TECHNoCuLTuRE

Audiovisual archiving

Episode 4

Full transcript

Guest: Ray Edmondson [Ray]
Host: Federica Bressan [Federica]

Welcome to a new episode of Technoculture. I'm your host, Federica Bressan, and today my guest is Ray Edmondson, a consultant in audiovisual archiving that has dedicated his life to audiovisual work, to the archiving and preservation of audiovisual heritage. Welcome, Ray.

[Ray]: Thank you, Federica.

[Federica]: Thank you for being on Technoculture. It's a great honor to have you as a guest. We are recording this as the World Day of Audiovisual Heritage approaches. That's the 27th of October, and on top of that, 2018 is the European Year of Cultural Heritage, so a great time to talk about audiovisual heritage. I learned about you about a decade ago through your milestone publication on Audiovisual Archiving: Philosophy and Principles, published by UNESCO, which reached the third edition in 2016, a true reference in the literature in this field, as it's kind of a unique publication and very important for the intellectual debate around audiovisual archiving. You started out in this field in the late '60s. You are a recognized pioneer in this field, but I would like to ask you to outline for us a little bit your career path, because, along the years, of course, you've been involved in this field in different roles. You have served in various capacities in UNESCO and other cultural and memory institutions.

[Ray]: Right. Look, my career path is, having studied arts at university, I decided to join the National Library of Australia (this was back in 1968), because the National Library housed what was then our National Film Archive, and it's not a very high-profile activity, but was one that I wanted to get involved in because I'd had a long interest in Australian film and its, as I discovered, as I went on, its preservation and its non-visibility in a country that speaks

English so therefore finds it hard to have its own film industry. I was at the National Library for 15 years in its film section, beginning as a junior librarian and finally ending up as head of the section. In 1984, what had become the National Film Archive, part of that section, and separately, elsewhere in the library, a national sound recording collection, the government sought to split those off and turn them into a new institution, the National Film and Sound Archive, and so I became Deputy Director of that institution, where I stayed until my retirement in 2001. So that's my formal bureaucratic career. Now, in the course of that, other things developed, such as the philosophy (which we'll talk about later), the beginning of education at the University of New South Wales. The School of Librarianship worked with us to establish an online course by internet in audiovisual archiving. This was a first of its kind. It's still the only course delivered by internet at this stage and is still running. Now, in the course of my whole career, I formed connections with the various professional associations in our field. That's film archiving, sound archiving, and held offices in various ones of them various times. In the course of this, contributed to their publications, which means I started writing quite a lot in our field. In 2001, I retired from the NFSA because I couldn't continue to hold down my day job as I saw it and develop my commitments overseas, which were sort of piling up all the time. So that was a good time to make that break and meant I could devote myself to teaching and writing and speaking, those sorts of things, and that's how it's been ever since. So the scope has sort of widened, and right through that time, beginning in, I think, 1996, I also became connected to the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme, which deals with the preservation of documentary heritage and its accessibility. It's a wider scope than audiovisual archiving. But I've been involved in it in one way or another ever since, and it's now quite a large undertaking based on voluntary committees around the world. My current involvement is as a special adviser to MOWCAP, which is the Memory of the World Committee for Asia and the Pacific. That's the acronym. In the course of that involvement, I have written a lot of material about Memory of the World. I've supervised the revision and recently re-revision of its general guidelines. That's the real bulk of the program, and that's been another writing stream for me. So that runs in parallel to my audiovisual archiving involvement, but of course the two do intersect, because UNESCO has interest in audiovisual archiving and in archiving generally and librarianship.

[Federica]: So speaking of UNESCO, like I said, I got to know you through this milestone publication, Audiovisual Archiving: Philosophy and Principles. Even today, I still find that it's a unique type of publication, because most literature in this field deals, is concerned with the technical aspects of digitization, content transfer, then digital preservation, and what I appreciate and I find very useful in this text is that you start from the beginning and clarify the terminology and address certain fundamental issues. For example, in the very opening you have a section called, "Why do we do the things we do, and why do we do things the way we do them?" These are important questions, so I would like to ask you: What was the landscape, the conditions in the '90s, that made not just possible that this publication would

see the light, but actually who suggested that there was a need for such publication? Who involved you, suggested that you be involved in this, and did you have to sit down and like think hard, "What should be the main guidelines in our approach and in precisely the philosophy of what we do," or basically it was all there already embodied in the practices, these issues were clear to you, and you just had to put them together in this remarkable publication? So, can you talk a little bit about how this work came to be in its first edition in the '90s?

[Ray]: Well, look, it all began, actually, in 1989 at the FIAF Congress in Lisbon. I had a conversation with Wolfgang Klaue, who was the head then of the East German Staatliches Filmarchiv, himself a pioneer educator in this field, who I'd first met in 1973 when I was a student at the first FIAF summer school which was held in East Berlin, and we just got talking, and he said, "Look, there is no philosophy of film archiving." And we talked about this and said, "Well, no, there isn't." And after that conversation I sort of thought, "Well, what can we do about it?" And so over time (we're talking about number of years), I spoke to other people in the field in both FIAF and IASA, [unclear 00:08:31] some different archives and so on that are new, and we started corresponding not by email (which wasn't available at the time), but by fax, go by ordinary letters, and tossed around these ideas. You know, how do we get down to the basics of what we're doing and the basic concepts and so on? And so we formed a group whose initials were AVAPIN, A-V-A-P-I-N, the Audiovisual Archiving Interest Network, and exchanged letters. This led to me writing some articles that were published in FIAF journal and the IASA journal, and it kind of grew so that it reached a point where, when I traveled overseas on what was an Australian government scholarship, a management scholarship, to also spend some time meeting people in Europe and working on a text. And we tried out this text at some conferences of FIAF, IASA, FIAT, and AMIA. Now, four of our associations at different dates, tried out some draft text for reaction and for discussion, and the feedback was important. Now, not everybody is in favor of this. Some people thought it was a waste of time. "We all run... We're running archives that are underfunded. Working under pressure, [unclear 00:10:10] have enough time or money to do the work we need to do. Why do we want to sit around gazing at our navels and pondering philosophically about the work we do?" But other people thought there was a need, and so the group reached about 20 or more people in the end who were corresponding and exchanging ideas. So, while in Europe, I called on Joy Springer at UNESCO and showed her the draft and said, "Look, you know, we think there's a need for something like this." She agreed, and so I was contracted by UNESCO to produce a text, a final text, which I did. And so it was published in 1998 under the title of A Philosophy of Audiovisual Archiving. It was revised in 2004 with a change of title, and most recently in 2016, there's a third edition. Now, the three editions obviously bear some similarities to each other, but they're all also different, and in the latest edition, of course, we have to deal with the issues of digitalization which did not loom as large before, but certainly did loom large by 2016. Now, in each case, it hasn't been me alone. There's been a group of people involved in looking at draft text and commenting back and discussing it, and in this latest iteration, there

