Documenting Communities of Practice: Making the Case for Archival Ethnography★

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Abstract. This paper seeks to present a new direction for archival research: ethnographic fieldwork. The author argues that this set of qualitative methods presents new opportunities for researchers to study phenomena in archival settings. Using the author's research on competing definitions of value in the world of film preservation as a case study, this article gives readers unversed in ethnography and grounded theory a primer which may be used as a starting point for considering how to apply such qualitative methods to the design of new research agendas and to solve questions specific to the archival domain.

Keywords: Ethnographic fieldwork, focus group interviewing, in-depth interviewing, participant observation, social construction of meaning

A New Prescription for Archival Research

This paper aims to propose and validate a new tradition in inquiry for the field of archival research, that of "archival ethnography." The application of fieldwork methodologies to the study of problems specific to the archival endeavor brings two important developments to the forefront. First, researchers will have another tool to add to their methodological toolkit, allowing them to look beyond the quantitative and qualitative methods common to the field – namely surveys and historical studies. Second, by employing ethnographic methods, researchers can immediately expand the scope of archival investigation to include the sociocultural realm of record creation and management, thus defining the record in direct relationship to the communities of individuals who generate, accumulate, and preserve documentary evidence. In short, it is possible to study archival

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★ This paper is a revised version of the methodological chapter of the author's dissertation: *The Imperative to Preserve: Competing Definitions of Value in the World of Film Preservation*, PhD dissertation (Los Angeles: UCLA, 2001).

processes and practices *in situ* – within communities of practice – rather than as idealized conceptions of archival theory.

Ethnography is a form of inquiry which falls under the larger category of qualitative research, the latter being "a process of enquiry that draws data from the context in which events occur, in an attempt to describe these occurrences, as a means of determining the process in which events are embedded and the perspectives of those participating in the events, using induction to derive possible explanations based on observed phenomena."[1] The hallmark of ethnography is the position of the researcher vis-à-vis the phenomena being studied. By "collecting data 'in the field,' being out among the subjects of one's research, becoming immersed in their milieu, and seeing events and activities as they see them," ethnographers have the opportunity to identify, analyze, and articulate the "insider" (emic) perspective.[2] Ethnographic fieldwork is especially well-suited for studying sociocultural phenomena such as structures, processes, and interactions among members of a defined community. It is helpful for uncovering and collecting data on tacit knowledge, that is, unstated practices and norms shared among community members. The ethnographic approach combines a number of qualitative data collection techniques, including participant observation and in-depth interviewing, but it may also be used in conjunction with other approaches, such as focus group interviewing, content/document analysis, discourse analysis, kinesics (the study of body movements), and/or proxemics (the study of people's use of space), in order to obtain further insights or validation of hypotheses generated through fieldwork.

Ethnography has been described as both a "theoretical orientation" and a "philosophical paradigm", in addition to a methodology.[3] Its roots lie in the field of anthropology, where there is a long tradition of researchers who spend much of their life abroad, living with and studying non-Western cultures (à la Margaret Mead). More recently, anthropologists, sociologists, and others have applied ethnographic methods to a wider range of "cultures", including those found within urban environments, organizations, and modern work cultures. This expansion of the ethnographic agenda reflects a new understanding of culture and community. In some cases, ethnographers can be said to

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[1] Gorman, G.E. and Clayton, P., *Qualitative Research for the Information Professional: A Practical Handbook* (London: Library Association Publishing, 1997), p. 23.

[2] Gorman and Clayton, p. 66.

[3] Tedlock, B.,"Ethnography and Ethnographic Representation", in N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd edition (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2000), p. 455.

have "created" a community "simply by virtue of studying certain people and by implying that the links he or she has perceived among them constitute a society."[4] In that vein, this article makes the assumption that the archival environment does in fact encompass a cultural dimension, and that it is worthy of study in this manner.

What then is the meaning of "archival ethnography"? I offer the following definition derived from my research investigating competing definitions of value in film preservation:

> Archival ethnography is a form of naturalistic inquiry which positions the researcher within an archival environment to gain the cultural perspective of those responsible for the creation, collection, care, and use of records.[5]

A corollary to the above definition is the concept that creators of documents, users of documents, and archivists form a community of practice – the archival environment – for which social interaction creates meaning and defines values.[6] Archival ethnography may be practiced in a variety of environments – any social space where the creation, maintenance, or use of archival records forms a locus of interest and activity.

Ethnographic research has thus far been largely unexplored in the archival realm, but a new vanguard of researchers has emerged recently whose work brings the sociocultural aspects of record creation and recordkeeping to the forefront. One of the first instances of this pioneering work can be found in the dissertation of Elizabeth Yakel, who combined ethnographic description, content analysis, and conversation analysis to examine how provenance is established and maintained in radiological reading rooms.[7] In particular, she was concerned about where the "loci of accountability" may be found in organizations, and she found that one must understand "the formal

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[4] Angrosino, M.V. and Mays de Pérez, K.A., "Rethinking Observation: From Method to Context", in N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd edition (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2000), p. 682.

[5] See Gracy, K.F., "The Imperative to Preserve: Competing Definitions of Value in the World of Film Preservation", PhD Dissertation (Los Angeles: University of California, 2001).

[6] According to Wenger, "a community of practice defines itself along three dimensions: what it is about – its joint enterprise as understood and continually renegotiated by its members; how it functions – mutual engagement that bind members together into a social entity; [and] what capability it has produced – the shared repertoire of communal resources (routines, sensibilities, artefacts, vocabulary, styles, etc.) that members have developed over time." See Wenger, E., "Communities of Practice: Learning as a Social System", *Systems Thinker* (June 1998). http://www.co-i-l.com/coil/knowledge-garden/cop/lss.shtml. Accessed November 15, 2004.

[7] Yakel, E., *Record-keeping in Radiology: The Relationship Between Activities and Records in Radiological Processes*, PhD Dissertation (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1997).

and informal communication and information flow patterns as well as the internal and external constraints and their influence on organizational record-keeping practices."[8] Kalpana Shankar used the lens of ethnographic fieldwork to look at record-keeping in a "knowledge production environment," namely an academic scientific laboratory. As Shankar entered and became a part of the laboratory setting, she found that she had become more interested in discovering "how record-keeping becomes a learned, natural, and unquestioned form of scientific infrastructure" than in the nature or form of the record after it has been created.[9] In her study of record creation and record-keeping in law enforcement, Ciaran Trace used a new framework for examining records which posits that "records are more than purely technical facts," allowing for "an understanding of records as social entities, where records are produced, maintained, and used in socially organized ways."[10] These researchers all focused on the means by which communities of practice build and maintain webs of meaning through record creation and record-keeping activities.

