

The Selection of Television Productions for Archival Preservation

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A common view of our television age is that of the omnipresent television screen confronting the viewer with a steady stream of images. Society, as represented by such voices as a royal commission studying the effects of televised violence or by a columnist in a popular magazine, treats the output of television as a cumulative force acting upon its viewers. The individual broadcasts that make up the television schedule receive far less attention from the shapers of public opinion. Those broadcasts are shown once or twice and then fade to become part of the ill-defined idea of television in the abstract.¹ Archivists collecting recordings of television productions have to separate the seemingly unmanageable volume of past and present television into its unique elements and to distance themselves from the widely held view that each production "is a staple commodity, apparently worthless the moment its transmission is over, like a tube of toothpaste [that has] been squeezed out."²

A number of reports on Canadian culture, notably the 1982 Report of the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee, and the National Film and Video Policy which was announced by the federal Department of Communications in May 1982, have recognized the value of Canada's television heritage and the need to preserve it.

The writing of history using broadcast documents is not well developed, partly because of the reluctance of academics to use moving-image recordings rather than printed materials and partly because collections of television recordings are not well known and not easily accessible.

With the growing interest in broadcast studies and popular culture, however, researchers are turning their attention increasingly to television recordings as primary sources. Academics such as Mary Jane Miller, who is doing pioneer work on Canadian

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- 1 This article uses the terms "programme" and "series" as they are commonly used by broadcasters. "Programme" and "broadcast" are used interchangeably here to refer to television productions of generally one-half to one hour in length, that are complete in themselves or are part of a continuing series of broadcasts. Programme "types" such as talk shows, variety shows, news broadcasts, and current affairs shows have been commonly recognized categories since television began. The discussion of programme types in this paper refers to these broad definitions which are shared by broadcasters and academics.
 - 2 Paul Madden, "Preserving and Using the Output of Television," *Television: The Journal of the Royal Television Society* 28 (January-February 1980), p. 27.

television drama, and Paul Rutherford, who is working on an ambitious study of Canadian prime-time television, are taking a refreshing approach in their studies of Canadian broadcasting by actively seeking out film and videotape of television productions and studying them in conjunction with printed documents.³

It is no longer necessary for television archives to make the case that television recordings as archival documents meet a serious research need. What archivists now need to know is what types of television productions will researchers need and how many examples of any given type of production will provide an adequate data base. A glance at the many communications, monographs, and periodicals being published in Great Britain and the United States indicates that researchers are applying a wide range of approaches including content analysis, semiotics, and analysis of television programmes as literary works, to the total output of television. No type of production, from news broadcasts, documentaries, and made-for-television dramas to game shows, situation comedies, soap operas, animated children's programmes, and commercials is considered too insignificant for study. Researchers are challenging the assumption that it is sufficient to save only individual programmes. Theorists such as Raymond Williams discuss the meaning of television in terms of the flow of the daily broadcast schedule. Commercials and other interruptions of a programme are also important to understanding how television conveys meaning.⁴ Interest in prime-time television and the television schedule as a whole creates a need for archival recordings of blocks of television programming larger than individual programmes.

As much as researchers do not like to hear it, selection for archival preservation is necessary. Archives, with their limited resources, simply cannot retain the total output of television. It is unrealistic to expect that the adoption of selection criteria, no matter how carefully developed, will release archives from the necessity of making continual selection decisions. Criteria based on clear collecting policies are nonetheless useful in helping to compare the archival value of one television production with another and, to a lesser extent, to reject productions whose preservation is not essential to present and future research.

The literature provides the material for a set of criteria for the archival preservation of Canadian television programming. The statement of acquisition policy which provides the framework for this model is that adopted by the National Film, Television and Sound Archives (NFTSA) of the Public Archives of Canada. The scope of this policy is national in that television programmes produced for nation-wide broadcast by the English- and French-language service of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), and the output of Canada's major private networks, the CTV Television Network and Télé-diffuseurs associés (TVA), provide the acquisition focus of the NFTSA.⁵

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Television Archive, the International Federation of Television Archives (FIAT) and the CBC have published detailed criteria

3 Paul Rutherford described his research on Canadian prime-time television in *Archivaria* 20 (Summer 1985), pp. 79-93. Mary Jane Miller has published an overview of Canadian television drama in Anton Wagner, ed., *Contemporary Canadian Theatre: New World Visions* (Toronto, 1985), pp. 186-96.

