Community & Activist Archives: Their importance & the Challenges they face

Consider the Source: Activist Archives & Collective Memory

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What role do Archives Play

• Collect the historical record
• Are considered legal entities that can testify that the documents within them have not been altered
• But reflect biases related to those in power when a record was collected
  – Tend to collect info about the government itself, rich/powerful/prominent people/groups/ideas
  – Tend to provide description, indexing, & other forms of contextualization reflecting the biases of those in power at the time

How reliable is the info in an Archive?

• What content is collected
• How is the content contextualized?

What content is collected

Woodstock - The Definitive 50th Anniversary Archive (Blu-ray)

Flash forward 50 years... Woodstock... What does it mean? What does it do?...
What content is collected documenting an event
Last month—IN Farmers Market protest against Identarians

How is the content contextualized?

Idea of Community Archives

- Collect material considered “ephemera” by conventional archives
- Want to “tell our own story from our own perspective”
- Want to maintain a legacy of their community, movement, activism
- An important component of Civil Society

What type of content is in a Community Archive

- Increasingly – mostly born digital
- Documentation of community social or ethnic events, protests, forums, as well as documents and position papers
- Content can be in the form of photos, home movies, posters, documents
- Can come from websites, Facebook pages, Tweets

Contents of Community Archives come from individuals within that Community

- w/Social Media, group activity is more important than ever
- But each person in the group is an individual collector. And frequently a set of individual collections forms the group collection.

Documenting Protests
When aggregated, many different personal collections form an important picture of:

- An event
- An ethnic group
- A community
- A social movement
- Civil Society

- What is important to them, how they go about their business, ...

And we know from past works that aggregations create new meanings

- Aggregating all the photos and home movies of the Digital Diaspora is hugely more meaningful than a single photo-
  - One tweet says very little, but thousands of tweets can show trends or depict a particular event or day

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Digital Diaspora Family Reunion

But aggregating items from disparate sources causes significant problems

- Vast quantity of user-contributed material
- Rights Issues
- No easy way to control for quality, file format, metadata (not even any consistency for any of these)
Every Image Collector has a Different Approach

- Different file-naming conventions
- Different file formats
- Different compression schemes
- Different metadata
- Stored in different arrangements/hierarchies
- Stored in different places (cellphone, personal hard disk, YouTube, Vimeo, Facebook, ...)

Community Archives finally being recognized as being critically important

- Umass Boston Community-based Cultural Heritage Survey
- "2 year project to build an accessible, adaptable, and engaging 'roadmap' to guide libraries of all kinds and sizes through the participatory archiving process."
- "The results of this survey will inform the development of a suite of resources empowering libraries to plan participatory archiving programs with the communities they serve, preserve the resulting digital collections, and make those collections accessible to the public."

Some Community Archives Examples

- Documenting the New (Black Lives Matter)
- Spain’s 5-M Movement
- Extension Rebellion
- Señal 3 La Victoria (video documentation of Chilean neighborhood fighting back against regime)- CDPWATCH-
- Chinatown Home Video Day-
- Center for Asian American Media “Memories to Light”- International Digital Ephemera Project-
  - http://idep.library.ucla.edu/
  - https://uclalibrary.github.io/ideptoolkit/
- Activist Archives (Occupy Wall Street)-

Señal 3 La Victoria (Santiago, Cl)
“Home movies occupy a unique place in American culture. Though generally dismissed for their amateur qualities, home movies provide us with exceedingly authentic and honest moving images. Premised on the historic, cultural, and artistic value of the home movie, Memories to Light: Asian American Home Movies is a national participatory arts project that collectively and aesthetically constructs shared social, cultural, and political representations of Asian America directly from the community itself. Since the mainstream media has given us so few authentic images of the Asian American experience, home videos become the most real way to see how our grandparents, mothers, fathers, aunts and uncles lived their lives.”
International Digital Ephemera Project

- NYU MIAP students and grads originally working on archiving media from the Occupy movement (after Occupy, morphing into a focus on Community Archiving)
- Guidelines both activist creators and archives
- Developed newer low-impact methods

How Occupy material resembles what we’ll be facing in the future

- Vast quantity of user-contributed material
- No easy way to control for quality, file format, metadata
  - No enforcing guidelines as with organizational records
  - No semi-consistency as in a single individual’s personal records
- Much of the material can most easily be found on Social Networks
  - …we need to find smart ways to harvest metadata and analyze files, as well as to influence behavior of potential contributors

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

Examples of digital-age challenges these Community Archive Collections face

- Making it easier for community members to contribute material
- Making it easier for the archive to sift through vast quantities of digital files
- Find better ways for conventional archives to reflect diverse community voices
- Help deal with the sticky issues of privacy for types of records that were not designed to be widely shared
Lessons Learned for Archivists
To be discussed after Break

• 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

Video Convincing Occupy of the importance of Archiving

SPLIT HERE AND CONTINUE AFTER BREAK

IMPORTANT LESSONS FROM ACTIVIST ARCHIVISTS (& OTHERS)

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Communicate well with your future Contributors-

• Learn to speak their language
• Help them to realize the importance of archiving
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.
Develop Cooperative Relationships-
- Try to better understand what their aims are; get involved in their activities
- Develop partnering relationships

Skill-shares for Occupiers
Workshop: OWS Archive Share Day

participated in Self-help activities:

Self-help activities:
Other Archive Share-Day and Hackathon 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”)

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
- Instructions for redundant metadata collection (to make sure that it is captured)

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 archiving-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://archivaguide.witness.org/

Collecting – Think Tank

Think Tank metadata redundancies

- Guidelines stipulate that person holding recording device will check to see that time and date stamp are correct before beginning recording (mostly didn’t happen)
- Guidelines stipulate that a script be read verbatim at the beginning of the recording, with date, time, proposed subject, etc. (and would eventually allow voice-recognition software to create appropriate metadata). Script also stated that all participants agreed to Creative Commons licensing of the recording
- Guidelines requested that date/time be embedded in the applied file-name

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-

Police in Berlin have raided an anarchist library

"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."
Promoting Privacy Protection
Example from WITNESS

• “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-

Privacy Issues with Police BodyCams
https://is.gseis.ucla.edu/bodycams/

Privacy Issues with Police BodyCams: Who should have access to archived videos?
• Police before writing their incident report?
• Attorneys before trial?
• Public in cases of police brutality?
• All videos after X years?
• What about the privacy of a rape victim interview?

Discuss issues around commercial services with Creators/Recorders-
• Disappearance of embedded metadata from YouTube & Vimeo
• More general Rights issues
• Give archives the IP right to download

Study of metadata loss through uploading to services
Even with good records, Rights Issues remain
1999 WTO Seattle Protest 20th anniversary Video Preservation

SUMMARY

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

Researchers need to be critical about what you find in an Archive
• Think about how reliable is the info in an Archive?
  – What content are they collecting
  – How are they contextualizing the content
### Other Projects to monitor

- **Documenting the Now**
  https://www.docnow.io/
- **International Digital Ephemera Project**
  http://idep.library.ucla.edu/

### Where OSF might help

- **Use Community Archives**
- **Help build more of them, or help conventional archives to build community collections with input from those communities**
- **Support exploration or research on the more difficult problems facing these types of archival collections in the digital age**
  - Making it easier for community members to contribute material
  - Making it easier for the archive to sift through vast quantities of digital files
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