was an editorial group of eight people put together according to UNESCO's rules. They have rules about these things. So it's gender-balanced and geographically balanced and balanced according to the connections that each person had within the profession, which of the professional associations they were related to and so on. So that's the story. Now, it is still the case, I think, that not everyone is on the same wavelength about this. The earliest iteration, when I was preparing it, I remember some correspondence with the Secretary General at FIAF, who pointed out to me that, well, you know, some people didn't think it was a good idea, and some people found it a bit suspect because I was talking to film archivists and sound archivists at the time, and while it's now hard to realize this was the case, these were like two armed camps that kind of hated each other, and the fact that I was dealing with both, maybe a bit of a traitor to each. But there was a need to bridge that gap in the first place because these two fields had grown up more or less independent of each other and didn't talk much to each other, and there was a need to bridge them and see what we're talking about a profession that covers both film and sound. And then even as late as 2016, when the latest edition was published and was considered two days after publication by a meeting of the CCAAA, which is the Co-ordinating Council of Audiovisual Archives Associations, it was clear that many people in the meeting, although they hadn't read the text, were expecting something quite different. They wanted a technical manual, and that's not what this was. So they're, not terribly many people, not terribly happy about it, to the extent that they asked UNESCO to suspend publication so the text could be checked out by the technical committees of various associations, which was entirely missing the point. UNESCO, of course, refused, and the publication simply went ahead, and since then the translation's gone ahead. So the idea of a philosophy does not appeal in the same way to everybody. The idea that the profession is about how-to manuals and technical [unclear 00:13:50] and so on and that's all it is still hovers there, and particularly, I think, with people of longer standing in the field, and the idea of looking at it from a philosophical point of view is not what attracts them. But for all that, for younger people I think it's rather different. The book is standard reading in various courses, and I noted in a recent survey done by AMIA that in the reading lists of 14 different courses across North America (and here, I'm talking about courses in archival science, not just audiovisual archiving), in their electives on audiovisual media, it was the second-highest on the list of required reading. The highest document was a publication of the National Preservation Board of the Library of Congress, which, of course, will be required reading for everybody in North America. But this [unclear 00:14:50] came immediately after. So it's seen as important in the courses, and this is what young people are absorbing as they enter the field now.

[Federica]: In the publication, there are several concepts that I have made my own since about a decade ago, and they are fundamental concepts that then also have consequences in the practice. One, for example, is the need to define audiovisual materials not by negation, not by what they're not, like the expression "non-book material." So a rethinking of what these objects truly mean to us and to find a way to describe them that is appropriate, that's

very important. Or another concept is, for example, the fact that preservation is not discrete process. Nothing has ever been preserved. It is only being preserved. So despite the specificity of audiovisual materials, and so all we know to be important, I want to ask kind of the complementary question, and that is, at the same time audiovisual material is part of our cultural heritage, it's archival material, for the most part, so there must be also an overlap with the approach to book preservation, the traditional approach. What is that overlap? What could we learn from that? What is the continuation of that tradition that we could export, so to speak, and adapt to audiovisual materials?

[Ray]: Well, look, I think all of what I call the memory professions (and here we're talking about librarianship, archival science, conservation, museology, gallery curatorship), these are all professions that deal with the preservation and accessibility of memory, if we can use that kind of broader concept, which is the way UNESCO looks at it. Now, memory takes many forms. It can be orally transmitted, and many cultures are oral cultures. It can be recorded in various ways: in writing, in speech, in vision or in the creation of objects. All of these things encapsulate memory, and so when you talk about preservation, the concept of preservation is basic. It means, firstly, keeping whatever the object is (if it's a physical object), keeping the object safe so it can continue its life. If it's oral, it means keeping the tradition alive from one generation to the next, and it's the continuation of memory, something that's actually unique to the human species. We can report memories in various ways, and we can transmit them to the next generation. This is something that other species just can't do. So the notion of preservation is fundamental to that, the continuation of the existence of a document or of information or of an idea. And then the point of preservation, by definition, has to be accessibility. Otherwise, why do you bother keeping it? So you preserve for the purpose of making something accessible, and for it to be accessible, people have to know that it's there and where to go looking for it, so it's kind of, it's awareness-raising, you know, where, "Where do I go to find information, to find memory?" Now, out of that general idea, different professions have evolved because they deal with different kinds of documents differently. So libraries have evolved because they deal with discrete works. A book is a discrete work. A journal edition is a discrete work, is a discrete object, a discrete thing, and they organize the collections along the lines of these discrete things. So cataloging in the library sense is about, you know, the book has this author, it's about this subject, these are its contents, and you have a catalogue entry. A journal, an issue of a journal, is treated in much the same way. Archives, as we now understand them, keep records and, unlike books in libraries, which are published, archival records are not published. They're not disseminated to the general public. They exist as a record of a transaction, of an action, an exchange of information, and the way that archives organize the collections, unlike libraries, which organize discrete works, archives organize their collections in a continuum so that one record relates to the next record, so if you have a file of correspondence, this letter relates to the one before it, the one before that, and so on. The meaning in the records comes out through the relationship of one record to another. That means collections are organized