4 Raymond Williams, *Television, Technology and Cultural Form* (New York, 1975).

5 The predominance of CBC television programmes used as examples in this article reflects the state of NFTSA's acquisition programme to this date. The NFTSA receives regular deposits of recordings from the CBC, but private broadcasters have deposited only small numbers of recordings despite the efforts of the NFTSA to acquire the many important productions of CTV, TVA and other broadcasters.

describing the qualities and quantities of television programmes warranting long-term preservation.⁶ These guidelines meet the day-to-day needs of television production organizations which maintain in-house archives to serve the programming requirements of the organizations. Television news producers and others in the broadcasting industry are increasingly recognizing the value of television programmes as production resources for rebroadcast in whole or in part, for research in the preparation of new programmes, and for sale to other television organizations. This article makes a distinction between archives operated by a television network and archives such as the NFTSA which are not run by broadcasting organizations. The model selection criteria are therefore evaluated on the basis of how well they will help archivists select television productions to serve the needs of historians, sociologists, and other researchers, as well as the production needs of broadcasters.

Programme content is emphasized here as the deciding factor in the selection of television productions for preservation but it is not the only factor that should be considered. Less obvious are the ensuing costs of a selection decision — the costs of the labour of archivists, cataloguers, technicians, and reference staff; the costs of blank tape, film stock, film laboratory work, and equipment necessary to conserve recordings; and the cost of long-term vault storage space. These factors should be weighed at least generally in every selection decision in relation to the known or potential research value of the document.

The process of selection requires decisions on the quality of the document. This article discusses quality in terms of programme content, rather than the physical characteristics of the film or videotape, although physical condition is certainly an important factor in selecting a recording for preservation. Most television archives, including the NFTSA, measure quality in terms of historical, cultural, aesthetic, and sociological value. Programmes may be identified as historically valuable if they contain information on one or more of the following subjects: the development and history of television; people in the fields of sport, entertainment, politics, or science; and events of historical importance in all fields, including television coverage of events as they occur or reconstructions of past events.

This categorization provides a basis for the argument that all television recordings have historical value and therefore warrant preservation:

Film and television provide photographic and aural records of what places/people looked and sounded like; records which are always evocative and valuable but which in a very large proportion of cases are strictly 'secondary' in evidentiary terms — and entirely irrespective of the artistic quality, if any, which they possess.⁷

6 The selection criteria used for the model proposed here are taken from CBC documents published in John Twomey, *Canadian Broadcasting History Resources in English: Critical Mass or Mess?* (Toronto, 1978), and in various articles about the BBC Television Archive. The selection criteria used by the BBC and recommended by FIAT are identical. Collection policies used by the National Library of Australia, the Institut national de l'audiovisuel (INA) in France and various American institutions were also examined, but for the most part they concentrated on the physical characteristics of recordings or consisted only of very general statements of policy.

7 Nicholas Pronay, "Archive Film/Television Preservation: The Historian's Perspective," *The Audiovisual Librarian* 5 (Winter 1979), p. 24.

Similarly, if the value of television is interpreted broadly, the entire output of a television organization documents its history.

