

## Chapter 3

# History, Memory, and Power

Moving Image Archives:  
Curation Management and  
Programming

## Archival silences

- Michel-Rolph Trouillot  
*Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995)
- Michelle Caswell  
*Archiving the Unspeakable : Silence, Memory, and the Photographic Record in Cambodia* (2014)

Silences are encoded  
in [the production of  
historical knowledge] at  
four key moments:

The moment of record creation

(the making of *sources*)

The moment of record assembly

(the making of *archives*)

The moment of record retrieval

(the making of *narratives*)

The moment of retrospective significance

(the making of *history*)

The moment of record creation  
(the making of *sources*)

Not all events are  
recorded

The moment of record assembly  
(the making of *archives*)

Not all records are  
archived

The moment of record retrieval  
(the making of *narratives*)

Not all archives are  
used to tell stories

The moment of retrospective significance  
(the making of *history*)

Not all stories are  
used to make history

What **fact** is represented by this historical **record**?



"Dog in Top Hat," by Bonque and Kindermann photography, ca. 1894

**Silences and subjective values/judgements** are encoded in [the production of historical knowledge] at four key moments:

The moment of record creation  
(the making of *sources*)

The moment of record assembly  
(the making of *archives*)

The moment of record retrieval  
(the making of *narratives*)

The moment of retrospective significance  
(the making of *history*)



The moment of record creation  
(the making of *sources*)

No record contains all  
information about a  
person/group/event/topic

The moment of record assembly  
(the making of *archives*)

No archive contains all  
records about a  
person/group/event/topic

The moment of record retrieval  
(the making of *narratives*)

No story contains all  
evidence about a  
person/group/event/topic

The moment of retrospective significance  
(the making of *history*)

No history contains all  
stories from all  
perspectives

## Archival silences

- What **causes** these moments of silence to occur?
- What **effects** do silences or historic gaps have on our archives' users and potential users, on our broader communities, and on the people represented or not represented in these records?
- What, if anything, can we do as archivists to mitigate the gaps and silences that may have lasting, harmful effects?



The moment of record creation

(the making of *sources*)

Boleslaw Matuszewski, "A New Source of History" (Paris, 1898)

## The moment of record creation

(the making *of sources*)

Boleslaw Matuszewski, "A New Source of History" (Paris, 1898)

“**Animated photography** will ... become an agreeable **method for studying the past**; or rather, since it will give a **direct view of the past**, it will eliminate, at least on certain points of some importance, the necessity of investigation and study.”

## The moment of record creation

(the making *of sources*)

Boleslaw Matuszewski, "A New Source of History" (Paris, 1898)

**"Thus the cinematographic print**, in which a thousand negatives make up a scene, and which, unrolled between a light source and a white sheet, makes the dead and gone get up and walk, this simple ribbon of imprinted celluloid **constitutes not only a historic document, but a piece of history**, a history that has not vanished and needs no genie to resuscitate it."

## The moment of record creation

(the making *of sources*)

Boleslaw Matuszewski, "A New Source of History" (Paris, 1898)

"Perhaps the cinematograph does not give history in its entirety, but at least what it does deliver is **incontestable and of absolute truth**... It is ocular evidence that is truthful and infallible *par excellence*"

# The moment of record creation

(the making of *sources*)

Silences and subjectivity in a filmic record:

- Context



"Dog in Top Hat," by Bonque and Kindermann photography, ca. 1894

## The moment of record creation

(the making *of sources*)

Silences and subjectivity in a filmic record:

- Context
- Manipulated images



# The moment of record creation

(the making *of sources*)

Silences and subjectivity in a filmic record:

