Usage guidelines

Archiving, Distribution, and Experimental Moving Image Histories

Julia Knight

The processes of distribution are central to shaping not only our moving image

culture—determining what gets seen, written about, and thus becomes "visible"—but

also the moving image histories to which scholars have access. Experimental work, for

instance, tends to attract relatively small audiences and has thus been unattractive to

commercial distributors and not widely written about. Historically, its distribution has

usually been undertaken by small specialist organizations, set up specifically for that

purpose, operating in a subsidized economy via low wages, volunteer labor, and state

funding. Sustaining such organizations—and hence the visibility of experimental

work—has frequently proved extremely challenging. In the United Kingdom, the

London Film-Makers' Co-op (LFMC) lurched from one crisis to another throughout its

existence before finally merging with London Electronic Arts to form LUX in 1999,

while several other specialist distributors that were active in the 1970s and 1980s—such

as Circles and the Other Cinema—no longer exist. Online distribution has been widely

seen as addressing some of the challenges of distributing nonmainstream moving image

work.[1] Now, with access to only a computer and a broadband connection, filmmakers

can, if they wish, self-distribute their work online and ensure its ongoing availability themselves.

The Internet has also started to break down the traditional distinction between a distribution collection (which is actively circulated to viewing publics) and an archive (which traditionally restricts public access to preserve the work). Historically, the two have served different purposes, so much so that the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) prevented accredited members from undertaking distribution (although members are often a source of prints for distributors and can lend prints to other FIAF members).[2] With the advent of the Internet, various organizations that have moving image archives—ranging from a national institution like the BFI in the United Kingdom to the Prelinger Archive amassed by Rick Prelinger in the United States— have started to make work from their holdings freely available online.[3] Once analog work that has been preserved in a traditional archive is digitized and uploaded to the Internet, it becomes available for (in theory) anyone to view and can be actively promoted through online mailing lists and social networking sites. This blurring of the previously distinct roles of a distributor and an archive is exemplified by the Internet itself. At one level, the Internet can be viewed as a massive archive in that it functions as a form of repository, a place to store or collect material together—albeit one that does not guarantee the *preservation* of that work. As Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau have observed, YouTube in particular "has rapidly developed into the world's largest

archive of moving images."[4] But the Internet is equally a *distribution* platform because, unlike traditional moving image archives, it conveniently makes material widely available.

The ease of making work available on the Internet—whether the material has been uploaded by a distributor, an archive, or a DIY practitioner—has in turn created a superabundance of easily accessible moving image material. This has started to focus attention on how users navigate their way through that abundance and/or how producers and distributors attract consumers to their particular "product." Many websites now include sharing, embedding, and social networking options to promote the circulation of their material to wider audiences, while others are embracing mobile or portable platforms. In a similar vein, recent research and scholarly literature addressing the digital distribution and promotion of moving image material have tended to focus on exploring the nature of the increased or enhanced access it provides. Jean Burgess and Joshua Green's book on YouTube, for instance, explores the participatory culture fostered by the platform; Emanuelle Wessels has examined the Internet marketing campaigns for *Cloverfield* (2008); Charlotte Crofts has explored the different ways in which digital cinema projection has been taken up in the United Kingdom, Europe, and the United States; while both Marc Stumpel and Iain Smith have examined the advent of peer-to-peer file sharing.[5]

Such interests have tended to neglect and even conceal the fact that not everything is actually available online, that online collections of moving image work are still *selections* made from what exists and is available offline, whether that is in digital or analog form. The Internet has certainly made far more moving image material, especially experimental work, widely accessible. But what is available online is nevertheless dictated by what people choose to upload, and a number of factors can function to delimit that choice. At the same time, other factors can impact the extent to which what *is* made available online is used.

Using the example of creating the Film and Video Distribution Database (FVDD; http://fv-distribution-database.ac.uk/)—an online resource addressing the institutional context that facilitated the circulation of experimental moving image work in the United Kingdom—this essay unpacks some of these factors. While we may have access to more moving image work than in the predigital era, that access is still constrained in a number of ways. Although increased availability of material online may help challenge the dominance of any single history or canon, the largely hidden factors that determine the selection and use of that material nevertheless function to enable access to particular experimental moving image histories over others.

While new media researchers have tended to concern themselves with examining what has become available, archivists, by contrast, have been grappling with the issue of selection—what to make available—for years. In 1986, Helen Willa Samuels argued

that in a modern and information-rich society, only a small portion of the vast

documentation produced by institutions and cultural activities can be kept. This has

meant that archivists now have to take a far more active role in selecting what to keep.