conceptually in quite a different way. When we talk about museums and art galleries, they're, to a large extent, dealing with physical objects, and conservation, the keeping of an object in a form that continues its life without degradation, is fundamental. So if you're going to preserve a painting, then how you physically handle it, store it, display it, look after it, the conditions in which it's displayed, relate to its physical survival and its accessibility. And conservation, the profession of conservation, is about stabilizing objects and removing the accretions of age or damage, if you can, to restore it to its original condition. And so this is a concept that's related to objects. Now, when you put those together, audiovisual archiving has aspects of all three things. For the most part, we perceive films, television programs, other audiovisual documents, as discrete entities. They can be described by a title or a series. They're published, in most cases. And so you catalog them in a way that's rather similar to the way libraries catalog their material, but it's also archival in the sense that one work can relate to another, and the notion of preservation before you give access is quite fundamental, more so in archives than perhaps libraries. When a library acquires a book, it just puts it on a shelf and it's accessible. When archives acquire archives, the notion of preservation starts to loom large at the beginning because the condition in which the records are received may not be particularly good. And then the notion of museum, notion of dealing with objects, well, it relates to all physical media, and also now to the concept of digital objects, but the notion of conservation, of restoring an object to its original condition as far as possible, is very particular to physical objects. Now, we see these things relating to audiovisual media, a film is an object, and it often needs restoration, careful storage, and skilled handling to get access to it. It needs the interpolation of a medium, of a mechanism, physical or digital. So when you kind of look at the aspect of these professions, which have all evolved to keep different kinds of records and to objects, they provide access to them, when you're dealing with audiovisual media, you're kind of taking aspects of all three, because that's the nature of the media we're dealing with. It has a physical being in many cases. If not, it has a digital reality. It has to be perceived through a technological mechanism, whatever that mechanism is, so accessibility depends on utilizing that mechanism. And it can take a great many forms. You can see a film in a movie theater. You can listen to a sound recording on a radio, or a gramophone, or now on the internet, and it's been through various digital applications, so it's. . . If you're talking about an audiovisual document, which is the term I use, you perceive all of its different characteristics. I used an analogy in my teaching that tried to explain this. If you imagine a mythical country — I call it Platonia — and someone in a government ministry moves a filing cabinet and finds behind it some cans of film, and they don't know what to do with this. So the minister calls a meeting and he puts the cans of film on the table, and he has the heads of the National Library of Platonia, the National Archives, the National Art Gallery, the National Museum and the National Audiovisual Archive, and he says, "Well, we found this film. It's actually a travelogue of Platonia of about 50 years ago, when the country looked very differently, very different to the way there's now." It was made by the national artist, because the national artist is a revered position in Platonia, and it was narrated by the president of that day, so

it was a very prestigious film, and it was narrated by the president, so it was shown widely, I guess, [unclear 00:24:50] details, but there it is. It's a record of the country. It's also an artistic creation of the national artist. It carries the imprimatur of the president. And the question is, where does this film go to? So the National Library spoke first and said, "Well, it should come to the National Library because it's the history of Platonia. This is how the country looked fifty years ago, and we want to add it to our collection of Platonialia, of the history of our country, so it should be part of the National Library." The National Archive said, "No, it should come to the National Archives because it's narrated by the president and it's, makes it a government record. It's evidence of a transaction. The president made this record, and we need to preserve it as a government record." The National Museum said, "Well, no, it really should come to us because it's shot in Dufaycolor, which is a now obsolete color process, and the National Museum makes a specialty of collecting photographic equipment and examples of film processes to put them on show." National Art Gallery said, "Well, really, it was made by the national artist, so it's a work of art, so it needs to come to the National Art Gallery." And so the minister turned round to the head of the National Audiovisual Archive and said, "Well, what have you got to say?" And the head of the National Audiovisual Archive said, "Well, it needs to come to us because it's a film, and the way we deal with film, we can represent all of those aspects of its character. It is a finished work. It is a published document, just like a book or a journal. It is a government record. We can recognize that fact in the way we catalogue it. Yes, it's a representative of a obsolete color process. We deal with those all the time, and we have the equipment and the knowledge to preserve such things in their proper way. And yes, many films are works of art, and so we recognize the concept of work of art in the way we catalogue, display, and provide access to our material." And so the film went to the National Archive. So I guess I'm really saying that it's a way of illustrating how an audiovisual archive is an amalgam of these traditions and, of course, adds on top of it the character of what it's dealing with. An audiovisual document (whether it's a film, a television program, a digital file, a physical [gramophone 00:27:25] recording or whatever) all exist in our heads. They don't have any objective existence. We perceive moving images because we see them through a projector or an electronic means. It's a number of images per second that run together in our heads, so we perceive them as movement. They're really [unclear 00:27:51] still images. The moving image does not have any objective existence. Now, when we listen to sound, it's really disturbances in the atmosphere impinging on our ears, which we interpret as meaningful sounds, but they have no objective existence. So this is their nature, and fundamentally, we need to recognize that's their nature, and so the way we preserve them and deal with them starts off at that point.

[Federica]: And having cleared what is unique about audiovisual materials and why they differ from other types of archival materials, I'd still like to ask why it was obvious, or why was it then decided, to group audio and video together? Why couldn't these two things be different enough to require separate publications, separate methodologies, separate philosophies, maybe?

