Archival Practice involves Curation; Trying to minimize the impact of ruling narratives

Howard Besser
Moving Image Archiving & Preservation
New York University
http://besser.tsoa.nyu.edu/howard/Talks/

Archival Practice involves Curation; Trying to minimize the impact of ruling narratives-

• Atomized individual items vs. Organized collections
• The Framework: Aspects of Archiving
• Community-run Archives vs institutional archives
• How to make today’s born-digital items useable for future activists/historians/researchers

Atomized individual items vs. Organized collections (1/2)

• Books, edited films generally are created with a POV & narrative of history; other materials (leaflets, photos, advertisements, unedited films) may be created with a POV, but generally don’t place themselves w/ a historical narrative
• But an archive generally does curate them, placing them within some type of contextualization or narrative (by grouping them together with “like” items, by assigning index terms to them and to historically-related items)

Atomized individual items vs. Organized collections (2/2)

• So while these atomized individual items (original source material) may be interpreted in different ways by different groups (Marxist, Capitalist, Anarchist), when you look for them within an archive, you are exposed to how the archive has curated/interpreted/historicized them. In fact, you may not even be able to find them because the archive has “mis-characterized” them. (Try looking for items showing “social revolution”).
  – Of course, with born-digital textual material that has been automatically indexed, you could look for word combinations. But you’d need to look for all the proper word combinations. And you’d still be subject to the biased synonym-mapping of automatic indexing companies.
  – And we can’t yet do this effectively with visual material.

Curating/Historicizing from atomic items has plusses and minuses-

Allows previously disenfranchised voices to create their own narratives
Allows previously disenfranchised voices to create their own narratives

Aspects of Archiving

- Items: What gets collected?
- Description/Contextualization: How are the items described/explained?
- Indexing/Terminology: What words are used to find the items?
- Access System: How are the items provided to viewers
- Preservation: How long will these items remain accessible?

- Institutional archives are much better at some of these areas, while community archives are much better at others
Looking at items produced today, how do we make sure that they are available to future activists/historians/researchers?

- Try to make creators more aware of issues around their contribution to archiving/history
- Try to make archives more responsible about their selection and contextualization

Examples:

Activist Archivists

http://activist-archivists.org/ (use Wayback Machine)
https://www.facebook.com/ActivistArchivists/

- NYU MIAP students and grads originally working on archiving media from the Occupy movement
- Guidelines both activist creators and archives
- Developed newer low-impact methods

Activist Archivist Website

Activist Archivists Projects-

- "Why Archive" postcard & video
- 7 Tips to Ensure Your Video Is Usable in the Long Term
- Study of metadata loss through uploading to services
- Best Practices for Creators/Collectors
- "Toolkit” for Occupy archiving
- Coordinating discussions among various groups archiving different parts of Occupy
- Exploring methods for obscuring identities

Lessons Learned for Archivists-

- Communicate well with your future Contributors
- Develop Cooperative Relationships
- Make it easy for future contributors to create “archival-friendly” works
- For Cooperative Projects, allow for instructions not being followed
- Find smart ways to deal with Scale
- Handle Privacy & Security responsibly

Communicate well with your future Contributors-

- Learn to speak their language
- Help them to realize the importance of archiving
**Why Archive** video

**Why Archive** postcard

- **ACCOUNTABILITY.** Archives collect evidence that can hold those in power accountable.
- **SELF-DETERMINATION.** We define our own movement. We need to create and maintain our own historical record.
- **SHARE.** Archives are a point of entry to our movement’s rich record. We can use them to ensure transparency, generate discussion, and enable direct action.
- **EDUCATE.** Today’s videos, flyers, web-pages, and signs are material for tomorrow’s skill-shares, classes, and mobilizations.
- **CONTINUITY.** Just as past movements inspire us, new activists will learn from the experiences we document.
- **RECORD & COLLECT** what’s happening around you.
- **PRESERVE** the record.

**Why Archive Postcard**

**Develop Cooperative Relationships**

- Try to better understand what their aims are; get involved in their activities
- Develop partnering relationships

**Self-help activities:**

- Batch download from FLICKR with selected attributes (#OWS, Creative Commons, EXIF metadata, tagged-text metadata)
- Re-mixing of older footage
- Creating a visual timeline
- Mining material for data (eg. number of co-locations of an officer’s name with “pepper spray”)

**Skill-shares for Occupiers**

- Workshops: OWS Archive Share Day
- Participated in Self-help activities:

**Other Archive Share-Day and Hackathon activities**
Make it easy for future contributors to create “archival-friendly” works:

- Low-hanging fruit
- Easy instructional material that appeals to what they think is important

Low-Hanging fruit

- Turn GPS on
- Develop strategies for automating a profile and uploads (our ideal App)