At the time, she asserted that they lacked the techniques to undertake that role and

advanced the idea of "documentation strategies" as a means of addressing that

problem.[6] In particular, such strategies are initiated to remedy the poor documentation

for specific sectors of society as well as for ongoing issues, activities, or geographic

areas. Rather than the traditional archival practice of appraising and managing existing

collections, a documentation strategy involves choosing and defining the topic to be

documented as well as selecting the documentation to be included.[7] Although not

necessarily conceived as such, it is possible to argue that it is more helpful and indeed

more accurate to view many online experimental moving image collections and related

resources like the FVDD as forms of documentation strategies rather than as part of the

culture of superabundance facilitated by the Internet.[8]

BACKGROUND

The FVDD was a by-product of an Arts and Humanities Research Council–funded

research project undertaken during 2002–5 by me (principal investigator) and research

fellow Peter Thomas, with Geoffrey Nowell-Smith as advisory coinvestigator.[9] The

project examined the distribution practices during the period 1966–2000 of the following U.K. organizations: the LFMC (founded in 1966), the Other Cinema (founded in 1969), London Video Arts/London Electronic Arts (founded in 1976), Cinema of Women (founded in 1979), Circles (founded in 1980 and relaunched as Cinenova in 1991), the Film and Video Umbrella (founded in 1983), Albany Video Distribution (founded in 1985), and LUX (founded in 1999). All these organizations distributed (and in some cases still do distribute) experimental moving image work, either solely (as is the case with LUX) or as part of a wider undertaking to distribute film and video material of little interest to commercial distributors.[10]

Within my own discipline of film studies, distribution has, until recently, been critically neglected, with scholarship tending to focus largely on the text (including modes of production and questions of authorship) and spectatorship (including sites of exhibition). This has generally been the case across all areas of moving image practice. A number of journal articles and books have started to emerge that deal with distribution and distributors—such as a handful of articles on feminist film distribution in the journal *Screen*, Peter Biskind's *Down and Dirty Pictures: Miramax, Sundance, and the Rise of Independent Film* (2004), and Scott MacDonald's *Canyon Cinema* (2008)—but they are few in number when measured against the scale of critical energy invested in textual analysis, stardom, directors, spectatorship, and so on.[11] In the United Kingdom, a number of books have also been published specifically addressing the experimental

moving image sector such as A. L. Rees's *A History of Experimental Film and Video* (1998),

Nina Danino and Michael Maziere's edited anthology *The Undercut Reader* (2003),

Catherine Elwes's *Video Art: A Guided Tour* (2005), and David Curtis's *A History of Artists' Film and Video in Britain* (2007). Yet again, these tend to focus primarily on the

work produced and, to a lesser extent, on the organizations that supported that

production work, with little or no discussion of the processes of distribution that

facilitate its circulation.

The aim of our research project was to address that neglect and improve

understanding—both among scholars and wider communities of interest—of how

distribution processes and activity help shape moving image culture. We undertook the

research by consulting the records of the preceding groups and the archives of the

organizations that supported them such as the BFI, the Arts Council of Great Britain, the

London Film and Video Development Agency, and the Independent Film-Makers

Association, as well as conducting research interviews with key personnel in those

organizations' histories. Largely for our own convenience, Thomas and I scanned or

took digital photos of all material consulted in the course of our research—including

committee meeting minutes, policy documents, promotional material, development

prospectuses, reports, funding applications, press coverage, budgets, correspondence,

royalty statements, and audience feedback sheets—and built up a ninety gigabyte

offline digital archive of documents.

Although the main output from the project was a coauthored book, the material consulted in the course of the research far exceeded what could be discussed in a single text.[12] As we trawled through our offline archive, it also quickly became evident that given the complex and multifaceted nature of the area we were examining, the newly digitized material had enormous potential for developing further research in the field of experimental moving image. In 2004–5, Thomas and I therefore initiated a follow-up project—also funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council via their Resource Enhancement scheme—to set up an online database to make more widely available a selection of our primary research material. It was developed as a collaboration with David Curtis and Steven Ball at the British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection (http://www.studycollection.org.uk/) since it would function as a complementary resource to their own collection of moving image work, databased information about that work, and artists' papers. Thomas, Curtis, Ball, and I, together with research administrator Jane Gowman, formed the project team, and we were supported by a four-person management committee. The resulting FVDD enables other researchers to access online documentation and material from and about the preceding organizations and to pursue their own lines of inquiry.

The FVDD (http://fv-distribution-database.ac.uk/) is intended to function simultaneously as an archive (preserving fragile, frequently uncataloged or dispersed, and in some cases now lost paper documentation) and as an easily accessible collection

of material freely available to anyone with an Internet connection. It can be viewed as a documentation strategy in terms of identifying an area that needs documenting in two ways. First, when it comes to moving image preservation, all too often, the emphasis is on preserving only moving image artifacts and artists' materials. Yet institutional records provide a crucial context for understanding the history of experimental moving image culture. Second, other U.K. organizations—including a number of independent film and video workshops—also undertook distribution of some experimental film and video work during this period, but their distribution activities tended either to focus exclusively on their own productions, deal with a very narrow area, or span only a few short years. The organizations included in the FVDD undertook distribution of work made by a wide range of film and video makers over sustained periods of time, helping establish national and often international profiles for that work, and hence had particular historical significance.[13]

At the same time, creating such an online archive–collection of primary research material has, to a large extent, replicated the issues that face the growing number of online collections of experimental moving image work and other related e-resources, many of which—like the FVDD—originated as educational or research-based projects and, in some cases, have been explicitly informed by a similar goal of addressing neglected areas of moving image history.