[Ray]: Well, in the beginning, of course, it did require a different approach, and the first… The profession grew out very gradually from the existing institutions, so places like the British Museum and the Library of Congress, which had very different jobs or very different approaches, and to the extent that they embraced these things themselves, they saw them as an extension of existing tasks. The British Museum began collecting films around 1900 but didn't quite know what to do with them because they didn't fit into an existing concept that they were handling. Yes, there were obviously physical objects, and the British Museum, also, at that time had the nation's largest book collection (the collection's now become in later years, the British Library), but it didn't really know how to characterize them. The Library of Congress saw films as an extension of still photography, and so they developed what is now a really odd approach of saying, "If you want to register your copyright," which in the U.S., you must do if you want to register copyright, you must deposit your work with the Library of Congress. They had no way of dealing with movies, so they came up with the idea that movies are a succession of still photographs. "So, if, instead of printing the film on celluloid, if you make a print of the film on paper and [lodge 00:30:22] it with the Library of Congress, we will record that as a group of still photographs." And this went on for about, I think until 1912. So the field emerged in this really strange way. Sound recordings were ways of initially recording ethnographic realities, ethnographers who would visit different tribes and communities and record their songs and speech on Edison cylinders. They saw those, obviously, as ethnographic records, and so the oldest film archive in the world today is the Austrian Phonogrammarchiv in Vienna, which began for that purpose and still exists for that purpose of ethnographic recordings. Now, as work went on, the idea of having specific institutions to look after films developed in one arena where film was an industry, an entertainment industry, as well as producing documentary records, and people in various countries saw the need to keep such collections in a noncommercial environment, and similarly, the idea of recording sound archives in different institutional contexts emerged separately. The film archives came together and realized their character in 1938 by establishing FIAF, International Federation of Film Archives, which had initially four members and IASA grew out of (that's the International Association of Sound Archives, as it then was) grew out of the International Association of Music Libraries. So recording was seen as a medium for recording music, not so much speech. And so it came into its own sometime in the '60s. These fields just grew in their own particular historical way without really intersecting, and, as I mentioned, you know, sometimes being jealous of each other. [unclear 00:32:31] they intersect, the first time on record that I think it happened was in Russia in about in the early '30s, where there was an archive that collected sound recordings and films and photographs and which I think then disappeared soon after. Strange, and oddly speaking, the next time that happened was here in Australia in 1935, where, for reasons that we can't entirely be sure of now, the federal government decided to establish something called (and this is a mouthful of a title) the National Historical Film and Speaking Record Library, and they placed this under the control, the joint control, of the government film production unit (the film production unit of the government made advertising documentaries

to promote Australia) and the Commonwealth National Library, which was then an institution that actually included the National Archives and various other entities that later split off. So this was, this little entity was created under the aegis of these two bodies. Clearly, because someone in the mix saw the point of recording, of joined together historical records in sound form and film form (and we're talking here about documentary material, not entertainment). It was seen very much as historical record in these two forms, but this is where it happened in Australia. Now, that really wasn't followed up for a long time until we get to the, I guess, the '70s or '80s. We still see these two camps, film and sound, operating separately, but there was a gradual coming together, as film archives had to expand into video and sound archives also found themselves expanding into video, because that's the way industry and entertainment were going. So in Australia, when the National Film and Sound Archive was set up, it was, and I'm not sure if there were any comparable predecessors, but it certainly made sense in this country to bring the two together because they'd been conceived back in the '30s (not necessarily followed through very well, but the concept was there). And so the NFSA was set up quite deliberately to cover the spectrum of film, television, radio and recorded sound and was seen as an entity. [unclear 00:35:07] That's 1984. We go back a little bit to UNESCO again with the notion of bringing these separate entities together, of film archives and the sound archives and, by then, the television archives, also a separate stream, to talk to each other, was initiated by UNESCO into what was called the Round Table of Audiovisual Archives, and here we get the term being applied to the field as a whole. So these were movements that were sort of gradually coming together. The NFSA was a visible manifestation of that idea, but the idea was already active in UNESCO, and over time, and with the assistance of technological change, it's become much more mainstream. And when you think about it, well, there are obvious linkages, and I can recall vividly within the NFSA when it was first created, it brought together the sound people and the film people from the National Library who lived in two different worlds and did not immediately see themselves as corresponding to each other and most definitely did not see themselves as operating on the same database. You couldn't have a film database and a sound database as one complete creation. Now, we had to demonstrate that was possible, that a single database could encompass sound recordings, film, television, radio and other and related things, as well as physical documentation such as posters, books, scripts and things of that kind. And we established such a database and showed it could be done. That was a crucial step in the development of the institution, and, of course, it was followed by others, and the software that was developed in the NFSA was later bought by others, including the Library of Congress.

[Federica]: In your publication, you also stress the importance of training professional figures, and it's more than just giving the right skills to the professionals involved in this field, but it's about recognizing this professional figure as something specific and I think, by reflection, to give importance to the heritage that has been taken care of. Can you talk a little bit about how training programs have emerged or have evolved since you started advocating for this?

[Ray]: Well, the idea of a profession, of a separate profession, I guess would go back. . . I'm not sure [unclear 00:37:49] go back to, but if we think of people in various film, sound, television archives and how they perceived themselves, it was evident when we were, well, in those days when we were discussing development of the philosophy, that people often conceived themselves as a creature of the institution they came from. So people who might be working with film but were part of a library conceived of themselves as librarians, and archivists and museologists ditto. So to develop the idea, the notion, of an individual profession was very gradual. I think the creation of summer schools. . . So I mentioned the 1973 summer school in East Germany, which I attended, which was the very first training exercise on [unclear 00:38:43], and that idea was continued, and it still continues today, and it was followed up by IASA in later years. So these were the initial courses that focused on an aspect of audiovisual archiving and nothing else and gave people a sense of identity, "I've been to a training field, here's my certificate," and so on. The first, this developed gradually. The first university course was at the University of East Anglia in Britain, which would have started, let's see, in the early '90s, I think, and that grew out of a film archive connection. There was a film archive that was related to the university, and the course grew naturally out of that. And it was a one-year elective course that related to the film studies course in the university, so it was an elective of that. The next one, I think, was George Eastman House in Rochester, USA. George Eastman House is one of the oldest film archives in the U.S., and the idea of a course that could be related to that film archive followed soon on it. I think it was established in about '97, '96, thereabouts. The initial student intake was six people, and the course was related in a practical sense, like the one at East Anglia, to working with an archive, so the students would do a yearlong course, and they would do intern work in an archive. It was a very hands-on course. So once these were operating and you had formal qualifications that had university acceptance coming out of it, along with the course that we developed in Australia that was often by internet, which would have begun, I guess, not long after that, it meant that universities recognized this was an emerging profession and were willing to offer a qualification of some kind in relation to it. So it simply grew over time as other universities took on this idea. So we now have the Netherlands' University of Amsterdam, UCLA in the United States, New York University, some universities in Latin America that offer courses in one aspect or another of audiovisual archiving. Now, along with that has gone at the development of modules in archival science courses or librarianship courses in various universities around the world, and these will be electives in an overall librarianship or archival science or related course. It leads to some, I guess, peculiar arrangements where in UCLA, for example, in California, the master's course there is a, if I remember correctly now, under the School of Librarianship at university, it's [wandered? 00:42:03] around with other attachments. In George Eastman House, now called George Eastman Museum, the course there has become connected to the University of Rochester. So you get your masters, you do a one-year course at Eastman House that's called the Selznick School, and you do another year at University of Rochester on a project-related course, and

