designed to focus on the needs of government records. Even so, the technical information they provide can be used by government archivists to make decisions about how digitization must be carried out to create digital files that can stand as records. The largest film digitization initiative yet implemented is part of the Images for the Future project in the Netherlands. Because this project is years ahead of what is occurring in other countries, archives from around the world look to the Netherlands for guidance. One of the helpful products of their research and work is a white paper examining film scanning considerations relevant to a large project that must be carried out under time and budget constraints.<sup>6</sup> In the United States, NARA developed a website outlining the products and services provided to the agency by the in-house labs, including the Motion Picture Preservation Lab. Digital file types are linked to preservation and access workflows, with

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<sup>6</sup> Tom de Smet and Harm Jan Triemstra, “White Paper: Film Scanning Considerations,” [http://www.prestocentre.org/system/files/library/resource/filmscanning\\_v1.04.pdf](http://www.prestocentre.org/system/files/library/resource/filmscanning_v1.04.pdf) (Accessed April 15, 2012).

links to information on file properties.<sup>7</sup> However, even though it was developed by a government archives, NARA's Products and Services resource does not explicitly address issues of record authenticity.

Another resource for archivists researching the digitization of film records is the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA).<sup>8</sup> Having grown out of the film archive movement, AMIA is not itself focused on motion picture film as a government record. However, it is a good resource for meeting film archivists and preservationists, some working in government, who could provide insight into the best ways to maintain the authenticity of records across formats. The International Federation of Film Archives (FIAPF) is an international body (also growing out of the film archives movement) that has several government archives as members and may also provide useful contacts.<sup>9</sup> But, rather than just seeking out help through film archives organizations, government archivists concerned with film should find partners for collaboration within organizations such as the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA) or the Society of American Archivists (SAA).<sup>10</sup> Unlike AMIA and FIAPF, which are less well known outside of the film archives world, these organizations are made up of archivists who understand what it means to say that a document or film is a government record. Additionally, it is the members of these organizations who produce much of the traditional archival literature.

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<sup>7</sup> National Archives and Records Administration, "Digital Moving Images from Film-based Source Material," <http://www.archives.gov/preservation/products/reformatting/mopix-digital.html> (Accessed April 15, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> AMIA's website is <http://www.amianet.org>.

<sup>9</sup> FIAPF's website is <http://www.fiafnet.org/uk>.

<sup>10</sup> NAGARA's website is <http://www.nagara.org>. SAA's website is [www.archivists.org](http://www.archivists.org).

Organizing a workgroup to examine the archival challenges of digitizing motion film records could help produce additions to the archival literature that will fill existing gaps.

### **Government Films Are Government Records**

This thesis was conceived to make the argument that motion picture films created or collected by a government are government records. It is imperative that archivists recognize this as preservation methods are poised to complete a shift from analog to digital processes within the next decade. If they don't think of films in the same way they think of other records, government archivists will be unable to make preservation decisions that ensure the continued authenticity of the films in their care. If the digitized films can no longer be trusted as records, we must question their continued presence in the government archives.

Starting from a question of how we should digitize a government film depicting a dog wearing a hat, I confronted a body of archival literature that had long omitted discussions of motion picture film as a record. After much research and reading, I pulled together many different perspectives in archival theory in order to break down preconceived notions of records and argue that films, though different from textual documents, are records and should not be disregarded in government archives. I was able to tailor discussions of the significant properties of digital objects to inform the design and implementation of digitization projects that will result in authentic digital copies of films. This thesis helps to make up for the dearth of serious discussion of films in archival literature and explores how government archivists can protect their motion picture holdings as the technological landscape changes.

Ultimately, motion picture film records in government archives will only be safe from both benign neglect and inadequate digitization when archivists and archival administrators

stop thinking of films as curiosities. They must be taught to recognize that the affordances provided by films, though manifested differently, are the same affordances provided by textual records. Evidence, information, memory, and accountability; all of these play a role in documenting our democratic society. Government archivists should embrace the power that motion picture records have to connect with the public. Whether in a research room, over the Internet, or in a darkened theater, audiences are seeking out engagement with records in audiovisual formats. Although we can expect that different users will want films for different reasons, when we serve an authentic record to a patron we can be sure that we have given her a versatile tool that can do everything from providing evidence of government actions impacting her community to offering a conduit for nostalgia. By ensuring that film records have a home in the government archives, archivists protect an important component of our nation's documentary heritage for its future citizens.

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