THE SELECTIVE NATURE OF HISTORIOGRAPHY

A central issue in creating an online archive–collection of material is selecting what to

include. This issue was compounded with the FVDD since the database comprises two

interlinked but separately searchable data tables: one of full-text PDFs of documents

and a second of narrative chronology entries drawn from the documents. While the full

data sets are available to the user, the FVDD's main purpose is to produce customized

chronologies and document sets in response to users' particular interests. For instance,

if you search the chronology data table for the LFMC, it will produce a filtered narrative

chronology that maps out aspects of the LFMC's history and is fully referenced with

both in-text citations and a bibliography. The in-text citations are links to the relevant

bibliographic entries, and the bibliographic entries in turn contain links to the PDFs of

the documents on which the chronology entries are based. Thus one of the narrative

entries in the LFMC chronology, as shown in Figure 1, states:

> **\<EXT>**
>
> "(Finch, 1983: 1)" is the in-text citation that links to the full reference in the
>
> bibliography at the end of the chronology, where the user can access the
>
> PDF of Finch's original letter.
>
> **\</EXT>**

This functionality means that the process of populating the database with content involved two levels of selection. First, a selection had to be made from the thousands of scanned documents held in our offline archive. Originally, I had envisaged this process being done on an organization by organization basis. However, this approach did not take into account the often interlinked nature of the organizations' historical activities. Indeed Samuels developed the idea of documentation strategies precisely to help address this because, as she observed, "modern documentation crosses institutional lines."[14] To ensure that the database facilitated the exploration of that complexity, we had to revise our methodology to instead select material that related to particular key events or developments, and this material was invariably drawn from the records of several organizations. Hence the chronology data table allows what are now termed "Event" searches. While it is possible to generate a chronology of a particular organization, the FVDD will tend to produce a detailed overview of certain periods rather than a comprehensive history. This tendency will diminish and the coverage of a particular organization's history will increase as more material is added. But at the time of this writing, the chronology that the FVDD produces when you search on Circles, for instance, focuses primarily on its failed merger in 1991 with Cinema of Women and its subsequent relaunch as Cinenova—rather than, say, Circles's distribution of Maya Deren's films during the 1980s, which did much to raise awareness of women's

experimental filmmaking among an upcoming generation of women in the United

Kingdom.

[INSERT NUMBERED FIGURE 1 HERE]

Second, what was selected from the scanned documents to construct the

chronology entries was, of course, guided by the research interests underpinning the

original research project. For instance, the Arts Council's minutes of their Artists' Films

Sub-Committee (AFSC) meeting held on January 17, 1977, are included in the FVDD's

document data table and have been used to construct a chronology entry that highlights

the growing concern in the United Kingdom with how to fund the emerging video

resource centers. However, the minutes also include a discussion of the relationship

between the AFSC and the BFI's Production Board as sources of funding for artists' film

and video production, details of which were not included in the chronology data table

because it did not directly relate to the FVDD's central concern with distribution.

While our choices were very specific to the nature of the FVDD, the basic issue of

selection is one that besets most moving image digitization projects and related online

resources. Some projects are set up to digitize preexisting collections, and thus the

process of selection has in a sense already been undertaken. This is the case with the

Arts on Film Archive (http://artsonfilm.wmin.ac.uk/), which was produced in the

United Kingdom, also with the support of the Arts and Humanities Research Council

(AHRC). As the resource's home page notes, "the archive offers a complete database

and on-line video streaming of *all 450 films* made by the film department of Arts

Council England between 1953 and 1998."[15] However, in many instances, resource

creators are faced with making the selection themselves, as was the case with REWIND:

Artists' Video in the 70s and 80s (http://www.rewind.ac.uk/rewind/). Another U.K.

project, also AHRC funded, REWIND was set up to preserve early British video art

through an offline digitization project and to provide an online information database.

This project presented the issue of which artists to include (see Figure 2) and which

works by those artists to prioritize for preservation. Most projects of this nature set up

an advisory board—as REWIND did—to help make those decisions to ensure that the

selection was as representative as possible. But inevitably, opinions will differ, and

those that win out will help shape any history of experimental moving image work that

can be constructed by using the resulting online resources.

[INSERT NUMBERED FIGURE 2 NEAR HERE]

On one hand, the REWIND database not only includes early video art champions

like David Hall and Brian Hoey but also John "Hoppy" Hopkins, who quickly became

more involved in community-based video work, as well as Malcolm Le Grice and Mike

Leggett, who worked extensively with film as well as video. On the other hand,

however, while the database includes entries on the 1975 Video Show held at London's

Serpentine Gallery and London Video Arts (LVA) for the key roles they played in

nurturing video art practice in the United Kingdom, it does not include entries on the

1976 special issue of *Studio International* or *Independent Video* [1] magazine (later

Independent Media) and their role in developing a critical discourse around the emerging

art form.