- Context
- Manipulated images
- Framing/perspective



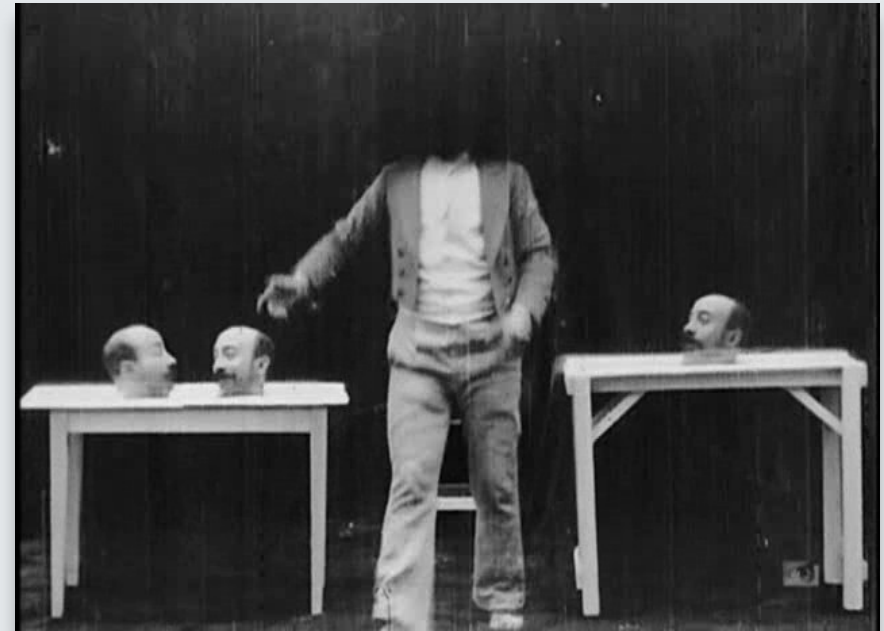
Frame from "Safety Last!," produced by Hal Roach Studios, 1923

# The moment of record creation

(the making of *sources*)

Silences and subjectivity in a filmic record:

- Context
- Manipulated images
- Framing/perspective
- Editing



Frame from "Un homme de têtes," produced by Star Films, 1898

# The moment of record creation

(the making *of sources*)

Silences and subjectivity in a filmic record:

- Context
- Manipulated images
- Framing/perspective
- Editing
- Interpretation

The moment of record assembly

(the making of *archives*)

Silences and subjectivity in archival collecting (for example):

## The moment of record assembly

(the making of *archives*)

Silences and subjectivity in archival collecting (for example):

- Institutional priorities

## The moment of record assembly

(the making of *archives*)

Silences and subjectivity in archival collecting (for example):

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- Physical condition



## The moment of record assembly

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Silences and subjectivity in archival collecting (for example):

- Institutional priorities
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- Limited resources

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Silences and subjectivity in archival collecting (for example):

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- Physical condition
- Limited resources
- Format/technology

## The moment of record assembly

(the making of *archives*)

Silences and subjectivity in archival collecting (for example):

- Institutional priorities
- Physical condition
- Limited resources
- Format/technology
- Donor relationships

The moment of record retrieval

(the making of *narratives*)

## The moment of record retrieval

(the making of *narratives*)

Barriers to accessing archival materials:

- Institutional
- Material
- Financial
- Psychological
- Knowledge

## The moment of record retrieval

(the making of *narratives*)

Record retrieval includes:

- Interpretation of records as evidence
- Synthesis of evidence into historical arguments/stories
- Dissemination of arguments/stories to an audience.



Case study:  
Conducting archival research

**Ben Singer**  
**“Manhattan Nickelodeons:  
New Data on Audiences and Exhibitors,”**  
**Cinema Journal 34.3 (1995)**



Comet Theatre, 100 3rd Avenue, New York City (ca. 1915)

What was the make-up of the nickelodeon's audience  
in terms of class and ethnic composition?

Research question

What **evidence or information** might answer my research question?

What **documents or materials** might have this evidence or information?

What **archival collections** might contain these documents or materials?

What was the make-up of the nickelodeon's audience in terms of class and ethnic composition?