you get your MA. So these were all developed independently, but with some connection with each other. And of course, as the various international federations have grown, the courses are advertised through those federations and promoted, and so the students often come from those connections and through those professional associations may find their way back into the field and gain employment. So that's how it now works. And so, if you look at what I feel are the characteristics of a profession, it has grown up. It now, I think, meets such characteristics of having a language, a terminology and concepts of its own. It has a literature, and it has people who identify with that profession first and foremost, rather than primarily identifying as a librarian or an archivist. It's been a gradual thing, and I think…Recently, I was asked to write an article as follow up to an article I wrote 20 years earlier called "Is Film Archiving a Profession?" where I reflect on what's happened in 20 years, has it grown up? My answer was, "Yes, it has, and it is now a fully fledged profession, with some work still to do. Still a work in progress, but I think sufficiently mature now that it can be seen that way."

[Federica]: Since the '90s, the internet has exploded, and there is no shortage of user-generated content, mostly uploaded on free platforms, and it's a lot of audio and video. Do you think that the archival community should be concerned with this type of, well, non-curated material, and also so much of it? Is this a challenge for audiovisual archiving today?

[Ray]: They should definitely be concerned about it, and it's being faced in various degrees. I think [unclear 00:44:35] because all archives are limited in their finance and have to make choices about what they preserve. We see a spectrum. We see some archives who are determined to remain analogue archives, and they're going to look after a film or sound recording in the analog sense, and that's their field. We find, I think, most archives, however, embracing digital media in some way. Clearly, film production, for example, is now very largely digital, audio production is very largely digital, and material is now often received and kept in a digital form, and so all the issues about digital preservation come to the fore, and you go back to the [unclear 00:45:15] issue about, how do you achieve long-term preservation? But we have the exploding internet and YouTube and the enormous number of ways in which moving images and sound recordings are created, and, yes, archives have to be aware of them. I think capturing things from YouTube, for example, often things that might be, that are important, that may disappear very quickly, is crucial, and so the medium has to be monitored in some way to capture that, to capture what should be kept. I don't say that's easy. Now, I think we're in the beginning stages of working out how to do that. Done manually by someone sitting down at a computer and sort of tracking through YouTube every day is very labor-intensive and will achieve only limited results. I think we're going to be looking at developments of artificial intelligence and so on to find an easier way of tracking, working out what to keep, and the same is true of the broadcast media where things go out on air, and unless they're captured immediately, they're lost. Radio, chat shows, news, public affairs, these things often just go into the ether and are not kept, and so capturing these things (again, in an organized basis, as

far as possible) is really crucial. For example, the NFSA in Australia has a practice of capturing a newscast every day from a different television station so that we are capturing the news of the day but from different points of view because news is reported very differently on different types of television stations. On the government networks, it's one way, and on the commercial networks it will be a very different style, and so this is the audiovisual media surrounding us, and the challenge is how we select what to keep, and it's getting harder and harder all the time.

[Federica]: So much of this material is being produced that it's pretty fair to say that, of course, we cannot preserve everything. So I wonder if the problem of selecting what to preserve may become the core issue and then how to preserve becomes a secondary question, as opposed to saying, "This is how we should keep these materials, and now let's start applying it to as much of it as we can in a sort of attempt to preserve everything, and since we cannot preserve it all, we will die trying."

[Ray]: Well, if you look around you, it is clearly impossible to preserve everything now. We've all got cell phones. We all produce movie images all the time. What happens to those images? They replace your [family 00:48:11] photographs. Most of them will disappear over time and very little will be kept, so that home movies, which used to be on film and which sometimes find their way into archives, and now replaced by digital movies, which, for the most part, will never find their way into archives because they'll be lost. We just won't keep them ourselves. Fundamental to what any archive does, I think, is a selection policy. You must have a conscious notion of what you want to keep and why, and it can't be just, you know, what appeals to you. It has to be logical. It has to answer to the people who fund you and what they expect, and to the public that expects certain things from you. So there needs to be a conscious selection policy developed, and it needs to be checked regularly with an archive's constituency, with its public, with its users and its stakeholders so it's kept up to date. And staff have to not only follow it, but they also have to have a degree of discretion, because no selection policy will tell you everything you can do. You're going to make judgments all the time. So selection is inevitable. How we do it requires, to the extent that we can do it, a logical, ordered approach, and then judgment, and then relying on the best tools available. Can you keep everything? The answer, I think, is no. I know that a couple of years ago, when I checked with the archive [unclear 00:49:55] that keeps television and radio, they download the whole output of a range of stations every day (that means everything), and try to keep it. I don't think that could continue forever. I think there'll have to be selection, because the sheer magnitude of what has to be kept will be overwhelming, but also, having a selection policy, provides a sense of purpose to an archive. You're there for what reason? To preserve the national memory? To preserve a segment of it? To capture a range of things happening in the media around you? What's your purpose, and what do people expect of you, and what does the taxpayer expect of you? That comes down to an archive's accessibility, because unless you're accessible, people won't know you're there, and they won't see any value for money, taxpayers' money, that's spent on you,

so a justification for your existence is accessibility. So it was never easy, and it's getting harder all the time.