THE BUGBEAR OF DIGITAL RIGHTS MANAGEMENT

The choice of what to include in a digitization project, however, is not entirely in the

control of the project team or its advisory board. A number of other factors can impact

the selection process, and a major one is digital rights management. Laws of copyright

vary across media and from country to country, but in many cases, the rights to moving

image work and related material are owned by someone. Although some work is in the

public domain, rights management is something that digitization projects have to

address. In some cases, it may not present a problem, but in others, what is uploaded to

the Internet and its accessibility is dependent on what digital rights the project team can

obtain.

In the case of the FVDD, several of the organizations whose records we consulted

no longer existed—such as the LMFC, the LVA, the Other Cinema, the Cinema of

Women, and Circles. Thus a first hurdle was establishing who owned the rights to the

surviving material. In some cases, the documents had been inherited by their successor

organizations—for instance, the LFMC's and LVA's by LUX and Circles's by Cinenova.

For those successor organizations to be able to grant the necessary digital rights, the

FVDD project team had to first establish that a formal transfer of assets had taken place.

In other cases—as with the Other Cinema and Cinema of Women—there were no

successor organizations, and access to the documents had been facilitated through

personal contacts. Thus the project team was also obliged to develop a policy to deal

with the eventuality of being unable to identify or locate a rights holder. Given that the

database was for educational and research use only, the best advice at the time

suggested that it was an acceptable risk to publish, with the proviso that the project's

research administrator documented her attempts to locate a rights holder and the

project team agreed to take material down if asked to do so should a rights holder

subsequently come to light.

A further complicating factor was the sheer number of documents that the

project team needed rights holders to look through, and a key part of the project

involved developing a method for dealing with this. Originally, we had envisaged

rights holders looking through the material offline prior to us uploading it to the FVDD.

In practice, this proved both unwieldy and unsatisfactory because, on one hand, it

would have necessitated compiling long lists or paper copies of documents to attach to

the permissions contract, and on the other hand, it meant that rights holders could not

view the material in its online context. A crucial factor in persuading rights holders to

consider online publication of what had in some cases been classified as "confidential"

documents was the fact that FVDD users would not be viewing them out of context but alongside a range of contemporaneous documentation from other organizations in response to their keyword searches.[16] As a result, we adopted a "right to preview" contract that was developed in conjunction with legal advice from the British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection's host institution, University of the Arts London. The contract allowed the project team to operate the FVDD online under password protection, upload documents to it, and grant rights holders preview access for a fixed period prior to the database becoming publicly available. This had the huge advantage of allowing easy access to the documents and a bibliographic listing thereof, while also enabling rights holders to experience the FVDD's functionality and see firsthand how inclusion of their material could contribute to building a better understanding of experimental moving image culture in the United Kingdom.

Even so, each organization employed a different approach to signing off on online publication permission. Some required us to give a formal demonstration of the database; others consulted their legal advisors, deferred to a recognized subject expert, or meticulously previewed each document; while still others immediately saw the benefits of making available any material that facilitated a better understanding of experimental moving image culture in the United Kingdom. All told, we have so far received only one request to take down a document because it contained information about a particular employee that was deemed to be confidential. Unfortunately, the

same document also shed light on how the organization developed at the end of the

1980s, which is now unavailable to the user.

However, the digital rights management process involves negotiating not only

the right to publish online but also the extent of public access to the electronic artifact(s).

Since the FVDD was set up to facilitate further research, the project team did not want

to impose any barriers to access. While we were fortunate in that rights holders were

supportive of our aims, rights holders' willingness to grant online publication rights can

vary enormously. Although some moving image artists have seen promotional benefits

to making their work freely available online, for instance, others have been more

reluctant to pursue online distribution. This has contributed significantly to creating

varying levels of access to digitized collections or archives of moving image work. In

some cases, the digitized work is stored entirely offline (as is the case with REWIND); in

others, limited access is offered online via taster clips or restricted access; and in still

others, complete works may be fully available online. The aforementioned Arts on Film

Archive is an example of restricted access; while the database of information about the

films is available to any Internet user worldwide (see Figure 3), the digitized films can

only be viewed by users based in U.K. institutions of further and higher education

because of copyright restrictions imposed by the Arts Council (see Figure 4). However,

LUXONLINE (http://www.luxonline.org.uk/), a freely available educational online

resource set up by LUX to help promote awareness of artists' film and video, offers both

taster clips of some work (see Figure 5) and, in some cases, full-length videos. Thus an extensive library of Arts Council films is only available to a very small online audience, while a very small amount of LUX's material is accessible to anyone irrespective of his location.

[INSERT NUMBERED FIGURES 3–5 NEAR HERE]

<H1>TIME-CONSUMING MONSTERS

As is evident, the digital rights management process for the FVDD project generated an unforeseen complication. While not all digitization projects may encounter the same kind of complication, it nevertheless serves to highlight the time-consuming nature of digital resource creation. All such projects require careful planning and development to ensure that the resulting resource does what designers want it to do and meets the needs of its users—that it is "fit for purpose." This involves addressing not only the processes of selection and digital rights management but also the issues of digitizing content, optimizing it for web display, designing and constructing the database or resource, trialing the resource's functionality, designing the web interface, uploading content, trouble shooting, and user testing. Not only are all these tasks highly labor intensive, but as experience has taught anyone involved in digital resource creation, the planning and development stages always take longer than anticipated. Indeed, when the FVDD project was initially set up, the Arts and Humanities Data Service (AHDS), a

former national advisory body and online repository for AHRC-funded digital

resources, advised that it invariably took at least twice as long.[17]

This is due in part to having to deal with unforeseen eventualities. For the FVDD,

the rights management process proved more complicated—and hence more time

consuming—than anticipated. Although the project team was able to learn from that

experience, a number of other problems also arose that could not have been anticipated.