Another difficulty created by a too-generous definition of historical value is that some very specific guidelines, which meet the requirements of television broadcasters for visual material used as illustration, recommend the preservation of moving images of objects or places which may be adequately documented in textual records, photographs, or perhaps documentary film in cinematic film archives. The detailed selection criteria adopted by the BBC Television Archive and recommended by FIAT illustrate the different needs served by archives within television production organizations and archives such as the NFTSA. The BBC and FIAT suggest that television recordings which show objects such as buildings, machinery and equipment, and works of art, as well as those depicting geographic locales, particularly recordings showing development over time, should be preserved. In a broad sense, this suggestion has merit as only moving images will vividly illustrate for future researchers how a particular twentieth-century object worked or how a locale looked. The desire to retain such material also reflects television's continual need for visual material to illustrate such programmes as news broadcasts. It makes financial sense for an archives operated by a television network to preserve and make accessible the many thousands of metres of film and videotape its organization produces each year. Graham Seaton, former head of the CTV Film Library, has estimated that in 1976-77 the library saved the network approximately \$35,000 in royalty payments alone by channeling 900 metres of stock film back into use.⁸

Television production crews shoot considerably more film and videotape than are actually required for broadcast. By describing this wealth of moving images in sufficient detail to permit television producers working under deadlines to select visual material rapidly, a television film archives saves the organization from having to purchase film or videotape from other networks or from having to shoot new material when existing footage serves the purpose. Such measurable financial savings can help the archives of a broadcasting organization justify both its existence and the time spent preparing detailed shot-by-shot descriptions of even short pieces of film. Some television archives such as the NFTSA or the National Film Archives of Australia, which serve a great variety of researchers with more generalized needs, have neither the financial nor the human resources to work with moving image documents in such minute detail. They concentrate on the acquisition of complete film and television productions rather than filmed or videotaped inserts and stockshots.

Selection criteria are most useful when they help archivists evaluate television production in terms of specific programmes, series or programme types. A model set of selection guidelines should be augmented by examples of television programmes or types that have a particular research use or value.

Moving images documenting television's development and history may take the form of recordings of the opening of a new television station; programmes compiled from earlier recordings to mark the anniversary of a series; taped interviews with on-air personnel, producers, and technicians who have worked in television; programmes transmitted by satellite for the first time; and other milestones.

8 Graham Seaton, "The Son of Celluloid at CTV," *ASCRT Bulletin* (January 1979), p. 22.

The recording of significant events as they happen also enriches television's value as a source of archival documentation. News and current affairs programming have the highest potential significance of any type of television production. Television news broadcasts contain reports on "hard" news such as Canadian politics and economic conditions. They also feature stories on prominent personalities, cultural events, and lifestyles. In effect, television news presents a microcosm of Canadian life.

Assessing the extent to which television images accurately record actual events presents problems because television is an information medium subject to the constraints of production deadlines and a visual medium subject to certain conventions it shares with the cinema. Most television newscasters allot no more than two minutes for each news item, making it difficult to report complex issues and events as thoroughly as does the print medium. In addition, viewers accustomed to the lively images of the cinema expect to see dramatic visual coverage of news events. Television journalism therefore tends to highlight stories which are told best with pictures such as natural disasters or bloody military engagements.

An understanding of how television news programmes are assembled can shed some light on the extent to which the visuals which accompany the nightly news are of the actual events in the news. Television production organizations consider it legitimate to substitute film or videotape footage of one event for a similar event. Martin Bishop of the international news film agency, United Press International Television News has noted, for example, that "on the day of [a] recent Peruvian earthquake, television news programs were able to illustrate the disaster by comparing it to the previous earthquake in Peru of which they had good pictures in their libraries."⁹

If the images used in television news sometimes have doubtful value as actuality, they do document the style and practice of television journalism. As with other forms of archival documentation, the integrity of a television recording enhances its value to the researcher. Television news broadcasts are not always preserved in the complete form that the viewers have seen, because their chief value to a television organization can be the re-use of various film or videotape elements rather than entire stories or the entire broadcast. Complete broadcasts are useful to the broadcasting historian for what they indicate about such things as the news values reflected by the story order of a newscast. The CBC did not maintain a comprehensive collection of nightly news broadcasts until 1979. TVA began keeping recordings of its newscasts on a regular basis in the 1980s and CTV does not even now save tapes of its news broadcasts. Fewer than a dozen recordings of the CBC National News survive for the 1960s and none exist for the 1950s. Only a small number of French-language *Radio-Canada* newscasts from the 1950s and 1960s have survived. The CBC has saved a massive collection of brief film clips used in its English-language national news broadcasts starting in the late 1950s which the NFTSA is copying onto videotape. The NFTSA has also been taping the CBC news broadcast "The National" and its French-language equivalent "Le Téléjournal" directly from a broadcast satellite feed since 1984.