My own work shares many similarities of methodological approach with the studies cited above. The subjects of my study were not the record creators, however, but the archivists caring for the records – in this case, the community of film preservationists who care for and preserve motion pictures. Film preservation is a complex field that employs archivists in both commercial and noncommercial sectors. My main goals were to map the terrain of film preservation (identifying the commercial and non-commercial stakeholders of the field), look at how work is accomplished, defining systems of value in community, and examine relationships among the archivists, archives, studios, and film laboratories which populate this landscape. As I delved into this world, I become particularly interested in the particulars of how work was accomplished, shared meanings and points of disjuncture in the definition of preservation work, and the ways in which authority and power over preservation decisions are wielded by individuals and institutions within their particular spheres of influence. I found that much of the work that occurs in film preservation is not recorded – nor is it validated – through the following of professional dictum. Additionally,

[8] Yakel, E., "The Social Construction of Accountability: Radiologists and Their Record-Keeping Practices", *The Information Society*, **17** (2001): 233.

[9] Kalpana Shankar, "Scientists, Records, and the Practical Politics of Infrastructure", PhD Dissertation (Los Angeles: University of California, 2002); see also Kalpana Shankar, "Record-keeping in the Production of Scientific Knowledge: An Ethnographic Study", in this volume.

[10] Trace, C.B. "What is Recorded is Never Simply 'What Happened': Record Keeping in Modern Organizational Culture", *Archival Science*, **2** (2002): 152.

very few archives have extensive manuals of local practice and policy. Thus, my only option for gathering data on the workings of film archives and film archivists was to put myself in their midst (where possible) or to otherwise in engage them in conversations about their work through the methods of in-depth and focus group interviewing, when participant observation was not welcome or convenient.

In the balance of this paper, I will present in detail this set of methodological approaches that I employed in my study.[11] It is meant as both a case study to provide other researchers with the knowledge and impetus to consider using such methods in their own work, and a primer for designing and implementing ethnographic methods.[12]

A Case Study in Archival Ethnography

In my study of the world of film preservation, the need to look at institutional norms and practices rather than industry-wide statistics and overall trends necessitated the use of ethnographic methods. Fieldwork and in-depth interviewing, supplemented by the use of focus group interviewing, facilitated the discovery of systematic patterns and themes within institutions that practice film preservation. Data collected in this manner gave me crucial clues to piecing together how the world of film preservation functions, while the mode of analysis, combining open and axial coding with memo-writing to develop categories of meaning, was essential for helping to identify, describe, and explicate the systematic patterns embedded in the field.

One might ask why I chose to employ ethnographic methods to collect and analyze data for this project. Ethnographic methods represented the best choice for two reasons. First, the emphasis of this project was largely exploratory and explanatory in nature. I investigated phenomena which are thus far little-known or understood. I was attempting to identify "plausible causal networks shaping the phenomena" being studied.[13] Marshall and Rossman have pointed out that

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[11] Readers may find it somewhat jarring that I use the first person throughout this paper. This stylistic decision reflects standard ethnographic practice whereby the discussion of methodology used in a study is self-reflexive. As Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw state, "in presenting their methods, ethnographers seek to depict the varied qualities of their participation and their awareness of both the advantages and constraints of their roles in a specific setting". Emerson, R.M., Fretz, R.I. and Shaw, L.L. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 203.

[12] For a complete discussion of the theoretical framework of my work, see Chapters 2 and 3 of my dissertation (Gracy pp. 19–102).

[13] Marshall, C. and Rossman G.B., *Designing Qualitative Research*, 2nd edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995) p. 41.

ethnographic methods such as participant observation, in-depth inter-
viewing, and elite interviewing are most likely to yield information on
institutionalized statuses and norms, especially those of a tacit nature.[14]

Second, in this research I emphasized context, setting, organiza-
tional culture, and the participants' frames of reference. By observing
and interacting with individuals within the setting, I was able to
record their social reality, including both participants' behavior and
the meaning of that behavior for participants. By eliciting "indige-
nous meanings",[15] I uncovered data on the attitudes, values, and eth-
ics of the film preservation community in various settings.

To achieve the goals set forth for this research, I immersed myself in
the world of film preservation. This work is practiced in a variety of
institutional settings: museums, universities, libraries, and most re-
cently, film laboratories and motion picture studios. My primary meth-
od of differentiating among these settings was to separate them into
categories of commercial and non-commercial sites under the assump-
tion that there are in fact two subcultures of film preservation corre-
sponding to this commercial/non-commercial split. I hypothesized,
however, that as these two cultures begin to commingle and overlap.
Non-commercial cultural institutions, which have traditionally valued
symbolic goods over economic goods, may be becoming more and
more like their commercially-minded colleagues in a number of ways.[16]

In order to document the social reality of the cultures of film pres-
ervation *in the non-commercial realm*, I carried out ethnographic field-
work and interviewing in two film archives. In these institutions, I
focused upon exploring how archivists decide what to preserve, and
the techniques and methods they use to accomplish preservation tasks.
In the course of data collection, I spoke with 16 specialists in different
aspects of film preservation, including the archivists themselves, as
well as other individuals, such as curators, catalogers, interns, vault
managers, and projectionists, who perform work that is essential to
the primary task of physical preservation. These noncommercial inter-
views, conducted either informally or in the field, constituted 73% of
the total number of individuals with whom I spoke for this study.

My preliminary research into the field revealed that preservation
work *in the commercial sector* was too decentralized to be studied
using   fieldwork   methods.   Unlike   film   archives,   where   most

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[14] Marshall and Rossman, p. 105.

[15] Also known as "member's meanings." See Emerson et al. p. 12.

[16] This hypothesis builds upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu on the cultural sphere. See Bourdieu,
P., *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

preservation activities take place in a single location, commercial enti-
ties involved in film preservation often contract out for services such
as storage and laboratory services. Without a centralized commercial
preservation culture to study, I opted instead to focus on "sampling
the continuum" of preservation activities through the use of in-depth
interviewing and focus group interviewing (see below). During the
course of interviewing, I spoke with six individuals who worked in
commercial organizations involved in some aspect of preservation,
including managers of storage facilities, laboratory technicians, and
studio employees who oversee preservation activities for their compa-
nies. Conversations with archivists in the commercial sector com-
prised 27% of the total number of individuals interviewed for this
study.

To augment the scope of the results achieved through fieldwork
and in-depth interviewing, I chose to conduct several focus groups
composed of individuals responsible for the overall management of
film preservation programs in various organizations and studios. I
used this technique to gather more "macro" level data – the purpose
of the focus groups was to discuss institutional-level and national-
level concerns of the film preservation field. The focus group data was
also helpful in that many of the issues brought up and discussed in
these sessions affected later hypothesis testing during the fieldwork
and interviewing components of the study.

In the following sections of this paper, I give a more thorough
explanation of these methods that I have outlined above. I also re-
view my methods for analysis of the resulting data, and discuss the
limitations and assumptions inherent in using this amalgamation of
qualitative methods.