First, the intention was to employ the British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection's

existing research administrator to undertake the digital rights management process.

However, just as the project was awarded funding, she became unavailable, which

meant we had to recruit and train up a replacement. Second, complications arose with

the server hosting arrangements put in place at the start of the project, which

necessitated finding an alternative. In the process, the project team also lost the

provision made for constructing the FVDD's user interface and had to outsource that

work elsewhere. And third, given the complexity of the FVDD's functionality, a

freelance software consultant had been employed who, unfortunately, became ill

during the course of the project and was unable to complete the job within the original

time frame.

These combined factors contributed to significant delays, and in the case of

funded projects—as the FVDD, Arts on Film, REWIND, and LUXONLINE all were—

this can have serious consequences. In the FVDD's case, what had been conceived of as

a two-year project became a three-year project but had no access to additional funding. This in turn meant that less content than originally planned could be uploaded to the database.

An obvious solution to these kinds of problems might seem to be to budget for longer planning and development stages. But the single largest cost in these kinds of projects is usually salaries, making them expensive projects to fund. Any lengthening of the project's duration can significantly increase the already high costs. Since all funders look at value for money, increasing the costs also reduces the chances of being funded in the first place.

Thus the time-consuming nature of digitization projects inevitably limits their scope and ambition. A feature that would have considerably enhanced the usefulness of the FVDD would have been to use optical character recognition (OCR) to produce fully word-searchable files, in addition to the scans of the originals, for all the documents. This would have meant that users were not dependent on how we chose to keyword documents to facilitate document searches. However, OCR is not 100 percent reliable, which means that every file would have had to be proofread and corrected, which would in turn have considerably increased the project costs.

These issues make an unfunded resource like UbuWeb a highly attractive option. UbuWeb (http://www.ubu.com/) is an online "repository" for all forms of the avant-garde and includes an extensive collection of moving image work. On its website,

UbuWeb states that it does not handle money. On one hand, the organization accepts no grants or donations, while on the other hand, it pays for nothing. Their web hosting is provided free of charge by a sympathetic "alliance of interests," and all work is done on a voluntary basis.[18] According to founder Kenneth Goldsmith, it is because they have no money that they never ask for permission to publish online; they simply go ahead and do it.[19] Over the years, this has given rise to much debate, together with various requests by rights holders to take down their work, with which UbuWeb has complied. But as Goldsmith points out, "if we had to ask for permission, we wouldn't exist. . . . Asking permission involves paperwork and negotiations, lawyers, and bank accounts."[20] Although by their own admission, this means that "the selection is random and the quality is often poor," their overall approach means that UbuWeb is not constrained by the limitations of a funding period but is instead "a never-ending work in progress."[21]

<H1>THE NEED FOR SUSTAINABILITY

The time-consuming nature of creating digital resources, however, also has implications for their sustainability. Undertaking the projects in the first place is largely dependent on the availability of "labor"—whether that's in the form of paid staff or (as in the case of UbuWeb) volunteers. But so, too, is maintaining the projects in the long term. Some

projects have finite content, such as the Arts on Film Archive, and, in terms of

uploading content, have a completion point. Others, however, do not and will require

updating. Still others—such as UbuWeb and the FVDD—have been specifically

designed as resources that can be added to as more material becomes available,

precisely as never-ending works in progress. In 2007, the AHRC conducted a survey of

the 173 digital resources (which included the FVDD) that had been funded between

November 2000 and May 2006 via their Resource Enhancement scheme. Questionnaires

were sent to the grant holders to elicit their views on the sustainability of their resources

and related matters. Of the 112 who replied, the vast majority (eighty-eight) stated that

the content of their resources would need updating; however, about half reported that

they "envisage[d] difficulty in carrying this out, mostly because of the non-availability

of funding."[22]

Although some hosting institutions are willing to bear the financial burden,

maintaining and developing a resource's content often requires recruiting volunteer

labor. In some cases, that volunteer labor can be provided by the original project team,

carried out alongside or in conjunction with new projects, but in others, it is recruited

from among the resource's user base. LUXONLINE has employed the latter approach,

and it is something we hope to implement in some form with the FVDD.[23] However,

dependence on volunteer labor, no matter from where it is sourced, means that the

process of updating content can be very random—something UbuWeb readily

acknowledge.[24] If content is not regularly updated, the resource runs the risk of containing inaccurate information. For instance, the REWIND database notes that video artist Brian Hoey is currently Head of the BA (Hons) Media Production course at Northumbria University. While this was true at the time of uploading the entry, it is now no longer the case. This is, of course, a very minor detail in terms of REWIND's central purpose, but more serious inaccuracies mean that resources can lose their usefulness as well as the trust of their users because they affect the veracity of the histories to which the resources give access.