7 Tips to Ensure Your Video Is Usable in the Long Term

- Collect details while filming
- Keep your original raw footage, unaltered
- Make your video discoverable
- Contextualize it
- Make it verifiable
- Allow others to collect and archive
- Or archive it yourself

Best Practices for Content Creators

- Security
  - Hidden camera laws, parties’ consent laws
- Capturing Content
  - Highest quality, set date and time-stamps, note location
- Offloading Content
  - Raw files directly onto computer, keep material organized
- Uploading Content
  - Importance of tagging, review of diff services
- Depositing with an Archive
- Copyright

Occupy Archiving Kit

- Why Archive?
- What is an “archive”? How do I create an archive?
- Creating archival-friendly content
- How can I collect materials for the archive?
- What should I save?
- How should I organize my materials? How do I get it into the archive?
- Description/Metadata
- Media Management
- Storage & Preservation
- Access
- Exhibition and Presentation/Outreach
- Rights and Re-Use

WITNESS: Activists’ Guide to Archiving Video, Yvonne Ng
http://archivingguide.witness.org/
Find smart ways to deal with Scale-

Tamiment YouTube collecting

- Tamiment Archive was selectively browsing through YouTube Occupy videos, trying to choose which ones to keep, then cataloging them with
  - Title, Creator, Creation Date, Upload Date,
  - Description, URL, Youtube Username, License,
  - Format, Codec, Source Media, On Internet Archive, CC License type

- But they didn’t realize that this wouldn’t scale!

March 24, 2012 YouTube stats
(just 6 months after start of movement)

- “#Occupy” 169,000
- “Occupy Wall Street” 98,400
- “Occupy Protest” 70,500
- “Occupy Movement” 54,800
- “#OWS” 50,300
- “Occupy Oakland” 13,400
- “Zucotti Park” 6,690

Alternative approach to YouTube Selection process

- Develop categories of important YouTube videos
  - Celebrity visits, Internal workings (library, kitchen, media), Confrontations with police, Labor, Housing, etc.
- Have Occupiers fill in an online form listing the 5 most important videos in each category

Advantages of YouTube Collaborative Filtering Selection Process

- Scalable and manageable
- Consistent with Occupy ideas of inclusiveness and of managing own story
- Tamiment can still choose to be selective in collecting only a portion of what is voted in, but the total set for review is a manageable scale

Handle Privacy & Security responsibly-
“In an effort to protect the privacy and personal safety of contributors to the Iranian Green Movement Collection, DONOR and UCLA Library agree to work together to develop methodology and an approach and will redact the email addresses or other personally identifiable information from broad public presentation.”

For more see library.ucla.edu/service/scl-rights-toolkit

Promoting ObscuraCam

• “ObscuraCam is a visual privacy app for photo and video, that gives you the power to better protect the identity of those captures in your photos, before you post them online”

• Developed by Guardian Project in conjunction w/Human Rights group WITNESS-

ObscuraCam

• Creative Commons lets you mix-and-match four different conditions:
  – Attribution: You let others copy, re-use and distribute your video, but they must credit you.
  – Share-Alike: You let others copy, re-use and distribute your video, only if they do the same with the work they create.
  – Non-Commercial: You let others copy, re-use and distribute your video for non-commercial purposes only.
  – No Derivative Works: You let others copy and distribute your video, but not to create new works using it.

• You can use these conditions in different combinations to share your work in a controlled way. Creative Commons licenses are legal tools that depend on pre-existing copyright laws. Having a Creative Commons license on your work may give you legal recourse, but it may not actually prevent people from downloading and re-using your video illegally.

Marking Creative Commons licenses

• There are a few ways to mark your video with a Creative Commons license. One way is to include a Creative Commons “bumper” or text card in your video. Creative Commons has created some with graphics that you can download from their website. This method is useful if your video is going to be shared offline (e.g. on DVD, live screenings), as the license information is attached to the video itself.

• Another way to mark your video with a Creative Commons license is to publish your video on platforms that are Creative Commons-enabled, such as YouTube, Vimeo, or Internet Archive. These platforms allow you to easily select a license during the upload process. This method is useful because the license is machine-readable. A search engine, for example, can detect the license.

Tips for Archivists on Outreach to Communities

• Build trust
• Speak in their language (not archive-speak)
• Identify ways you can meet needs they already perceive
• Approach projects as collaboration whenever possible
• Don’t only focus on content and metadata, but also rights that can be an impediment to preservation
Archival Practice involves Curation; Trying to minimize the impact of ruling narratives

- http://besser.tsoa.nyu.edu/howard/Talks
- http://digital.library.ucla.edu/
- http://ac=vist-archivists.org/ (use Wayback)
- https://www.facebook.com/ArchivistsCanada/