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Résumé de l'article

Collections of independent, non-commercial works often represent voices and speak to topics not seen in mainstream media, and they are still often cared for outside of major collecting institutions. Since 2011, activist audiovisual archivists have organized Community Archiving Workshops (CAWs) in the US and beyond to help caretakers of endangered media and film collections jump-start preservation efforts. In the spirit of 'each one, teach one,' experienced archivists share skills with other volunteers to inspect and inventory a collection, thus giving caretakers the data they need to select priority works for preservation. CAW organizers are committed to training more people to carry out CAWs in their own communities; a grant-funded project will pilot this approach in partnership with cultural heritage organizations in three regional hubs (Nashville, TN; Madison, WI; and Oakland, CA) beginning in 2018.

PROJECT REPORT

Community Archiving Independent Media

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Collections of independent, non-commercial works often represent voices and speak to topics not seen in mainstream media, and they are still often cared for outside of major collecting institutions. Since 2011, activist audiovisual archivists have organized Community Archiving Workshops (CAWs) in the US and beyond to help caretakers of endangered media and film collections jump-start preservation efforts. In the spirit of 'each one, teach one,' experienced archivists share skills with other volunteers to inspect and inventory a collection, thus giving caretakers the data they need to select priority works for preservation. CAW organizers are committed to training more people to carry out CAWs in their own communities; a grant-funded project will pilot this approach in partnership with cultural heritage organizations in three regional hubs (Nashville, TN; Madison, WI; and Oakland, CA) beginning in 2018.

In the late 1960s, when portable video systems—called portapaks—first arrived in the US, videomaking was strictly the domain of a homogenous group of broadcast television producers. Before long, emerging makers working in schools, art studios, collectives, and non-profits carved out spaces for independent, non-commercial video production, exhibition, and distribution (and eventually, in a few cases, preservation). In the 1970s, funding flowed to set up non-profit centers, first through private and public arts funding (dubbed media arts centers), and later through local advocacy efforts that resulted in the investment of municipal cable fees into public-access, educational-access, and government-access television.

By 1980, some of these fledgling media centers (numbering 80 nationally) had formed the National Alliance for Media Arts Centers (NAMAC). In 1983, at the conference *Media Arts in Transition*, NAMAC's chair J. Ronald Green described the true goal of independent media as 'cultural pluralism' undertaken by 'those persons and interests that the majority of successful America think of as other than themselves: women, minorities, youth, artists, aged, critics of the system, the religious/sexually/politically/psychologically/non-normal and non-normative…the unaveraged' (Green 1983: 6). Writing during the Reagan era, Green described a vibrant but precariously positioned field. Through ups and down in funding, this independent media sector has continued to assert itself due to the dedicated work of cultural workers and creators, many of whom took it upon themselves to box its histories away, creating accidental archives. These collections undeniably contain voices and issues very rarely seen in the mass media and represent a wide variety of visual forms – video art, documentaries, interviews, home videos, and more. But the reality is that the tapes are on long-obsolete, deteriorated formats dependent on decrepit machines, some nearly 50 years old.

As the moving image archiving field becomes increasingly professionalized, and practices are codified and shared widely, more media collections are being digitized and made accessible. For those who champion the preservation of moving-image-based culture, this is reason to celebrate. Yet, increasing professionalism can have its drawbacks if the result is more delineation between 'experts' and amateurs or non-specialists, or between community-based archives and designated memory organizations. Collaborations that intentionally create linkages among practitioners belie these unnecessary characterizations. For the past eight years, members of the Independent Media and Diversity Committees of the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) have promoted a community archiving workshop (CAW) model that mobilizes allies to work together toward preservation and access.

A principal problem in the preservation of moving image archives is that caretakers often do not have enough information to make selections—to find the highest quality version of their most valued productions. A community archiving workshop is essentially a distributed model for what archivists consider the first step in collection management: gaining 'intellectual and physical control' of the tapes. In a CAW, experienced audiovisual archivists and preservation specialists are paired up with those new to archiving. They work together for a day to label, inspect, inventory, and re-box a magnetic media (and in some cases a film) collection. Everyone's data is collected using a standardized spreadsheet template, and at the end of the day, the files are merged into one. In a CAW involving about 30 people, the group typically inventories 125–150 items, capturing titles, dates, formats, tape condition, and other information needed for prioritization. The CAW model seeks to help caretakers jump-start preservation actions, emphasizing that the goal is not a better-organized archive—although this is a peripheral benefit—but to enable them to quickly find the most important works in the collection. Much of the legacy of independent media production remains uncollected, and, realistically, even when works are collected, only a small percentage of the tapes will be preserved. The data from a CAW gives caretakers the information to begin the preservation process while the video playback decks can still be found.

The first CAW was held alongside a conference of the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA), in collaboration with the Scribe Video Center, a community media center in Philadelphia, where volunteers worked with 1980s-era tapes from Scribe's series *Community Visions* (http://scribe.org/community-visions). The CAW team located and inventoried edit masters and camera originals for the oldest productions, leading to the preservation of selected works. In 2011, the Independent Media Committee took the lead, organizing a CAW at the annual AMIA conference. From 2012–2017, these CAWs were co-organized with the AMIA Diversity Committee.[1] Additional CAWs have been organized in New York City, Philadelphia, Oaxaca, Tokyo, Manila and Bangkok. In 2017, the Southeast Asian Pacific Audiovisual Archives Association decided to make CAWs a regular feature of their annual conference, and a CAW is being organized as part of the 2018 conference of the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries and Museums.

Veteran CAW organizers have created a handbook (communityarchiving.org) and regularly network with other activists at gatherings such as the Allied Media Conference. Partner organizations have included Three Dollar Bill Cinema, which hosts an annual queer film festival in Seattle; All Walks of Life, a youth media group in Savannah; the National Black Programming Consortium and the Downtown Community Television Center, both in New York; Ojo de Agua Comunicación, a media center in Oaxaca; City of Asylum, a literary center in Pittsburgh; and the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, among others.

At the 2017 AMIA conference, a new activity was piloted: a Community Archiving AV Fair co-organized with the New Orleans Video Access Center offered nine stations, each one focusing on a different tool or technique for AV archiving and preservation. This new activity will continue at the 2018 AMIA conference. Also, AMIA has received major funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services to develop a 'training of organizers' curriculum and an updated handbook. The purpose of the grant is to expand the number of people who feel confident in organizing CAWs, thus addressing a greater number of endangered audiovisual collections. AMIA CAW committee members will work in partnership with cultural heritage groups around three regional hubs: Nashville, TN; Madison, WI; and Oakland, CA. Confirmed partners include the media arts center Appalshop (in Whitesburg, KY), the Nashville Metro Archives, the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theatre Research, and the African American Museum and Library at Oakland.

Competing Interests
The author has no competing interests to declare.

Reference
Green, J. Ronald. 1983. "The Media Arts in Transition (For James Blue)." In: *The Media Arts in Transition: 8–11 June, 1983, Walker Art Center*, Bill Horrigan (ed.), 6–9. Minneapolis, MN: The Walker Art Center.

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[1] The organizers of AMIA CAWs have included Rachel Beattie, Kelli Hix, Marie Lascu, Jeff Martin, Yvonne Ng, Amy Sloper, Taylor McBride, Moriah Ulinskas, Pamela Vadakan, Sandra Yates, and the author.