But it is not just a question of updating and developing the content. Digital technology has developed at an almost alarming rate, and what was state of the art five (two?) years ago can now seem very clunky and dated as well as limited in its functionality. As resources start to date at the technological level, this can similarly make them less fit for purpose because they no longer provide what their users have come to expect of digital resources. LUXONLINE is undergoing a technological overhaul for this very reason because it was originally developed before the massive take-off of online moving image delivery.[25] Technological obsolescence is also the reason why online distribution does nothing to fulfill the preservation mandate of traditional archives. As film archivists have found, 35mm film is a far more stable and longer-lasting preservation medium than any digital format. Indeed, as Thomas and I built up our ninety-gigabyte offline digital archive in the course of our original research

project, we became acutely aware of how vulnerable the material was due to the inherent instability of digital files. According to Jan-Christopher Horak of the University of California, Los Angeles, a new digital format is also being developed every eighteen months. The only way to ensure the preservation of digitized material is to migrate it to new formats as they emerge, something that is beyond the means of resources like REWIND, LUXONLINE, and the FVDD.[26]

The sustainability of such resources is also not just dependent on maintaining their overall usefulness. It is also crucially dependent on a commitment to providing hosting for the resource in the long term. However, a significant number of digitization projects that originate in academic institutions come about through the research interests of a particular staff member. The British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection, for instance, was set up at Central St. Martins College of Art and Design at University of the Arts London around the combined interests and personal archives of filmmaker Malcolm Le Grice and senior research fellow David Curtis; REWIND at the University of Dundee around the research interests of video artist Stephen Partridge; and the FVDD at the University of Sunderland as a result of my own prior involvement in independent film and video distribution.[27] While these staff members remain in their positions, they are able to canvass on behalf of their own resource. However, all the projects have been taxed with the need to ensure that users will continue to have access to their material when that is no longer the case.

There are various approaches to this problem. In the United Kingdom, it used to be the case that all digital resources funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council had to be deposited with the previously mentioned AHDS at the end of the award period—precisely to ensure their long-term availability. However, in 2007—while REWIND, Arts on Film, and FVDD were all in development—it was announced that the AHDS was to lose its funding and would be unable to provide a hosting service for future projects. Depending on the level of demand for a resource's content, it may be possible to pursue a more commercial route by charging for access or selling advertising. The Prelinger Archive, for instance, makes low-resolution copies of some moving image work freely available on the Internet but charges for access to and use of high-resolution versions.[28] For projects developed within an academic context primarily as research resources, the most robust approach has been to try to ensure that the resource becomes firmly embedded within the hosting institution's wider research culture and teaching programs.

<H1>THE NEED FOR VISIBILITY: BUILDING A USER BASE

The extent to which any online resource contributes to new histories of moving image culture also depends on the extent to which it is actually used. Keeping the resource

current is in fact a key means of attracting return users. But the long-term usefulness of an online resource is also related to its ability to attract new users.

Much of the early funding available in the United Kingdom was informed by a desire simply to make collections more available, to enhance access to them. For instance, in 2003, JISC [2] (a U.K. organization aimed at promoting and supporting the innovative use of digital technologies in higher education) set up a ten million pound program to digitize material "from previously difficult or impossible to access collections."[29] Similarly, the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Resource Enhancement scheme, which funded the FVDD, was intended to support projects "designed to enhance *access to and the availability of* research materials and resources."[30] And one of the Arts and Humanities Data Service's key functions was precisely to "make its collections *readily available* to scholars through an on-line catalogue."[31] By 2006, that service was jointly funded by JISC and the AHRC to the tune of just over one million pounds.

However, as early as 2005, the AHRC had recognized that funding digital resource creation was raising a number of problems and undertook a review of its Resource Enhancement scheme. A key concern was the long-term sustainability of the resources they had funded, along with the extent to which the resources were actually being used: "Although it is too soon to assess the wider impact of projects, awareness

and usage of some resources was found to be low. This was coupled with weak

promotion and dissemination to potential users."[32]

One outcome of the AHRC review was the decision to discontinue the Resource

Enhancement scheme and replace it with a more strategic approach to digital resource

creation that sought "to identify key resources which, should they be enhanced would

not only be *more widely used* but would transform research undertaken in the arts and

humanities."[33] Hence the emphasis shifted from simply making *available* to building

usage. As a result, a number of funding schemes have since been launched—including

ones by both the AHRC and JISC—that have been aimed in part precisely at developing

user groups for existing online digital resources.[34]

To a certain extent, in the age of Web 2.0 culture, lack of awareness and low usage

of resources are perhaps less urgent concerns. The REWIND project has to date, for

instance, received over one million hits from over ninety countries, which is far in excess

of anything the project team envisaged and has been achieved with virtually no

promotional effort on their part.[35] In a similar vein, according to Goldsmith, artists are

increasingly gifting their work to UbuWeb precisely in recognition of the attendant

promotional effects of being online.[36] But even with Web 2.0 tools, the Internet does not

necessarily create an even playing field. REWIND has also reported that its user stats peak

when there is a related real-world event being staged, which suggests that real-world

visibility still plays a crucial role in building usage.[37] Major collections—such as those of

the BBC or the BFI—already have extensive real-world visibility and hence have far greater potential for attracting real-world media coverage in addition to online word of mouth. This in turn means that they are usually able to build far larger user bases than can be achieved by online collections of experimental moving image work and resources.