Fieldwork and Interviewing in Noncommercial Settings

Selecting fieldwork sites

When selecting a location for ethnographic research, the primary
objective is to "locate a site that contains people and social activity
bearing upon that interest."[17] For ethnographic studies that are able
to draw from a large local population, this simple directive causes few
difficulties. In the case of this study, however, the task of finding a
suitable site proved to be more problematic, for a number of reasons.

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[17] Schatzman, L. and Strauss, A.L., *Field Research: Strategies for a Natural Sociology* (Engle-
wood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice, 1973) p. 18.

First, the numbers of individuals and institutions that engage in the work of film preservation are both relatively small.[18] It was impossible to choose one site that would be "typical" or "representative" of film archives across the country. In fact, a number of archivists informed me that each archive was so unique, in terms of its organizational structure, collections, and activities, that it would be impossible to draw any conclusions about the field as a whole.

Second, preservation activities tend to be centered in a few areas of the country, close to large metropolitan areas that are hubs for either motion picture production or cultural institutions – e.g., Los Angeles, New York City, and Washington, D.C. I was fortunate to be located in one of these areas, but given the small pool of possible sites for study, my options were extremely limited, and I risked geographical bias if I chose to focus on just one area of the country.

A third problem presented itself, which ended up being a solution to all three conundrums, in a way. During the course of reviewing possible sites I had the opportunity to select an archive with which I was already familiar – the place where I had received initial hands-on training as a preservationist. This site had the advantage of easy entrée due to my connections to employees there and my broad knowledge of its operations, and I had already done preliminary fieldwork there to fulfill requirements of a course in ethnographic methods. Despite these many plusses, it was pointed out to me that I should probably broaden my perspective on the field by visiting an archive in another part of the country – to taste the culture of an archive far from the milieu in which my "alma mater" was located. In this way, I could see the differences between "indigenous" meanings and meanings shared among archivists at different institutions. The second archive could serve as an additional case study, which I could use for comparison to the first institution, as well as for further development and refinement of initial hypothesis formulation.

These reasons provided a strong argument for choosing to conduct participant observation at two sites, despite the difficulties encountered in arranging for fieldwork at a site far from my home university. Although I ultimately persevered, I faced challenges of funding which ended up curtailing the amount of time I could spend in the

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[18] In the United States and Canada, film archivists number fewer than a thousand practitioners, based on 2004 membership statistics from the Association of Moving Image Archivists. The number of institutions who practice film preservation is fewer than one hundred. Of the latter number, fewer than ten could be considered "major archives" –i.e., archives whose primary activity is film preservation. (Estimates taken from the most recent edition of the Association of Moving Image Archivists Membership Directory, published in May 2004).

field. Despite these limiting circumstances, I feel that the addition of a second setting enriched the study immeasurably.

Setting

Physical and social features

Although every film archive is unique in the particulars of its facilities and staff – not to mention their approach to preserving film – one may make several general statements about the mechanics of their work. In order to perform film preservation, archivists require certain facilities and equipment. Facilities include vaults to store film, workrooms to carry out physical preservation, projection rooms to view films, and office space for staff. Basic equipment includes rewind benches to inspect film, flatbed viewers or Moviolas to view film, splicers to repair film, and synchronizers to compare various elements of a film to one another. Basic supplies include film cleaner, splicing tape, and leader (to protect the ends of film reels from damage). Archivists also require access to film laboratories which have specialized knowledge of how to duplicate archival film, which may be fragile and in a state of deterioration.

Preservation staff members perform a variety of tasks having to do with the physical preservation and restoration of films. Archivists select the films to be preserved and/or restored, inspect them for damage and signs of deterioration, repair them if necessary, and prepare them for duplication at the laboratory (which can be located on- or off-site). Archivists are also expected to keep records of their work, conduct quality control checks of laboratory work, and communicate with supervisors, other staff members, preservation institutions, and potential donors (in the case of non-commercial institutions). Although archivists usually work in solitude on individual preservation projects, they also work in teams on large projects, or may work individually on different aspects of the same project.

Entrée

My study aimed to delve deeply into the daily life of the individuals that make up the world of film preservation. In seeking access to the sites chosen for this project, I made use of my past experiences as an archivist. My assumption that my past training in film preservation would facilitate both my requests for access and my acceptance in the role of participant-observer proved to be true. Earlier in my professional career, I served as an assistant preservationist in the preservation department of a large film archive. I began there as an intern while I

was earning a masters degree in library and information science, and later, I worked there as a regular employee for a couple of years.

As a result of spending almost 3 years at that archive, I considered myself to be somewhat of an insider to the world of film preservation. Although I never felt that my skills and techniques approaches the highest standards of the more experienced archivists, I felt that I had assimilated into this culture. I learned much of the lingo and mastered many of the techniques of film preservation, and I felt comfortable participating in critical discussions of preservation projects. This insider information proved to be invaluable as I attempted to establish a rapport with individuals at a site.

At the same time, I understood the dangers of fully embracing the insider role.[19] I forced myself to underscore my primary role as a researcher, asking detailed questions about film preservation practices and procedures in order to elicit detailed explanations from the archivists. Because of my previous knowledge, however, I could not feign ignorance of the simpler techniques of film preservation. To maintain some semblance of credibility, I framed my questions slightly differently than a complete outsider would. For example, instead of asking how an archivist would perform a procedure (a common technique used by fieldworkers to obtain rich, detailed data), I asked why they performed a task in a certain way, often comparing their technique to that used by another department or another institution. This method was successful in prompting archivists to reflect upon their work, in addition to simply telling me how they accomplish activities.

Collecting data

At each site, I immersed myself in its culture for approximately 200 hours in the field. For one site, this time stretched out over a 5-month period, and for the other site, the fieldwork occurred over a 1-month period. The latter visitation period involved travel to a site outside of my state of residence, hence the period in the field was unfortunately limited by funding and time constraints. At each site, I was usually present for a minimum of 3 or 4 hours per day. At both sites, I engaged myself in the daily activities of the archive; usually this involved working intensively with an archivist while he or she worked

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[19] For a discussion of issues involved, consult Pollner, Melvin and Emerson, R.M., "The Dynamics of Inclusion and Distance in Fieldwork Relations", in R.M. Emerson (ed.), *Contemporary Field Research: A Collection of Readings* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1983) pp. 235–252.

on a particular project. Under the direction of archivists, I often assisted with some of the simpler tasks of preservation, including rewinding film, preparing leader to attach to the ends of film, making simple splices, identifying film stock, inspecting footage for signs of deterioration, and assessing other types of damage. For more complex work, such as the comparison of various film elements to one another, or reconstruction work, I often sat beside archivists as they performed the delicate operations of their craft, conversing with them about their techniques, decisions, opinions – anything which might shed light on their professional knowledge, technical skills, and how they approached their work. I also had the opportunity to join them when they were in consultation with other members of the archive (such as curators, catalogers, and programmers) and observe the interactions among personnel in the various divisions of the archive. Finally, I accompanied them when they reviewed preservation copies of films at local laboratories, which gave me insight into the quality control process.