[Federica]: I would like to insist on this point for a moment, if you bear with me. It seems to me like a very crucial question, that of preserving everything or selecting the material very well. We just said that we cannot preserve everything, so it seems a reasonable consequence of that to say, "Oh, then we should select very carefully," but my impression, in my experience, you know, it's just that we would rather die trying to preserve everything than select, and we will leave behind a partial set of documents that express our culture, but also the impression that we were virtuous because we tried so hard, so we died trying, at least. Now, one argument to want to preserve everything is that if we select what to preserve of our own culture, we might be biased and we might choose the materials that will make us look good in the future, as opposed to preserving everything. Then people in the future will be able to look back and make their own reflections. But preserving everything is not possible, and, in a way, then not selecting consciously is also an implicit decision, and what will be left will also be anyway the result of what we cared for the most, in a weird way, in a way that happened in the past, I think, for what concerned the history of kings and popes. You know, so large archives today, those who have access to infrastructure and financial support are more likely to put in place effective preservation strategies that will also survive a long time, as opposed to the small archives or maybe archives with materials that are not on high demand today. So the importance of selection and not die trying in the attempt of preserving everything seems to me very important because it's a choice anyway, one way or the other, and better a deliberate choice than not, because we will leave an impression of who we were anyway, and me personally, I'd rather have someone criticize me for a conscious choice I made than scaring away from the responsibility of a choice and let them draw the conclusions of what what our society really valued.

[Ray]: Yes. Look, so one of the dilemmas is, whatever choice we exert now to preserve reflects the way we see the world right now. It can't reflect the way people twenty years from now will see the world, and so that's a limitation already, and our perspective will not necessarily be the one that people twenty years from now would like to have. So that's already a limitation. We have to try to predict what people ahead of us will expect. Then when you look at all the images and sounds that are now recorded, all the surveillance videos around the world, all the movies and sound recordings created on our cell phones, it's gargantuan, and we live in a society that is, because of fears of security, is more and more monitored, by images and sounds that are recorded and kept by various authorities. Not everybody is happy with this. Did we really want to live in a 1984-type society, as Orwell saw it, where everything we do is documented and monitored by other people? Is that the sort of society we want, or don't we have any privacy at all? That's where it comes to in the end. And I don't see that there's an answer to that. Yes, if we could keep everything, you'd have a real access problem. How would you find what you're looking for, and how would you trawl through this enormous mountain

of data that kept increasing exponentially, but how do we ensure we can keep what people in future generally might want to see? And I'm not sure there's an easy answer to that. I mean, let me give you a very, very practical question, a very practical illustration. When I was very new in this field (going back now to about 1970), it was the practice in the National Library of Australia when it was copying nitrate film to copy onto 16 millimeter and destroy the original. Now, that appalls people today. The reduction of quality, the lack of technical oversight (nobody ever checked the results; they just left it up to the lab to figure that out), and the loss of the original, which contains so much information that you can never transfer to a copy anyway. It was a shocking thing to do from today's perspective, and yet it was the policy and the norm (a) because it saved money, (b) because of a cultural attitude. And when I questioned this with my, I said, "Why don't we copy everything on 35 millimeter?" And they said it was 16. Yes, it would cost more money, but well, you know, we're thinking about the future. He said, "Look, Ray, you've got to be philosophical about this," he used that word, "Australia made terrible films. We're keeping a record of them, but no one will ever want to study these. They just want to know that they existed." That was the cultural view, and that was the view not held within just in the National Library. It would have been like a widely held view in Australian culture. And now it's quite different today, but that was the view at the time, so we work with those sorts of limitations. Yes, of course, we did move on to 35-millimeter copying, etc., etc. You know, it all changed, but that's how it was then. So we're all blinkered by our cultural attitudes of today, and trying to see beyond them is really quite difficult. We have to try. So what is somebody in 2040 going to want to see and listen to from our era? I don't know. Will it be our creative works, our feature films, our songs, our recordings? Will it be documentaries? Certainly, it will be documentaries because it will record a world that will look very different by 2040 with global warming and the loss of species and so on. But what about the personal communications? You know, the family albums, the equivalent of the family albums, and so on? [unclear 00:57:54] see those? What about the surveillance videos? Will they be of any use to us? And so on and so on. We can look at each type of recording we're now making and we can try to predict that question. So, in the end, there's no real answer that I can see. It's a bit of a philosophical dilemma. We're governed by practicalities and by, I suppose, our imagination, and we do try to see ahead with the eyes of the future insofar as we can.

[Federica]: And what do you think about this fact that we are the first society to actively preserve the products of our own culture and the responsibility that comes with that?

[Ray]: Yeah, look, I think... Well, let's just go back into the past. There were deliberate efforts in the past. Let's go back to the Library of Alexandria almost 2,000 years ago. I'm sure there are other examples of this, but that was an institution that deliberately set out to collect the writings of its day. That meant writings of not only philosophers, but of historians, of mathematicians, of scientists and so on, as they were 2,000 years ago, and this was an institution, it was an [elite 00:59:14], it was a learning institution, and it kept writing on scrolls