FUTURE HISTORIES?

Despite the selective nature of the growing number of online experimental moving image collections and related resources, it is impossible to dispute the benefits of the increased availability of such material. However, the histories to which they give researchers and other interested parties access are still—just as with traditional archives and collections—partial because the resources themselves can be highly limited in scope or functionality, incomplete, out of date, or simply inaccurate.

The existence of some online resources may also possibly be very transitory. It is evident that usage—however large or small—builds both visibility and communities of interest. And those in turn can play a key role in helping secure the continued availability of the online collections and resources—by making the collection or resource an asset of value to the hosting institution or by building up a user base of volunteer activism. But this, combined with funders' concerns with building usage, suggests that it is not just a case of the Internet starting to break down the traditional

distinction between a distribution collection and an archive; rather, it is possible to argue that in a reversal of offline archiving practice (restricting public access), online archiving projects must function like active distribution collections (ensuring that they are used as widely as possible) to secure their own long-term survival. If, for whatever reason, they are unable to do so, they may cease to be used or disappear. More worryingly, the very act of building usage for the growing number of online collections and resources tends to condition users to look only online, which can in turn marginalize the material that remains offline.[38] If scholars are to continue to develop their understanding of experimental moving image culture and its histories, it will be necessary not only to safeguard existing online resources and continue to develop new ones but also to actively promote those that (may always) remain offline.

<BIO>*Biography*

Julia Knight is professor of moving image at the University of Sunderland in the United Kingdom and coeditor of *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies.* Before entering academia, she worked as a video distributor in the independent film and video sector. She has published on various aspects of film and video but has most recently been engaged in research addressing moving image promotion and distribution, which resulted in the book *Reaching Audiences: Distribution and Promotion of Alternative Moving Image* (2011), coauthored with Peter Thomas.

<NH>NOTES

1. By, e.g., allowing producers to bypass the gatekeeping function of commercial distributors. See, e.g., Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail: How Endless Choice Is Creating Unlimited Demand* (London: Random House, 2006). This was also a key issue informing the setting up of the London-based Power to the Pixel annual conferences in 2007.

2. See John Mhiripiri, Anthology Film Archives, in interview with Peter Thomas, August 1, 2003. This unpublished interview was conducted as part of the research informing the author's recent book, cowritten with Thomas, *Reaching Audiences: Distribution and Promotion of Alternative Moving Image* (Bristol, U.K.: Intellect, 2011).

3. The BFI set up a YouTube channel, while Prelinger gave two thousand of his collected titles to the Internet Archive to be freely available for download.

4. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau, eds., *The YouTube Reader* (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009), back cover. The book also includes a section on "Storage," in which contributors discuss various ways in which YouTube can be viewed as a form of archive.

5. Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009); Emanuelle Wessels, "**<HS>**'Where Were You When the Monster Hit?' Media Convergence, Branded Security Citizenship, and the Trans-media Phenomenon of *Cloverfield*," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 17, no. 1 (2011): 69–83; Charlotte Crofts, "Cinema Distribution in the Age of Digital Projection," *Post Script* 30, no. 2 (2011): 79–94; Marc Stumpel, "File-Sharing or Attention-Sharing? Implications of the Hybrid Economy," paper presented at Besides the Screen Conference, Goldsmiths University of London, November 20, 2010; and Iain Smith, "Bootleg Archives: Alternative Channels of Film Distribution in the Internet Age," paper presented at Screen Studies Conference, University of Glasgow, July 3, 2011.

6. Helena Willa Samuels, "Who Controls the Past," *American Archivist* 49, no. 2 (1986): 109–24. Her ideas about documentation strategies were formed while working with Larry Hackman and were subsequently developed and clarified through a number of publications. See, e.g., Larry J. Hackman and Joan Warnow-Blewett, "The Documentation Strategy Process: A Model and a Case Study," *American Archivist* 50 (Winter 1987): 12–47; Philip N. Alexander and Helen W. Samuels, "The Roots of 128: A Hypothetical Documentation Strategy," *American Archivist* 50 (Fall 1987): 518–31; Richard J. Cox, "A Documentation Strategy Case Study: Western New York," *American Archivist* 52 (Spring 1989): 192–200; and Helen W. Samuels, "Improving Our Disposition: Documentation Strategy," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–92): 125–40.

7. Two further activities are also involved: selecting advisors and establishing the site for the strategy and structuring the inquiry and examining the form and substance of the available documentation. See Samuels, "Who Controls the Past," 116.