Television broadcasts also have archival value when they depict historical events and present new interpretations of the past. The CBC has produced many acclaimed television histories over the years, including a biography of Lester B. Pearson, "First Person

9 Martin Bishop, "Television News and Library Film," *Journal of the Society of Film and Television Arts* 41 (Autumn 1970), p. 7.

Singular,” and of John George Diefenbaker, “One Canadian,” which draw heavily upon the personal recollections of their subjects in filmed interviews. As with written histories, the extent to which such programmes are based on solid research principles and documented evidence determines their value to the historian.

When historical content is a factor in selecting television productions for preservation, the archivist must also decide if historically inaccurate programme types, such as historical dramas and documentary dramas, have a place in a collection. Television producers, historians, journalists, critics, and educators have long debated the extent to which television shows blending events from history with fictional characters and situations serve history. Series such as the CBC’s “Some Honourable Gentlemen,” about rogues in Canadian history, CTV’s “The Campbells,” about the adventures of a Scottish immigrant family in Canada, and the independent production “Heritage Theatre,” highlighting little-known people and events from Canada’s past, demonstrate that dramatizing history, or at least emphasizing the drama in our history, is an effective way of making the past entertaining.

In the UNESCO publication *The Archival Appraisal of Moving Images: A RAMP Study With Guidelines*, Sam Kula recommends that archivists acquiring television programmes such as documentary dramas should make an assessment of the degree to which a programme is accurate. Supporting documentation such as newspaper reviews or production files should be used by both archivists and researchers in order to assess a moving image document both for the basic information it contains and for the significance it may acquire as a result of public reaction to it.¹⁰ The 1977 CBC documentary drama “The Tar Sands,” for example, combined documentary journalism style, fact, and creative writing. Actors portrayed real people, notably the then Premier of Alberta, Peter Lougheed, and an official of the Syncrude tar sands project in Alberta. Although “The Tar Sands” is based on public knowledge of the general course of the negotiations, the writers speculated on what Premier Lougheed had discussed with Syncrude officials behind closed doors, prompting the real-life premier to charge that the programme was defamatory. Whatever value “The Tar Sands” may have as a commentary on an event in Canadian history or as an example of television production style is enhanced by the fact that the CBC postponed its broadcast for more than a year over concern that it could be damaging to the real people it portrayed.¹¹

The need to attract a wide audience and the effectiveness of television as a dramatic medium blur the line between historical and artistic value. Archives should not be too stringent in assessing the worth of a programme on the basis of accuracy alone, because even productions that take liberties with history have value in demonstrating how television popularizes history for a general audience.

In using categories such as historical or artistic value to assess the quality of television programmes, it is important to avoid rigid categorization. Categories only serve as selection tools to help judge the probable intent of programme producers, subject matter, and the relative value of one production as compared to another.

The artistic significance of a television programme lies both in its merit as an example of the art of television production and in its subject matter. An element common to the

10 Sam Kula, *The Archival Appraisal of Moving Images: A RAMP Study With Guidelines* (Paris, 1983).

11 Gordon Donaldson, “What Can You Believe?” *TV Guide* (14-20 January, 1978), pp. 2-6.

selection criteria used by the CBC, FIAT, and the BBC is the emphasis placed on television programmes which are seen as excellent examples of production. The CBC, for example, considers programmes which demonstrate excellence in camera work, on-stage performance, direction, and set design as having long-term artistic value. To a large extent, the evaluation of what constitutes artistic merit is left to the judges in various awards-granting competitions that broadcasters enter.