After spending a significant amount of time in the field with these archivists, I followed up with interviews of key informants, whom I had identified through my fieldwork. These individuals came from all divisions of the archive, from managers to archivists to even the entry-level vault assistants and student interns. By garnering the insights of individuals throughout the archive, I got a much better idea of how film preservation works at all levels of the hierarchy. Student informants were particularly interesting interview subjects, as they often were in the process of learning many of the same skills and practices that I was, albeit from a different perspective than my own.

Confidentiality
At all stages of this research, I made every attempt to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Before I began any fieldwork or interviewing, the study was reviewed and approved by the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at UCLA. I abided by the requirements of this body through the use of either informed consent, in the case of fieldwork participants, or consent forms, in the case of interview participants. Readers should also note that I used pseudonyms in order to disguise the identity of individuals and institutions who participated in this research, and omitted the titles and details of particular films and collections in instances where they might be considered identifiers.

Participating and observing

In order to familiarize myself with the environment of each setting, I spent a significant amount of time as a participant–observer. The primary activities associated with participant–observation include:

1. Entry into the setting and familiarization with people involved in it.
2. Participation in the daily routines of the setting.
3. Development of relations with people in the setting.
4. Observation of all events and interactions.[20]

While entrée or "getting in," may seem like just the prelude to the real business of fieldwork, it is wise to remember that "entrée is a *continuous* process of establishing and developing relationships, not alone with a chief host but with a variety of less powerful persons. In relatively complex sites, particularly those with multiple leadership and jurisdictions, there are many doorways that must be negotiated; successful negotiation through the front door is not always sufficient to open other doors, though at first it may appear to do just that."[21] I learned this lesson time and time again as I sought access to different departments of the archive; while I had an easy time establishing rapport with preservationists due to my background and technical knowledge, it was more difficult for me to establish trust relationships with other constituencies, such as the projectionists and the programmers. In these cases, I had to work harder to convey my sincere interest in their work. Often, it was easier to establish rapport at times when they were taking a break from work, over lunch or coffee; a casual conversation about work-related concerns often led to an invitation from the individual to "take a look" at what he or she was working on.

After the researcher achieves initial contact and successfully negotiates entry into the site, she must begin the process of immersion and contemplate which activities and interactions merit further investigation. The first few weeks of participant–observation can often be overwhelming – the potential avenues to explore are many and varied, and researchers may feel confused about where they should focus their attention. When deciding which events to write about in their fieldnotes, Emerson et al. instruct novice researchers to "take note of their initial impressions," "focus on observing key events or incidents," and "move beyond their personal reactions to an open sensitivity to what those in the setting experience and react to as 'significant' or 'important.'"[22]

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[20] Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw p. 1.
[21] Schatzman and Strauss, p. 22.
[22] Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, pp. 26–28.

This advice served me well as I observed the myriad of activities in which film archivists are engaged. In addition to physical preservation tasks, they visit film laboratories to view work in progress, consult their colleagues for advice on techniques, write grants to support future preservation projects, and communicate with archivists at other institutions. By spending a significant amount of time at each setting, I observed the full scope of the social world of film preservation and yet was able to narrow my focus to pinpoint those particular areas where tensions between commercial and non-commercial institutions are emerging. Participant–observation enabled me to "enter into the matrix of meanings of the researched, to participate in their code of moral regulation."[23]

Recording field data

Participation in the setting and systematic recording of observations go hand-in-hand in ethnographic research. The record that I generated included all observations and experiences in the course of participating in the daily activities in the life of the people in the setting. Relying on mental notes and jottings (quickly-made notes of key words and phrases), I generated densely detailed fieldnotes which are comprised of those incidents and conversations which seem noteworthy and significant. All fieldnotes generated in the course of this study were recorded in machine-readable format, to facilitate analysis of the data.

Interviewing in the field

In the interests of gathering as much data as possible in a reasonable amount of time, I chose to augment fieldwork with in-depth interviews at each site. I selected certain concepts, tropes, or patterns drawn from my initial fieldnotes, and pursued them further with open-ended questions that did not prompt a simple yes-no answer or a brief response.

Schatzman and Strauss encourage the fieldworker to see the in-depth interview as a "lengthy conversation", noting that "the interviewer does not use a specific, ordered list of questions or topics because this amount of formality would destroy the conversational style. [S]he may have such a list in mind or actually in hand, but [s]he is sufficiently flexible to order it in any way that seems natural to the respondent and to the interview situation."[24] For my study, I

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[23] Wax, M.L., "Paradoxes of 'Consent' to the Practice of Fieldwork", *Social Problems*, **27** (1980): 272–273.

[24] Schatzman and Strauss, pp. 72–73.

encountered some resistance from the UCLA OPRS when I proposed interviews that did not use a standardized questionnaire. To satisfy the committee, I wrote a list of interview questions which corresponded to areas of inquiry which I was interested in pursuing; during the course of interviews, however, I used that list mostly as an "ice-breaker" and as a springboard for exploring other issues as they emerged.[25]

I selected individuals for interviews with an eye towards documenting the world of film preservation from as many angles as possible. I relied on the advice of Whyte when selecting interview subjects:

> The best informants are those who are in a position to have observed significant events and who are quite perceptive and reflective about them. Some such key individuals may be identified early in the study since they hold formal positions of importance to the study. Others, who hold key informal positions, are not so evident initially. To locate such people, the interviewer can make a practice of asking each informant to name several people who would be especially helpful to his study.[26]

Thus, in this study interviewing served a three-fold purpose of gathering information, testing hypotheses, and generating additional pathways to accomplish the first two objectives.

As stated above, interview data augmented fieldwork data, although I do not want to give the impression that interviews merely provided a supplement to the fieldwork data. Although many ethnographers view fieldwork as the *ne plus ultra* method for acquiring sociological data – i.e., the most complete form of information about a social world[27],[28] – other researchers point out the value of in-depth interviewing as a way of testing out hypotheses generated from fieldwork data.

All formal field interviews were recorded on audiotape, and machine-readable transcripts were generated from those recordings.

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[25] The questionnaire, as approved by the UCLA OPRS, appears in the appendix to this paper.

[26] Whyte, W.F., "Interviewing in Field Research", in R.N. Adams and J.J. Preiss (eds.), *Human Organization Research* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey, 1960), p. 358.

[27] Becker, H.S. and Geer, B., "Participant Observation and Interviewing", in William J. Filstead (ed.), *Qualitative Methodology* (Chicago: Markham, 1970), p. 133.

[28] Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw do not consider interviewing to be "the primary tool for getting at members' meanings. Rather, the distinctive procedure is to observe and record naturally occurring talk and interaction. It may indeed be useful or essential to interview members about the use and meaning of specific local terms and phrases, but the researcher's deeper concern lies in the actual, situated use of those terms in ordinary interaction" (p. 140).