8. I should stress here that my research has been rooted in the discipline of film studies with more recent interests in new media rather than archival practice. Thus I make no claim for the FVDD being a consciously and coherently formulated documentation strategy. Although we had a management committee overseeing the project, this did not include an archivist. But, as was pointed out to me during the drafting of this article, the aims of the FVDD project parallel those of documentation strategies too closely to be ignored.

9. It was in fact two interrelated projects, one following on directly from the other. Information about the research projects, their findings, and their outputs can be found on the project website at http://alt-fv-distribution.net/.

10. Of these, only Cinenova, the Film and Video Umbrella, and Lux are still in existence.

11. With regard to the *Screen* articles, see, e.g., Jane Root, "Distributing 'A Question of Silence,'**<HS>**" *Screen* 26, no. 6 (1985): 58–64; Caroline Merz and Pratibha Parmar, "Distribution Matters—Circles" [3]; Adriane Jenik, "Distribution Matters—'What Does She Want,'**<HS>**" *Screen* 28, no. 4 (1987): 66–72; Julia Knight, "Cinenova: A Sign of the Times," *Screen* 33, no. 2 (1992): 184–89; and Julia Knight and Peter Thomas, "Distribution and the Question of Diversity: A Case Study of Cinenova," *Screen* 49, no. 3 (2008): 354–65.

12. Julia Knight and Peter Thomas, with a foreword by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Reaching Audiences: Distribution and Promotion of Alternative Moving Image* (Bristol, U.K.: Intellect, 2011).

13. FVDD can also be viewed as functioning as a documentation strategy in the way it crosses institutional boundaries—as advocated by Samuels—both in its collaborative nature and in the multiple organizations whose activities it documents.

14. Samuels, "Improving Our Disposition," 126.

15. Emphasis added.

16. E.g., the Arts Council's minutes of their Artists' Films Sub-Committee meetings were confidential, because they recorded decisions on funding applications from artists.

17. As recipients of AHRC Resource Enhancement funding, the FVDD project team was invited to attend an AHDS Digitization Workshop—held in London on October 27, 2005—where this advice was given during a presentation on project management.

18. "About UbuWeb," UbuWeb, http://www.ubu.com/resources/index.html/.

19. Kenneth Goldsmith, "An Open Letter to the Frameworks Community," UbuWeb, October 18, 2010, http://www.ubu.com/resources/frameworks.html/.

20. Ibid.

21. "About UbuWeb."

22. Seth Denbo, Heather Haskins, and David Robey, "AHRC ICT Programme Report: Sustainability of Digital Outputs for AHRC Resource Enhancement Projects," August 20, 2008, 1.

23. This crowdsourcing approach had not really developed when we conceived the FVDD in 2004–5 and hence was not written into the original project brief. It is something we have only been able to consider since the FVDD was made freely available in 2011.

24. Goldsmith, "An Open Letter."

25. Mike Sperlinger, LuxOnline, paper presented as part of Online Archives and Cultural Access panel, Recycled Film Symposium, Tyneside Cinema, Newcastle, U.K., March 12, 2010.

26. Jan-Christopher Horak, "Moving into the Digital Future: Archives, Film Studies, and the Internet," keynote presentation at the Screen Studies Conference, University of Glasgow, July 2, 2011.

27. Curtis was involved with the LFMC during its very early years and subsequently spent a number of years as a film and video officer at the Arts Council of Great Britain. Prior to entering academia, I was

comanager of Albany Video Distribution for four years (1987–91) and on the management committee of Cinenova throughout most of the 1990s.

28. Rick Prelinger, keynote presentation at the Recycled Film Symposium, Tyneside Cinema, U.K., March 12, 2010.

29. JISC, "The JISC Digitisation Programme: Four Centuries of Unique Resources for Learning, Teaching & Research," July 2005, 3.

30. AHRB, "Details of the Resource Enhancement Scheme," September 2004, 3; emphasis added.

31. Alistair Dunning, "The Tasks of the AHDS: Ten Years On," *Ariadne,* no. 48 (2006), http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue48/dunning/; emphasis added.

32. AHRC, "Resource Enhancement Scheme," http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundedResearch/Pages/ResourceEnhancementSchemeReview.aspx.

33. Ibid.; emphasis added.

34. In September 2009, the AHRC launched its Digital Equipment and Database Enhancement for Impact (DEDEFI) scheme (http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/dedefi.aspx), and in October 2010, JISC launched its eContent Programme (http://www.jisc.ac.uk/fundingopportunities/funding_calls/2010/09/grant1110.aspx).

35. REWIND web server statistics, March 1, 2011; courtesy of REWIND.

36. Goldsmith, "An Open Letter."

37. Adam Lockhart, REWIND archivist, e-mail correspondence with the author, March 24, 2011.

38. Both Jan-Christopher Horak and Rick Prelinger have discussed related aspects of this. See Horak, "The Gap between 1 and 0: Digital Video and the Omissions of Film History," *Spectator* 27, no. 1 (2007): 29–41; and Prelinger, "The Appearance of Archives," in Snickars and Vonderau, *YouTube Reader,* 268–74.