Programmes which have for their subjects the performing arts also fall within this category. CBC Television has earned respect as a patron and promoter of the performing arts in Canada for its many critically acclaimed arts series and specials over the years. Drama series such as "Q for Quest," "General Motors Theatre," and "Front Row Centre" have introduced Canadian television audiences to a wide variety of Canadian and non-Canadian drama, including numerous plays written expressly for television. So dominant has been the CBC's role in bringing drama to Canadians that it has been called "the national theatre of the late fifties and sixties."¹² In recent years, the Global Television Network has shown a number of half-hour dramas in its series "Bell Canada Playhouse."

Television production techniques and the circumstances in which the audience receives the television message shape the style of performance and can effect changes in artistic techniques:

[The] intimacy of television, the conditions under which it is viewed, and the relentless probing of the camera's eye, as distinguished from the illusion that can be practiced with the film camera, have encouraged the television artist to create in new ways. Television demands of the performer unusually taxing simplicity and economy of projection. The writing must be sparer and more incisive, the direction more to the point, and the design cleaner and leaner, all because of the confined and thus more concentrated image.¹³

It is obvious that musical performances are best preserved by means of sound recordings rather than on film or videotape, if a faithful reproduction of the sound of music itself is of primary importance. Television productions of musical performances, though, do have a value in showing an orchestra conductor at work, for example, or the intense concentration of a performer like Glenn Gould playing the piano. Television provides a visual record of dance performances and performers. With the growing interest in Canada's early dance history, choreographers are reconstructing dances that have been forgotten and recording them on videotape. Television programmes about dance are an important part of this type of research.¹⁴ Artistic or cultural value also can be found in television programmes on visual arts such as film, painting, or sculpture. Television shares with film the ability to illustrate, for example, the technique and manner of a painter at work on a painting.

12 Mary Jane Miller, "CBC Television Drama: The Future and the Past," *ASCRT Bulletin* (December 1983), p. 23.

13 Lillian Brown, "The National Library of Television," *The American Archivist* 30 (July 1967), p. 503.

14 Note, for example, the project entitled "Encore! Encore!," which aims to reconstruct Canadian ballets of the past and create a collection of films, photographs, dance programmes, newspaper clippings, and other material to document the history of dance in Canada. The project is funded by the federal and Ontario governments and is administered by former National Ballet of Canada dancers Lawrence and Miriam Adams.

The evaluation of television recordings, particularly on the basis of artistic value, places the task of the archivist in close relation to that of the critic. Both critics and archivists who evaluate television must have an appreciation and knowledge of the performing and visual arts. Published reviews of television programmes can be of assistance in assessing artistic value, but the widely varying reviews different critics often give of the same performance proves that artistic criticism is not free from subjectivity. Archivists must avoid becoming so attuned to the critic's approach to programmes as individual creative forms that they lose the sense of them as parts of a larger collection of moving image documents grouped by a common subject or a common long-term research value.

The use of artistic value as a means of judging the quality of television programmes presents the archivist with the same difficulty encountered in evaluating historically accurate versus historically inaccurate productions:

Existing network criteria for keeping their own material lean heavily toward their most cultured and intellectual efforts, presenting an irony of preservation for future historians attempting to reconstruct our social history, especially in view of the overwhelming amount of mediocrity broadcast to our society.¹⁵

By selecting award-winning television programmes, the archivist runs the risk of skewing the televised record, so that an overall view of artistic productions of varying quality is lost to researchers. The categories of historical and artistic value can imply that there is only one history and that is accurate history, and that there is only one valid expression of art and that is critically acclaimed art.

The third category used to evaluate programme quality is sociological value. This broad, catch-all category achieves a balance between the high points of the television schedule and more mundane fare. The sociological category takes in television productions which do not have content or value that is specifically historical or artistic, but which have value in illustrating the workings of Canadian society. Programmes in this category, such as sports, children's programmes, talk shows, game shows, variety entertainment, and soap operas are generally assigned a low priority for archival preservation because they tend to have repetitive formats and little informational value when compared to news programming or a play presented at the Stratford Festival.