because that was the medium of the day, and it was presumably with the intent that that the material will be kept, will be permanently available. I'm not sure, if you find the librarian at the Library of Alexandria at the time, whether he would be speaking with the same concepts that we're using now, but also archival records in various forms were made by various civilizations, ancient Egypt, Sumeria, and others. Again, whether they thought of how they would be kept long term and how it could be done, we don't know, but there have been attempts at various times and various cultures to collect and preserve, but what has happened over centuries is, materials been lost or destroyed, sometimes deliberately, because incoming culture didn't like what they found. The Library of Alexandria was destroyed in several phases, but an incoming culture didn't think what was there was worth keeping and got rid of it. Some was being lost by neglect. Some because the institutional structures disappeared. And that's why things come down to us now as a matter of luck or coincidence where, for example, some of the writings that would have originally been in the Library of Alexandria found their way into the Arab cultures and were transcribed and then came to what we now call the West by that means. So what we're doing now is not entirely new or unique. We're just doing it on a far larger scale and with many more institutions, and for, I guess, from a number of different reasons and for purpose of popular access rather than very limited individual access that many of these earlier institutions would have had, we still face the same question of how stable are our institutions? Will they last? Where do they get their support from? And the larger they get and the bigger the preservation problems become, the more they'll cost. Will governments or philanthropists and so on continue to fund them, and what happens if they don't? So we still have issues about how stable and long-lasting our institutional structures are, and preservation has to include the notion of a stable and continuing institutional structure. Without that, everything's open to chance, so it is a fundamental question. We're looking. . . Let me take the example of the National Film and Sound Archive again. It's been through so many changes and threats to its survival (it's a government body) that you have to be very aware of what threats might come in the future. It was once part of a library where it had a fairly low priority, but it became a separate body. Its survival was dependent on the opinions of various ministers and funding authorities. When it gained a parliamentary backing with its own legislation became more secure, but its budget is at the behest of a government that wants to spend less or less money on such institutions. It's more than once been threatened with dissolution and dispersion of its collections and so on. So institutions are fragile things, and we can't assume that the way they are now will be the way they are in 10 years or 20 years. All sorts of things may happen to the collections and to their institutional structures, and it's on the structures that we have to depend for the implementation of policies, the training of people in the disciplines that are required and so on. So yes, we are making enormous efforts now around the world to preserve in a way, to an extent we never had before, and the preservation of audiovisual documents are essentially a creation of the 20th century. They're something new. They didn't exist before, and they have all sorts of technical and other challenges related to them, but we have to be very realistic about, you know, what might come next. We can't ever take the future for granted

and the future stability of institutions for granted. They've had to be fought for in the past, so they'll have to be fought for in the future.

[Federica]: The landscape of audiovisual archives is not equal across the world. There might be countries or continents where there are larger infrastructures and other places where specific types of materials are more popular because of social, cultural trends and reasons. Can you talk a little bit about different situations that we may find across the world in the light of your extensive travels and your professional and personal networks?

[Ray]: Well, the world is a very uneven place and opportunities are very uneven, so the poorer countries have less money to spend on institutions, less money to spend on training, and possibly institutions more at risk in those countries. In affluent countries like Australia, well, you make the institutions permanent as you can, if they're government bodies, by having legislation that fixes their place in the scheme of things, but they remain vulnerable to varying degrees of government funding, and... Now, those institutions can support staff members being trained. They can participate in the international associations. The associations themselves are important avenues for encouraging the stability of institutions and the continuing of institutions and can set standards and sometimes encourage things to happen or try to prevent things happening sometimes, so those global networks are important stabilizers, in my view, provided they can set and enforce standards and encourage training and encourage the stability of institutions. They can never fundamentally guarantee any of those things. They can only try to increase the chances of it. I look at long-standing institutions like the Library of Congress in the U.S., that's probably about as stable an institution as one could expect to find. It's been there for more than 200 years, and it has a very large audiovisual archiving aspect, but it's fundamentally a library, and it's long been the case... I think, I don't know whether it still is, I can't speak for people currently there, culturally, a lesser priority than perhaps the printed word, which is traditionally the major province of libraries. It would be hard to imagine the Library of Congress getting rid of that activity, but it may be affected by budgetary changes, by political changes. For example, the election of Donald Trump as president has sent a shockwave through many of these institutions because arts funding decreases, and they feel threatened, so political changes of that kind can be... Well, it's something you can't predict, but it can have a profound effect. I would hope that we're safe in Australia, but I never assume it, and I look at other institutions, apparently long-running ones, that have been threatened by changes of government. So I'm thinking of the Moscow Film Museum, which was a long-established body but which lost out to political changes under Vladimir Putin, lost its premises. Other staff were moved in to take over. The knowledgeable staff were dismissed and so on. This can happen, again, in any society. The Cinemateca Brasileira, which I visited maybe a decade ago, very effective archive, political change in that country meant that many of the staff lost their jobs. It became the subject of, as I understand it, a political fight, and a consequence of that was, they had a nitrate fire and lost a part of their nitrate collection. These are unpre-

dictables. You can never. . . There's this phrase "future-proof", which is supposed to guarantee that nothing will happen in the future. There's no such thing as future-proofing. You can't guarantee what will not happen in the future. So to me, the only real guarantee is the vigilance of individuals who are involved in the various situations working through their institutions, through their own government systems, through professional associations, through bodies like UNESCO that encourage standards, try to enforce standards, and through, certainly important in Australia, advocacy groups who watch what is happening and, when they become unhappy, pressure governments and try to change the way things are. That's been crucial, absolutely crucial, in Australia, that volunteer advocacy groups (that means people who, as individuals, come from the audiovisual archiving field or related fields), and when they see something that's dangerous, they create publicity [unclear 01:09:33] government's attention. They lobby. They try to make things better. It's only because of such groups that we have the National Film and Sound Archive as it stands now, and in any country, such groups are absolutely essential, which means it kind of comes back to the individuals involved, our commitment, and the way we pass that commitment on in the way we train people, the way they catch, they catch the feeling, if you like, or catch the disease, perhaps, of continuing the profession and seeing, and continuing the world's memory. To me, it's the individual, in the end, it certainly has been here, and in so many other countries I have observed, it's come down to individuals acting as advocates.

[Federica]: Speaking of getting involved and raising awareness, in the opening of this episode I mentioned that on the 27th of October, we have the World Day of Audiovisual Heritage coming up. Can you talk a little bit about this initiative?