Having done so, I was able to study these interviews in detail later using NUD*IST, an ethnographic data analysis software package.

In-depth interviewing in commercial settings

Selecting participants

As I have stated above, the structure of the field of film preservation did not allow me to conduct fieldwork on commercial organizations in one centralized location, as had been the case with non-commercial institutions. Thus, for this portion of the study I focused on selecting what Weiss calls a "sample of representatives."[29] Note that this type of sampling should not be confused with random sampling, often used in quantitative studies to represent the larger population. Rather, my aim was to choose a representative sample of individuals who contributed to the work of film preservation in commercial organizations by providing essential services such as storage facilities, specialized technical assistance, and laboratory duplication services.

After having identified those key areas, I used two methods for selecting individuals for interviewing. First, I followed up on suggestions given to me by individuals working in the noncommercial sector. Often, studios and archives use the same laboratories or storage providers – the field is small enough that "everybody knows everybody," and there are acknowledged "experts" in certain areas. I also relied upon the membership directory of the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA), the main professional organization in North America for film preservationists, to identify possible interview subjects.

Ultimately, my list of interview subjects narrowed to those individuals who responded to my initial queries and were willing to be interviewed for the study. A number of the participants were quite eager to assist me. These obliging individuals tended to be more active in AMIA, especially in its educational initiatives, so it is not surprising that they were supportive of my research endeavors. There were several individuals with whom I was unable to conduct interviews, due to their heavy work responsibilities at the time of my request. Despite these difficulties, however, I was able to find at least one representative in each major area who agreed to speak with me.

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[29] Weiss, R.S. *Learning From Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (New York: Free Press, 1994), p. 18.

Designing the interview guide[30]

My preparation for the interviews conducted in the commercial sector
included the construction of a guide. As its name suggests, an inter-
view guide is "a listing of areas to be covered in the interview along
with, for each area, a listing of topics or questions that together will
suggest lines of inquiry."[31] Major areas covered included the back-
ground of the participant, his day-to-day responsibilities, relations
with other people in the field of film preservation (often, their clients),
and their opinions about the contribution that their work was making
to the field. I told participants that they should expect the interview
to take approximately ninety minutes; usually interviews ran approxi-
mately 75–90 minutes.

Because I did not have the luxury of spending time observing par-
ticipants at their place of work before the interview took place, I tried
to begin each interview with an "ice-breaker" type question which
sought to elicit biographical data about how the person had entered
the field. Such questions helped to build rapport with the participant
and jumpstarted the conversation, leading quite naturally to other
questions which covered the areas which formed the various parts of
the interview guide.

All of the interview questions were open-ended, giving the partici-
pants latitude to explore issues that were of particular concern to
them. The minimal amount of structure in the interview process was
helpful in uncovering concerns to which I had not previously been
exposed. I could then pick up cues and allusions from initial responses
and ask the participant to elaborate on those opinions and experiences.

Focus group interviewing

Selecting participants

Morgan notes that "the comparative advantage of focus groups as an
interview technique lies in their ability to observe interaction on a
topic. Group discussions provide direct evidence about similarities
and differences in the participants' opinions and experiences as
opposed to reaching such conclusions from post hoc analyses of sepa-
rate statements from each interviewee."[32] The inclusion of focus

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[30] See the sample interview guide in the appendix. Note that the actual interview guide used in a
particular session was tailored to the participant's activities (i.e., a manager of a storage company
responded to questions about storage, in addition to more general questions).

[31] Weiss, p. 48.

[32] Morgan, D.L., *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*, 2nd edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage,
1997), p 10.

group interviews as part of my data provided me with a more macro-level perspective on many of the issues that had already arisen in fieldwork and interviews.

In designing the structure for focus group interviewing, I was guided by two primary criteria. First, I felt that it was important to keep commercial and non-commercial participants in separate groups. Because I was particularly interested in uncovering tensions between the two interests, I felt that to have studio employees and archivists from non-profits in the same group would stifle genuine opinions and feelings about certain issues, e.g., the validity of preservation as it was practiced in each environment.

Beyond the main criterion of keeping commercial and non-commercial participants separate, I also tried to segment the non-commercial groups by maintaining a balance between representatives from major archives and smaller archives.[33] The main advantage of this guideline was to be able to examine such issues as the difficulties of securing funding for preservation from the perspective of both the "major" and "minor" players in the field.

One possible source of bias in the focus group interviewing was the fact that most participants were acquainted with one another prior to the interview taking place. It was difficult, if not impossible to avoid this bias, since the film preservation community is quite small – most of the major players see one another on a regular basis at conferences and film archivists are always contacting one another to locate prints for preservation or exhibition purposes. Morgan notes the danger that acquaintances may be less likely to discuss tacit meanings in focus group settings.[34] Therefore, I tried to be aware of this potential for assumptions when designing the interview guide.

Designing the interview guide
As I had done with the commercial interviews, I prepared an interview guide to provide some nominal structure for the discussion. Areas covered in the guide included the definition and importance of preservation in archival work, prioritization and funding for preservation work, and preservation partnerships between institutions and studios.[35] I did not want too much structure, however, so as to avoid the bias of a researcher-imposed agenda.

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[33] See Morgan (p. 35) for a discussion of homogeneity and segmentation.

[34] Morgan pp. 37–38.

[35] I have included a sample focus group interview guide in the appendix.

Morgan notes that in focus groups that do not use a standardized guide "what makes [them] such a strong tool for exploratory research is the fact that a group of interested participants can spark a lively discussion among themselves without much guidance from either the researcher's questions or the moderator's direction." Indeed, in my most successful session I did very little "moderation"; the group became so involved in their discussion that they ended up discussing many of the issues on my guide without my having to ask any questions about them!

The main drawback of using an unstandardized interview guide, however, is that it reduces the researcher's ability to make direct comparisons from group to group. I attempted to counteract this disadvantage by making sure that each group touched upon the general areas of concern outlined in the guide, even if they didn't answer every question in as much depth as I would have liked. By maintaining a flexible structure, the focus groups revealed many issues and concerns that my original agenda had not taken into account.

Analysis[36]

Charmaz states that "the grounded theory method stresses discovery and theory development rather than logical deductive reasoning which relies on prior theoretical frameworks."[37] The methods of grounded theory research require that researchers juggle the two tasks of data collection and data analysis, because each activity informs and shapes the formulation of the theories that will help to explain the social world in which they are immersed. "Grounded theorists shape their data collection from their analytic interpretations and discoveries, and therefore, sharpen their observations. Additionally, they check and fill out emerging ideas by collecting further data."[38]

Coding and memo-writing are the two primary techniques used in the analysis of fieldwork data. Researchers use coding initially as a way to begin to categorize and sort data, and further on in the research, to "label, separate, compile, and organize data."[39] Memo-writing serves as the manner whereby researchers can begin to explore ideas about the

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[36] I am indebted to the work of Anselm Strauss, Juliet Corbin, and Kathy Charmaz for large portions of my descriptions of coding and memo-writing in this paper. See Strauss, A. and Corbin J., *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 2nd edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998); and, Charmaz, K., "The Grounded Theory Method: An Explication and Interpretation", in R.M. Emerson (ed.), *Contemporary Field Research: A Collection of Readings* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1988), pp. 109–126.