If the growing interest in social history is any indication, future historians may be working as much with recordings in this category as with artistic or historical moving images. How various societies over time have led their day-to-day existence has been the aspect of the past most poorly documented and most neglected by historical writing. The content of children's programmes, talk shows, game shows, variety entertainment programmes, commercials, and serial dramas such as soap operas illustrates their potential value to social historians. A sampling of children's television over time can document changes in how the medium is used to teach children, the range and depth of the information being conveyed, and how children are entertained. Situation comedies and soap operas serve as commentaries on lifestyles, social problems, the role of women, and even speech patterns or clothing.

15 K.M. Larose, "Preserving the Past on Film: Problems for the Archivist," *Archivaria* 6 (Summer 1978), p. 145.

The most important source by far of television broadcast recordings is the production organizations themselves. Some selection will have already taken place, as not all television production was recorded in the early years. Many productions in television's early years were either broadcast live or combined live action with filmed inserts. When programmes were recorded on film or videotape, they may simply have been destroyed through poor storage or other forms of neglect. Videotaped programmes have been lost by erasing and reusing the tapes. Despite this attrition, the vast amount of television production that has been recorded makes it impossible for archives to save everything. Qualitative evaluation of television programmes does not help the archivist handle this problem of selection.

There are no means of rapid and easy access to the many images found in television recordings, although optical disc technologies and automated cataloguing systems hold some promise. Users need playback equipment to view tapes, cataloguing is time-consuming, and preservation costly. In addition, uncontrolled acquisition could result in a collection of video recordings so large and unmanageable that researchers would be overwhelmed. Qualitative evaluation of television film and videotape recordings must be accompanied by quantitative evaluation if selection is to assist archivists in making difficult decisions about what to acquire.

When archives decide that acquisitions should be comprehensive but not exhaustive, the question the archivist must then ask is how many programmes of any given type a researcher needs. In his manual *Archives and Manuscripts: Appraisal and Accessioning*, Maynard J. Brichford gives the optimum size of a manuscript collection:

An archival agency should have a definite policy for the collection of the records of greatest research significance, covering the broadest range of activities for the longest time with the smallest volume of the most easily understandable records with due regard for administrative activity, supplementary material and valid sampling techniques.¹⁶

The need for sampling television recordings is most evident in the case of programming in the sociological category, which is likely to include the programme type, along with news broadcasts, that researchers will wish to study using statistical analysis. With the growing use of computers able to make sense of large amounts of data, researchers in many fields of study are using statistics. In Canada, for example, researchers have used content analysis to study the differences between French- and English-language television news programmes.¹⁷

In a 1979 article in *The Audiovisual Librarian*, Nicholas Pronay wrote that the historian "ideally needs the whole of what the public was given through the media to apply statistical analysis methods."¹⁸ As archives cannot preserve every television broadcast, a random sampling is useful to preserve at least some examples of a series. One of the few examples of detailed sampling formulas in the literature is that used by the CBC. The

16 Maynard J. Brichford, *Archives and Manuscripts: Appraisal and Accessioning* (Chicago, 1977), p. 7.

17 See for example the studies by Arthur Siegel, *A Content Analysis. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation: Similarities and Differences of French and English News. Background Research Paper*. Committee of Inquiry into the National Broadcasting Service. (Ottawa, 1977) and Monique Mousseau, "Analyse des nouvelles télévisées," *Documents de la Commission royale sur le bilinguisme et le biculturalisme* (Ottawa, 1970).

18 Pronay, "Archive Film/Television Preservation," p. 24.

network aims to preserve a random sample of all of its output. The number of programmes selected for preservation each year is in proportion to the total number of broadcasts in a series for that year. According to the formula, the CBC saves six broadcasts of television series telecast daily. Four programmes are kept from weekly series when the series is aired fifty-two times a year. From series lasting thirty-nine weeks, three programmes are saved and two programmes are preserved from twenty-six weeks. When programmes are from a thirteen-week series or appear less frequently, one program per series is preserved by the CBC. In practice, the CBC does preserve more programmes than this formula suggests. News programming in particular is now kept by the CBC almost in its entirety, largely because of its continuing value in the production of newscasts. Under the cooperative agreement between the CBC and the Public Archives of Canada, programmes not selected by the CBC for preservation may be offered to the Archives for preservation there.