[Ray]: Yes. That initiative came from, I think, one of the professional federations. It was put to the General Conference of UNESCO. It was adopted on the 27th of October. That date commemorates the adoption of the first UNESCO instrument that relates to the preservation of film, recommendation for the preservation of moving images, the first time that UNESCO, back in 1980, recognized that film was worth preserving. That was an important step, so it commemorates that date. Now, the world day was adopted. . . I was actually contracted to do a feasibility study at that point to test the idea and how it might grow, and [unclear 01:11:25] supported by running some questionnaires, public questionnaires, and out of that, a report was compiled which suggested ways it might grow. And the day is, you know, effectively administered by the CCAAA, Co-ordinating Council of Audiovisual Archives Associations, which is where all the professional bodies come together. In practice, it's often sort of taken on by a particular archive on behalf of the CCAAA. So it has grown over the years. Typically, there's a website in which individual activities of various companies are registered, and the activities can range to public events, screenings, lectures, other events, publicity tasks, publications, [unclear 01:12:25] publication, statements that are directed at governments. It can take many forms on that day. I guess my favorite example of it comes from Thailand, where the Film Archive of

Thailand, which is a remarkable showpiece of an institution that has an extraordinary growth story...Some years ago, Bangkok, where it's located, suffered a huge flood, and the water was rising all over the place in the city, and in the location of the film archive and other institutions, the water was rising around them, and so the staff of the archive put sandbags around the film vault to stop the water getting into the vault, and they stayed there on a vigil all night until the water started to go down. But what they did (very smart) was to invite in the media, inviting the television crews to see what they were doing, and they all wore T-shirts that advertised the World Day for Audiovisual Heritage. So remarkable piece of publicity, was opportunistic, raised public awareness, advertised the day, advertised the archive, and showed how dedicated the staff were. Did all those things simultaneously. Now, we don't always have floods or opportunities like that, but you can create your own opportunities to draw attention to your work, and publicity is crucial to an archive's work. It needs to be publicly visible, publicly accessible, and because the general public doesn't really understand what goes on inside an archive, its work needs to be explained and demonstrated, and people need to be linked with what is, in many cases, popular culture, popular heritage. So I think it's good that the average person knows that their favorite TV shows are actually preserved somewhere, they've got a chance of seeing them again, and making that personal link is really important. So the day can be used in publicity in that way. But, of course, every day can be used to publicize the work of an archive. It's not something you just do occasionally. It should be continuous, and it should be relevant, and it can be done in so many ways through public events, through products, through publications, through travelling film festivals. There's any number of ways in which you can do it. There are, here in Canberra, where I am, I happen to be also the president of the Friends of the National Film and Sound Archive. That's our current advocacy group, and we do advocate to the government to support the archive in its work and that advocacy is needed, but we also run events which are aimed at the public, and these may be, at its simplest, film presentation, but it can also be a lecture or something more elaborate where we introduce people to aspects of the collection. And the archive also runs something called the Vinyl Lounge, where people are invited to come along, bring their favorite vinyl recordings, hear them played on some state-of-the-art equipment, discuss them. It gets a great following. Every month on a Friday night this happens. So there are lots of ways of reaching out to people. Yes, there are conventional film screenings and other presentations and exhibitions, all of which are open to the public, all of which encourage the public to visit, and then what's on the net. One of the features of the archive's website is clips from a huge variety of Australian films. It can be used for classroom study or for, in other ways. You can go to the website. You can look at the history of Australian feature films documentary. You'll find three-minute clips from many of the films which you then download and use, or the Friends of the NFSA have another [unclear 01:16:15] on their website. We have what is called the Argonauts page. The Argonauts was a radio club for children run by the Australian Broadcasting Commission from the 1930s to 1970s. Tremendously popular, had a huge reach across the country, and you joined up as a club. You joined up. It was the Argonauts Club, and the Argonauts were based on the Greek

myths about Jason and the Golden Fleece and so on, used that mythology, but you joined up, you sent in your literary contributions, a poem which you wrote or other contributions that can be read out on air, and the session was on radio every day for one hour, and all across Australia, children tuned into it. When they joined, they were given a ship name and number. My ship name [unclear 01:17:09] Phineas 44, which I, like thousands of Argonauts, still remember, because the club was so important to us. So on our website, the Friends website, we started an Argonauts page, and we invited Argonauts to contribute their memories of the program because almost nothing of the program survives. It went out live. No recordings were made. The theme song survived, but very little else, so the only way of documenting what that program was like and the effect it had was to capture people's memories, and so hundreds of Argonauts have since written in, added their memories to their page. Anyone can look it up, and you can see how much the series meant to them. Now, all of these are aspects of ways in which you reach out to the public in ways that are specific and important to them, and in doing so, they become part of your constituency. You know, part of the vast range of people that will support the archive when it needs support.

[Federica]: Have audiovisual archives, in your opinion, obtained the place they deserve in the cultural landscape?

[Ray]: In a word, no. [laughs] I think we're still seen as a bit lightweight, a bit more concerned with entertainment than with high culture. We relate to the razzle-dazzle of the film industry and the TV stars and all the rest of it. So it's that much harder, I think, to gain that kind of high-level acceptance and sponsor support compared to art galleries, museums, institutions. Because these are long-standing and well-accepted concepts, they relate more readily to people who are willing to give money. I think we still have a long way to go to reach that point. So we're still, I think, fighting for our place in the sun, and maybe we'll have to do so for a long time yet. In my view, of course, it's the audiovisual media that matter most today, because it documents who we are, it documents reality and it particularly relates to everybody very easily. But what is popular isn't necessarily what attracts the biggest budgets or the greatest prestige, so there. . . I think we have grown out of the, well, the show business, the business of putting on a show, the business of entertainment, and we'll always be associated with it. Nothing wrong with that. That's part of what we are, but we still have to work to attain that place, and, of course, that applies to every aspect of what we are, including our training courses, our visibility through the media, our advocacy groups, and so on. We have to explain to people what we are, and when we say, "No, we're not a library. We're not an archive in the traditional sense. We're not a museum. We're an amalgam of all three," we have to explain to people what that is that they need to know. So we have to, in a sense, justify ourselves from first principles. The older established concepts don't have to do that any longer.

[Federica]: Ray, let me express once more what an honor it's been to speak to you after so

many years of not just knowing your work, but valuing it so much. Thank you for your time, thank you for sharing your experience, and thank you for being on Technoculture.

[Ray]: Okay, Federica, well, thank you.

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