What **evidence or information** might answer my research question?

Data on nickelodeon theater locations

What **documents or materials** might have this evidence or information?

What **archival collections** might contain these documents or materials?

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Data on nickelodeon theater locations

What **documents or materials** might have this evidence or information?

NYC business directories  
Film industry trade papers

What **archival collections** might contain these documents or materials?

New York Public Library

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Data on nickelodeon theater locations

NYC business directories  
Film industry trade papers

New York Public Library

NYC building permit ledgers

NYC Municipal Archives



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# Impacts of archival silences

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- Justice and accountability

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- Justice and accountability
- Representation

Symbolic Annihilation (George Gerbner, 1976) -

“Poor media treatment can contribute to social disempowerment, as symbolic absence in media can erase groups and individuals from public consciousness.

Robin R. Coleman and Emily A. Chivers Yocham,  
"The Symbolic Annihilation of Race: A Review of the Blackness Literature," (2008)

# Community archives

**Community Archives** - collections of material gathered primarily by members of a given community and over whose use community members exercise some level of control

Flinn, et. al. "Whose memories, whose archives?" Archival Science (2009)

**Community archives** are part of larger social and political movements whereby groups who have been ignored, misrepresented, or marginalized by mainstream archival repositories launch their own archival projects as a means of self-representation, identity construction, and empowerment.

Caswell, et.al. "To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing: Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives," *American Archivist* (2016)



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Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario H. Ramirez,  
“To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing:  
Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives,”  
American Archivist 79.1 (Summer 2016)

- Addressing historic gaps

- Addressing historic gaps
- Personal connections

“The value of the archive is profound. And I think that may be true for a lot of people who suddenly are able to discover themselves, existing, being documented.”

Cifor, et. al., ibid

- Addressing historic gaps
- Personal connections
- Diverse representation

“It represents a wide range of religious backgrounds, linguistic backgrounds, regions of origin, times of migration, reasons for migration.”

Cifor, et. al., ibid

- Addressing historic gaps
- Personal connections
- Diverse representation
- Community-building



**Representational belonging** - the ways in which community archives enable those who have been left out of mainstream repositories to have the power and authority to establish and enact their presence in archives in complex, meaningful, and substantive ways

Cifor, et. al., ibid

# Community archives

# Protocols for Native American Archival Materials

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- consultation with and concurrence of tribal communities in decisions and policies

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- consultation with and concurrence of tribal communities in decisions and policies
- understanding Native American values and perspectives

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- consultation with and concurrence of tribal communities in decisions and policies
- understanding Native American values and perspectives
- rethinking public accessibility and use

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- culturally responsive context



## Protocols for Native American Archival Materials

- consultation with and concurrence of tribal communities in decisions and policies
- understanding Native American values and perspectives
- rethinking public accessibility and use
- special treatment for culturally sensitive materials
- culturally responsive context
- copying and sharing of certain materials

**post-custodialism** - a practice in which creators maintain control of their archival records while archivists provide management support

Dictionary of Archives Terminology (Society of American Archivists)

## Protocols for Native American Archival Materials

- consultation with and concurrence of tribal communities in decisions and policies
- understanding Native American values and perspectives
- rethinking public accessibility and use
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- copying and sharing of certain materials

## Bibliography and suggested resources

- Caswell, Michelle, *Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory, and the Photographic Record in Cambodia* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2014)
- Caswell, Michelle, et. al., "To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing: Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives," *American Archivist* 79.1 (June 2016): 56-81
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- Flinn, Andrew, et. al., "Whose memories, whose archives? Independent community archives, autonomy, and the mainstream," *Archival Science* 9.1 (June 2009): 71-86
- Singer, Ben, "Manhattan Nickelodeons: New Data on Audiences and Exhibitors," *Cinema Journal* 34.3 (Spring 1995): pp. 5-35.

## Image credits

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