The formula thus allows for comprehensive preservation of mini-series made up of several programmes and for the retention of unique programmes such as specials. This sampling method provides a minimum degree of selection to preserve samples of overall production. It is most useful in selecting repetitive series that are primarily of sociological significance, making a more detailed examination necessary for programming such as artistic or historical programs, which may have unique qualities. For programmes considered to have historical or artistic value, a more subjective approach is used by the CBC. The network preserves programming which documents its own history by selecting the first and last programme of each series as well as programmes marking the anniversaries of series. It keeps unique programmes such as specials, broadcasts such as "The Tar Sands" that spark controversy or could be involved in legal proceedings, and programmes that are interrupted by important news bulletins. To offset the imbalance that might be created by saving only award-winning programmes, the network also retains examples of programmes containing errors. These are used in staff training or troubleshooting.

The problem of limiting the amount of television programming for archival preservation makes the search for a rational, statistically significant sampling system attractive. The importance of the CBC formula is that it samples known quantities of programming in proportion to the total number of programmes in a series, thus preserving in a general sense the context of an individual programme as part of a larger group of recorded documents. The many variables not taken into account by such detailed models indicate that there is still a role for the archivist in using more subjective but still valid qualitative methods of selecting television programmes for preservation.

With the development of inexpensive videotape recorders in the 1970s and their entry into the home entertainment market, it became possible for archives to become active collectors of television programmes by taping them directly from a television receiver. Such off-air taping can be used to build a collection of complete programming days, for example, or of programmes that include commercial breaks. Because of the way a television network distributes and broadcasts its productions, broadcasters have little reason to record complete programming days on a regular basis and their master recordings of individual productions do not include commercials. Off-air taping is more strictly a matter of acquisition strategy than it is of selection, but it does enable archives to preserve a variety of contemporary programming, thus providing a better reflection of the complete television schedule than do individual programmes. Detracting from the advantages of off-air taping is the poor image quality due to using non-professional video formats such

as the half-inch and three-quarter-inch tape sizes and the question of copyright of the recorded material.

Since March 1979, the NFTSA has been taping television programming available via an Ottawa cablevision service using a standard half-inch videocassette recorder. The NFTSA adds approximately 400 hours of such off-air recordings to its collection each month. Notwithstanding the poor technical quality of the tapes, broadcasters have used recordings from the collection from time to time, when the NFTSA's off-air copies proved to be the only copies of a given programme in existence. Of much higher technical quality are the sixty hours per week of CBC French and English network programming that the NFTSA records directly from a broadcast satellite feed, in cooperation with the CBC. The NFTSA is working to tape private broadcasting network programming via satellite as well.

Some examples of selection decisions illustrate the extent to which various criteria developed in the model set of selection principles can be applied. In a typical arrangement, CBC made available to the NFTSA 148 programmes from the "Bob McLean Show" and 246 programmes from the "Take Thirty" show. Under a CBC-NFTSA agreement, the CBC loans the NFTSA its two-inch broadcast quality videotapes. The NFTSA selects programmes from the network tapes and copies them onto NFTSA broadcast-quality videotape for preservation. The original CBC videotapes are then returned and are usually erased and reused.

Both series offered by the CBC were, in essence, daily talk shows. As such, they share a feature common to television talk shows: a parade of three or four guests from such areas as sport, entertainment, medicine, journalism, and politics, as well as an array of experts on such matters as fashion or consumer issues. Talk shows generally focus on celebrities and light entertainment. A staple of these programmes is a visit by an author publicizing his or her latest book or an actor appearing in a touring theatre production.