[37] Charmaz, p. 110.

[38] Charmaz, p. 110.

[39] Charmaz, p. 111.

data and the categories drawn from the initial coding. The researcher may write many memos on the same topic, refining her ideas as she collects additional field and interview data. From these two inductive processes theory will emerge, based in large part on the amalgamation of indigenous meanings and *in situ* experiences of participants.

Coding

Coding is defined as "the analytic processes through which data are fractured, conceptualized, and integrated to form theory."[40] In the initial coding phase, often referred to as "open coding",[41] researchers "look for what they can define and discover in the data. They then look for leads, ideas, and issues *in* the data themselves."[42] Line-by-line coding, where researchers begin to make categories and subcategories (concepts that stand for phenomena), provides the most efficient way to accomplish this goal. Charmaz identifies four objectives that she uses in the initial phase of coding, all of which I kept in mind when analyzing my own data:

1. Attend to the general context, central participants and their roles, timing and structuring of events, and the relative emphasis participants place on various issues in the data.
2. Construct codes to note what participants lack, gloss over, or ignore, as well as what they stress.
3. Scrutinize the data for in vivo codes.
4. Identify succinctly the process that the data indicates.[43]

An example of this process in my study was when I began to identify key phenomena and exchanges which made me look at the meaning of the word preservation more closely. Archivists used it in multiple contexts, and it soon became apparent that I would need to sort these meanings out in a logical manner. Thus, "preservation" became a code that I focused on in the next phase of the analysis process.

Axial coding, which is an intermediate phase between open and focused coding, is "the act of relating categories to subcategories along the lines of their properties and dimensions."[44] During this phase, I identified causal, intervening, and contextual conditions which affect the phenomena which I categorized in the open coding phase of analysis. Initial hypotheses which I generated during data

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[40] Strauss and Corbin, p. 3.
[41] Strauss and Corbin, p. 101.
[42] Charmaz, p. 113.
[43] Charmaz, p. 114–115.
[44] Strauss and Corbin, p. 124.

collection and open coding were tested. To continue with my previous example, in the axial coding phase I began to recognize that job responsibilities and institutional mission were key contextual conditions which affected how archivists used the word preservation.

After refining open codes through the axial coding process (and through the memo-writing process which I articulate below), I embarked upon the third phase of coding. In this final phase of analysis, often referred to as "focused coding" (or "selective coding",),[45] I incorporated a limited set of codes developed during the open and axial coding phases, and applied the schema to large amounts of data. Charmaz describes this process as both selective and conceptual, emphasizing the *analytic* level inherent in focused coding. The purposes of focused coding are to "build and clarify a category by examining all the data it covers and variations from it", as well as to "break up a category [and] develop subcategories which explicate and exhaust the more general category."[46] To illustrate, during the focused coding phase of this study I filled out my "preservation" category by examining all of contexts in which archivists used the word preservation, as well as coding those instances where the archivists defined the term directly.

Selective coding is a process of refinement whereby the researcher ensures that her categories have achieved saturation (i.e., when no new information seems to emerge from either coding or the collection of new data). Strauss and Corbin note that reaching data saturation often is a matter of practicality, when "collecting additional data seems counterproductive; the 'new' that is uncovered does not add that much more to the explanation at this time. Or, as is sometimes the situation, the researcher runs out of time, money, or both."[47] In the case of my study, the modest budget for data collection (taken largely from a dissertation-year fellowship and other financial aid sources) indeed limited the extent to which I could pursue data saturation.

Memo-writing
Memos provide researchers with the opportunity to develop ideas about the data and coding categories. Thus memo-writing should take place throughout the coding process, from the initial observations and interviews onward. Initially, memos "shape aspects of subsequent data collection; they point to areas the researcher could explore

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[45] Strauss and Corbin, 143.
[46] Charmaz, p. 117.
[47] Strauss and Corbin, p. 136.

further. They also encourage researchers both to play with ideas and to make early assessments about which ideas to develop. Additionally, early memos provide concrete sources for comparison with materials gathered later."[48]

Over the course of data collection, I wrote memos in order to explore the boundaries and definitions of the codes as they were under development. These memos were refined to account for variations in observations, and eventually, the processes of sorting, integrating, and refining memos helped to explicate a major pattern or idea. At that point, a cohesive theory, grounded in shared experiences and conversations began to emerge. Examples of early memo topics that later proved to be very helpful in developing my ideas and coding categories included: the lack of consensus about what preservation means in the field of film preservation, the nature of the relationship between archivists and film laboratory personnel, and the factors which influence selection of films for preservation.

Potential biases of the researcher

In an attempt to control the possible skewing of results as a result of my own biases, I took special care in the design and implementation of data collection, as well as in the analysis of that data. In his work *Learning From Strangers* Robert Weiss lists four possible points in qualitative research where investigator bias might affect results and analysis: sampling, interviewing, interpretation and reporting, and intellectual honesty.[49] As a self-critique, I offer my response to these sources of prejudice, as he has identified them.

Sampling
According to Weiss, "biased sampling occurs when we take respondents who have particular points of view as a representative sample of a more inclusive group." To combat this potential bias, I consciously attempted to select respondents on the principle of providing representation of the different types of archives, both non-commercial and commercial, and of the different types of archival work rather than selecting participants from only one or two strata of the field (e.g., only curators and preservationists).

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[48] Charmaz, pp. 120–121.
[49] Weiss, pp. 211–213.

Interviewing

Weiss warns that "biased interviewing occurs when we encourage respondents to provide material supportive of our thesis." In the design phase of this study, I constructed my interview guide using topics, not issues; during interviews, I made every effort to make my interview questions open-ended and non-directive; and last, I simply asked participants at the beginning of interviews to frame their answers in terms of their own experiences and opinions rather than in terms of an "official" institutional response. I feel that these precautions encouraged responses that were more representative of the respondents' true thoughts and feelings.

Interpretation and reporting

Weiss states that "we can easily make an argument come out our way by treating comments that support our view as gospel and subjecting to skeptical scrutiny those that don't, by reporting material we like and disdaining the rest, and in general by behaving like a lawyer with a brief to advance." In this research, I always sought to present an even-handed, balanced description of events and interactions. My hypotheses were tested against multiple sources of information. To give an incomplete picture would have undermined the very argument I was advancing in the study.