Although this article concerns the selection of videotape and film recordings of television productions, records in other media such as production files, scripts, press releases, and photographs should ideally be collected in conjunction with the moving image recordings they document. In the case of the programmes offered by the CBC, the NFTSA asked the network to provide information on the guests and the subjects of discussion. The CBC supplied broadcast dates and guest lists for each programme of the "Bob McLean Show." Without the information on the guests, a sampling of the programmes to preserve as many as five or six of the programmes from each season probably would suffice to illustrate the characteristics of the series and its changes over time. It is typical of the selection process that the more that is known about a recording, the more reasons can be found to keep it. Because the CBC supplied a guest list for each programme, more programmes (fifty-nine) were selected than might have been otherwise, based on the perceived importance of the guests and the variety of fields and interests they represented. Programmes featuring noted Canadians John Diefenbaker and Foster Hewitt were obvious choices. The problem with selection on the basis of personalities is that the number of guests on each programme means that there is a prominent person on just about every one. Since the programmes featured an assortment of well-known and not-so-well-known people, it was relatively easy to include both prominent personalities and ordinary people.

“Take Thirty” was a somewhat different case in that the CBC supplied information on both the guests and the subjects they discussed. The archivist chose sixty-one programmes from the block of 246 offered, based on the variety of subjects discussed, personalities of note, broadcast dates, and visual interest. The NFTSA already had more than 300 hours of “Take Thirty” programmes dating from 1962 to 1981. The 246 tapes the CBC was offering had been broadcast during the 1970s and the 1980s. Since the NFTSA already had a sufficiently large sample to document the hosts, subjects, approaches, and style of “Take Thirty” over the years, the archivist chose to preserve only a few of the programmes that consisted of in-studio interviews and discussions about social issues and problems such as alcoholism and education. Because these issues receive in-depth coverage in the print media, selections tended to be made of programmes featuring that which television does best: the visual presentation of a subject. Items such as a film report about the production of animated films, showing animators at work, for example, can convey a much more vivid idea about a visual process than a written description or radio report can. Interviews and profiles of personalities such as Gordie Howe and Terry Fox were chosen. As with the “Bob McLean Show,” each “Take Thirty” programme generally combined a blend of important people and subjects and less-well-known people and subjects. In keeping with the usual practice at the NFTSA, entire programmes rather than segments were selected for copying.

This discussion of model selection criteria and the application of these criteria to the evaluation of specific programme types or series illustrate both the benefits and limitations of selection principles. Archives are becoming more selective about the many different types of records they collect. As archival collections grow and resources shrink, institutions have to examine more closely how different types of records create a comprehensive, balanced research base for a varied research community. It is always possible that preserving every recording of a series such as “Take Thirty” might limit the resources available to obtain and preserve a representative sample of programmes such as network news broadcasts. There is often the underlying hope that carefully crafted selection criteria will be “a miraculous keyword — which should open the road to archival happiness.”¹⁹ In fact, this article’s attempt to flesh out the bare bones selection criteria found in archival literature shows that there is no avoiding the responsibility of the archivist to weigh one factor against another, based on what is known about a television production. Similarly, the nature of the televised record is such that archivists must carry out time-consuming item-by-item analyses of some types of programming instead of being able to rely on sampling to select a representative body of records.

The development of selection criteria that both include sufficient material to meet anticipated needs and prevent archives from being inundated by records is not something that any one archivist or any one institution should attempt in isolation. Organizations such as FIAT, to which the NFTSA belongs, exist to facilitate the exchange of information about the archiving of television. Criteria do have to be flexible to meet the specific needs of different archives, but the experiences of various institutions, as well as the interests of the research community, are important.

In archives such as the NFTSA, which aim to build a balanced collection of national television programming representative of all programme types, categories can help the

19 Rolf Schuurmsma, “Problems of Selection in Research Sound Archives,” *Phonographic Bulletin* 31 (November 1981), p. 17.

archivist to think of holdings and potential acquisitions as programme types constituting a body of research materials, rather than as an assortment of individual unrelated recordings. The use of categories to describe the qualities of a television production serve to relate subject content and production styles to possible research uses, but only quantitative criteria or sampling go some way to reducing the actual amount of material for archival preservation. The pressures of time and the needs of researchers and donors make it difficult for selection criteria to be applied on a consistent basis. Broadcasting organizations in particular, with their unyielding production deadlines, may loan videotapes to archives for only a short period of time. Despite the ever-present exceptions to the ideal world in which selection criteria are developed, they provide a framework for the decisions television archives must make.