Intellectual honesty

Weiss comments that "people who do research should have only one concern in their work, and that is to capture, with scrupulous honesty, the way things are." This point strikes to the very heart of researcher bias. In my own career, I have certainly felt an affinity with the professionals in field of film preservation, having been one myself earlier in my career. This affection could have led to a skewed representation of these individuals. I feel, however, that the breadth of my study, in terms of number of participants and variety of institutions studied, gave me a much more balanced perspective than if I had simply looked at the single institution with which I had previously been affiliated. Looking back at the final analysis phase of this study, I found that the results of this study challenged many of my most strongly-held beliefs about the field. Thus, I believe that I have made a sincere effort to maintain a spirit of intellectual honesty.

Limitations and assumptions of methodology

Implementing a qualitative methodology such as fieldwork raises several questions in the minds of researchers who may be more familiar with the quantitative paradigm – where such concepts as objectivity, external and internal validity, and reliability constitute the criteria for judging the soundness of research design. Marshall and Rossman dispute the relevance of using quantitative criteria, offering the following concepts (suggested by Lincoln and Guba) as alternate measures:[50]

1. *Credibility*, instead of internal validity, "in which the goal is to demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject was accurately identified and described. The inquiry then must be 'credible to the constructors of the original multiple realities.' The strength of the qualitative study that aims to explore a problem or describe a setting, a process, a social group or a pattern of interaction will be its validity. [...] Within the parameters of that setting, population, and theoretical framework, the research will be valid."

2. *Transferability*, instead of external validity, "in which the burden of demonstrating the applicability of one set of findings to another context rests more with the investigator who would make that transfer than with the original investigator." Although researchers more familiar with the quantitative approach view qualitative research as lacking in external validity, Marshall and Rossman point out that data collection and analysis will be guided by concepts and models which represent the theoretical parameters of the research. Those researchers working within the same parameters can determine whether or not the research in question may be generalized to their own research agenda.

3. *Dependability*, instead of reliability, "in which the researcher attempts to account for changing conditions in the phenomenon chosen for the study as well as changes in the design created by increasingly refined understanding of the setting." This concept assumes that the social world is continually being constructed, thus replication of the study is not only impossible, but also not a practical consideration for the qualitative researcher.

4. *Confirmability* instead of objectivity, in which the researcher "remove[s] evaluation from some inherent characteristic of the researcher (objectivity) and place[s] it squarely on the data

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[50] Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G., *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1985), cited in Marshall and Rossman, pp. 143–145. All quotations taken from Marshall and Rossman.

themselves. Thus the qualitative criterion is: Do the data help confirm the general findings and lead to the implications?''

My goal is to have my research be evaluated according to the criteria stated above, because of its greater relevance and applicability to qualitative methods. This study does not pretend to be generalizable to all cultural institutions, or even all institutions performing film preservation. By keeping the parameters that I have set as to setting, population studied, and theoretical framework in mind, however, other researchers may find that this research will have relevance and applicability to their own studies.

A step-by-step summary of methods used

The following list summarizes the different steps followed during the data collection and analysis phases. These methods represent a commitment to the methodology of grounded theory. A note of caution is extended to those who would interpret this list as an indication that the process was entirely linear, however. It is the nature of ethnographic fieldwork to be iterative, i.e., that the practices of data collection and analysis feed upon one another – initial analysis of data uncovers new directions and concepts that demand the additional collection of data to fully describe and understand the newly-identified phenomena. This cyclical process continues until the researcher is satisfied that additional collection of data will shed no new light on the subject in question.

In this study, I

1. Gained access to fieldwork sites, and established myself in the role of participant-observer (known as *entrée*).
2. Wrote up fieldnotes of observations and experiences on a regular basis, and conducted interviews in the field with key informants.
3. Conducted in-depth interviews with key informants in the commercial sector.
4. Conducted focus group interviews with managers of both commercial and non-commercial film preservation programs.
5. Converted all fieldnotes and interviews to machine-readable format using a word-processing program.
6. Performed preliminary, line-by-line coding (using NUD*IST, an ethnographic analysis computer program) at regular intervals during the data collection and transcription process.

7. Refined and clarified coding categories using memo-writing and knowledge of the relevant literature.
8. Carried out theoretical sampling by collecting more data, i.e., performing additional interviews, as needed.
9. Performed focused coding using the refined set of codes on the entire data set.
10. Re-worked memos on concepts and categories, based on refined coding schemes.
11. Sorted and integrated memos.

Reflecting Upon the Validity of "Archival Ethnography"

For this study, I found that ethnomethodological methods were the most appropriate way to investigate an archival environment which was largely undocumented and unexplored. By conducting an initial exploration of the world of film preservation through participation observation and ethnographic interviewing, I was able to gather enough preliminary data to formulate initial hypotheses which reflected actual practice. This study offered the opportunity to go beyond the minimal quantitative measurements that have commonly been accepted as assessments of progress in the film preservation endeavor to explore standards for such work. The amount of footage preserved annually or the dollars spent on preserving film on a yearly basis are the most glaring examples of such measurements. These figures tell only part of the story of film preservation.[51] By relying exclusively on such gauges of progress, the field of film preservation places undue emphasis on quantity rather than quality. For instance, this study revealed that if the budget for preservation is increased, archivists are just as likely to spend additional time and funds on increasing the quality of preservation as they are to use the money for preserving additional films. My observations and interviews documented a process which employs multiple feedback loops for quality control, whereas the simple counting of "footage preserved" or "dollars spent on preservation copying" does not reflect such data.

In this project, I foresaw two major benefits to the fieldwork/ grounded theory perspective. First, I was able to foreground an emic, or insider, perspective, which allowed me to grasp concepts which were so tacitly accepted and understood among film archivists as to be invisible to outsiders. The definitional nuances of the word

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[51] *Film Preservation 1993: A Study of the Current State of American Film Preservation*, Vol. 1. (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1993). http://www.loc.gov/film/study.html

"preservation", for example, would have been undetected by the typical survey instrument. Similarly, it would be quite difficult to "identify plausible causal networks" shaping phenomena such as the process of selecting a film for preservation or the rise of the orphan film movement without comparing interview responses with experiences observed in the field. Second, ethnographic methods allowed me to ascertain the nature of relationships among participants both within and among institutions and organizations more precisely than would have been possible through survey methods or quantitative analysis. Given the lack of documentation of the operations in this field, my goal was to record the function and form of film preservation from the ground up, and to build a base of knowledge from which to generate theory on the operations of the field. In my opinion, this approach was logical and unassailable.

The qualitative perspective that I have embraced centers "around notions that empirical reality should be approached as potentially multiple realities, constructed by perceivers, and frequently acted on as if there were one objective reality. Empirical reality – what researchers set out to capture as data and understand in terms of abstraction – is complex, intertwined, understood most fully as a contextual whole, and ultimately inseparable from the individuals 'knowing' that reality."[52] It is my argument that the new agenda for archival research must not privilege a single worldview, and must be reflective and reflexive. Naturalistic research design provides methods for beginning to capture the complexity of the lived experience in which records are created and preserved.

As Gilliland-Swetland points out, the next generation of information studies researchers must take a more pluralistic approach in their inquiries in order to address the many new problems and challenges brought about by the dizzying technological change of the last decade and the decades to come.[53] Not only in the area of moving image archiving and preservation, but also in other newly emerging subdisciplines of the field such as social informatics, digital libraries, and electronic recordkeeping, we will need to reappraise the methods that have been used in the past, and the benefits and drawbacks of "nontraditional" tools of research. Ethnographic methods, along with such tools as content analysis, discourse analysis, and focus group interviewing offer information studies researchers a way to recast research

[52] Bradley, J., "Methodological Issues and Practices in Qualitative Research", *Library Quarterly*, **63** (1993): 432.

[53] For a discussion of this issue in archival education, see Gilliland-Swetland, A.J. "Archival Research: A 'New' Issue for Graduate Education", *American Archivist*, **63** (2000): 258–70.

problems and in fact uncover new avenues for inquiry that were inaccessible through purely quantitative methods. It is my hope that eventually, researchers from both quantitative and qualitative traditions will collaborate on research to cross-validate research findings through triangulation, and thus provide results on both micro- and macro-levels.

Before this collaboration may take place, however, much more grounded research needs to be undertaken in the archival arena. As I pointed out in the introduction to this paper, "archival ethnography" is thus far largely unexplored as a research methodology. I theorize that there are multiple reasons for the lack of fieldwork research in this field. First, and perhaps most obviously, there has been and continues to be a preponderance of researchers trained in historical methods. Few archival researchers have training in the fieldwork tradition, having been educated in the various fields where historical methods are the preferred form of inquiry. Where historical methods are not used, survey methods seem to be the most popular. While surveys, of either the quantitative or qualitative variety, certainly have their uses, they are often used inappropriately, leading to conclusions which are poorly supported or otherwise invalid.

The types of questions upon which archival researchers have traditionally focused suggest another reason for why ethnographic approaches have been absent in archival research. Although archival research has often reflected upon issues of process and function, as is evidenced by the innumerable studies of appraisal and descriptive practice, rarely do we approach these topics from sociocultural perspectives that recognize the *inherently* subjective nature of archival work. Instead, research questions have tended to promote the archival endeavor as ideally objective work, where individual or collective subjectivity must be either ignored or rooted out. Perhaps many of us are still unduly influenced by the belief in the sanctity of the processes of record creation and recordkeeping, fondly desiring to make them purely logical procedures which can thus be theorized, normalized, and generalized (not to mention dehumanized).

It may be difficult and messy to admit that record creators make and manage records in an illogical fashion, and that archivists sometimes do not treat records in the most objective manner possible. Yet, as the archival research agenda slowly makes the post-modern turn, many scholars and practitioners seem to be asking for just such admissions in the name of integrating theory and practice, as well as achieving the goals of trust and accountability in recordkeeping,

empowerment of the users of archives, and the preservation of evidence. Cook and Schwartz, who liken archival practice to theatrical performance in that we are actors in a perpetually unfolding drama, remind us that "our constant duty – to the past and to the future, to the records creators and the records users, and to the records themselves – must be an ongoing critique and transparent accountability of our theory/scripts and thus an honest assessment of our practices/performances."[54] One of the most illuminating methods to reflect upon professional practice, revealing previously undetected patterns of behavior and systems of meaning, is through the methodological approach of ethnographic fieldwork, and the grounded theory that will emerge from such data.

Appendix: Sample Guides for In-depth and Focus Group Interviews

In-depth Interviews

(For participants from non-commercial institutions)

Background of the participant

1. How did you decide to become an archivist?
2. Describe your job responsibilities.
3. What individuals or experiences have had the strongest effect on how you perform your work?

Archival work

1. Can you tell me about a typical day at work?
2. What sorts of projects are you currently working on?
3. Describe a recent preservation project, small or large. Tell me how the project came into being and what you did, or are doing, to complete the project.
4. How do you feel about the results you achieved with the project? Were you satisfied with the final product? How do you think others perceived the results?
5. How much of your day is spent doing physical preservation work? What other kinds of work do you do? How do you see these other kinds of work as fitting into your job?

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[54] Cook, T. and Schwartz, J.M., "Archives, Records, and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance", *Archival Science*, **2**(3-4) (2002): 183–184.

(For participants from commercial organizations)

For all commercial participants:

1. How long has this facility been involved in preservation work?
2. Please describe the preservation services that this company offers.
3. What sorts of customers do you serve? (e.g., archives, studios, independent producers) Why do they choose to employ your company?

For Laboratory Services Personnel

Laboratories and preservation

1. What do you see as the role of film laboratories in the preservation process?
2. How would you say that ideas about laboratory processing for preservation have evolved over the past ten years?
3. Have these changes affected the sorts of services that you provide?

Processes and practices

1. Please describe the process, from start to finish, of preserving a film and your part in it.
2. What types of situations make a preservation or restoration difficult?
3. At what points in the process do you interact with your clients?
4. How do they communicate their needs to you? What happens when they are dissatisfied with a particular aspect of the product?
5. Do you use digital processes in your work? In what ways?

For Storage Facilities Personnel

Storage and film preservation

1. What do you see as the role of storage in the preservation process?
2. How would you say that ideas about storage have evolved over the past ten years?
3. Have these changes affected the sorts of services you provide?
4. How do you feel that the transition to digital filmmaking will affect the sorts of services you provide?

Focus Group Interviews

(For Participants from Either Commercial or Non-commercial Organizations)

Definition and importance of preservation in archival work

1. What kinds of preservation activities does your organization engage in?
2. What part do you feel preservation plays in the day-to-day activities of your organization?
3. What is the primary mission of your organization?
4. How does preservation work fit into your organizational mission?
5. How would you define the word preservation?

Funding for preservation/cultivating donor relationships

1. How are preservation activities funded in your institution?
2. (For non-profit institutions) How much of your time is spent writing grants to fund preservation activities?
3. (For commercial organizations) Describe the level of support received from the parent organization for preservation activities in comparison to other sort of activities in which your department may engage.

Orphan films

> *The national plan for preserving film heritage published by the Library of Congress calls for an increased emphasis on rescuing orphan films (orphan films being defined as "works without clearly defined owners or belonging to commercial interests unable or unwilling to take responsibility for their long-term care").*

1. Do you have orphan films in your collection?
2. Have you undertaken any preservation projects involving orphan films? Please describe one or two of them.
3. What goals does your organization have for preserving orphan films?

Partnerships in preservation

1. Has your institution engaged in a partnership with another institution or organization to work jointly on a preservation project? If so, please describe the project briefly, including a breakdown of which activities were performed by which organization.
2. What kinds of concerns did you have before entering the partnership?