



Anarchival Materiality in Film Archives

Toward an Anthropology of the Multimodal

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we propose an anthropology *of* the multimodal, based on research-creation work in fugitive film archives. We foreground the material dimension of anthropological research and describe film technology and its use in anthropology as ideologically and materially situated. Through our work with magenta film, we theorize anarchival materiality as a force of entropy in archives and collections. Attention to anarchival materiality raises questions about the persistence and reliability of the products of contemporary multimodal practices in anthropology.

KEYWORDS

multimodal anthropology, research-creation, fugitive, anarchival materiality, ethnographic film

In a way, I sort of have a matter of fact way of looking at film decomposition, and that it's a reflection of the way things are. Yes, we should try to preserve everything we can. We should try to preserve ourselves, to the degree that we can, but the bottom line is we are going to deteriorate and die. And that's not always an ugly thing to look at. You know, that is part of life. It's the way things are. And it tells us as much about who we are as much as the thing that we are trying to preserve.

—Bill Morrison, filmmaker, in *The Cinema of Decay: The Films of Bill Morrison* (Herzogenrath 2017)

Introduction

A few months before her retirement after 30 years as an archivist, Ann ten Cate led us through the stacks of the bureaucratic archives of the Province of British Columbia, Canada. We had asked her to identify objects that had transformed in unexpected ways, based on her personal experience of caring for the collection. As an exploratory element of our visual research-creation project, grounded in our long-term practice in art and anthropology, we had set up a temporary studio in one corner of the archival research space and planned to photograph or film videos documenting the objects that she chose (Figure 1).

As we walked, Ann used the word *fugitive* to describe the creeping rot on leather book bindings, the yellow tinge of acid burn on paper, a pile of orphan wallets with nowhere to go in the archive, and the various machines used in the past to project film and play audio recordings. Fugitive objects, for Ann, are the things that cannot be preserved because of their inevitable material deterioration, their obsolescence as technological systems, or their precarity as orphaned or unclassified residents of the archive. Procedurally, Ann helped us to understand that this fugitive nature of archival objects and tools used to read archival objects inevitably force the humans in charge to engage in the reclassification of objects. This reclassification moves objects from archival—which denotes “records whose content has been appraised as having enduring value” (Pearce-Moses 2005, 24)—to anarchival, which denotes having limited enduring value and therefore to be deaccessioned and possibly destroyed.

In highlighting the fugitive qualities of archival objects, Ann highlighted the material vulnerabilities of the items she stewarded: Some changed slowly and would endure without much intervention; some were flammable and unstable, even

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dangerous. Others were present in the archive because of a story known about them by a few who worked there and could not bear to throw them away. The materiality of the archive plays a constant and often lively role in archival work, directing the labor of archivists and conservators in determining what stays and what goes. We began to see a tension between preservation of archival materiality and the identification and mitigation of anarchival materiality as a force that we wished to visualize through our visual research and art-anthropology practice. As we worked together in our photography studio with nitrate negatives, film reels, piles of acid-burned paper, and other curious objects, we came to understand fugitivity as an expression of what we call anarchival materiality (Hennessy and Smith 2018; Smith, Hennessy, and Neumann 2019).

As part of our work in the BC Archives, we digitized a 16mm color film reel from 1978 about the British Columbia plywood and forest industries, called *To Build a Better World*. It was chosen by preservation manager Ember Lundgren because it had faded from full color to magenta, becoming anarchival. While we worked, we discussed with her the problem of perishable media in the form of magenta film transformations across the world's film archives, including in anthropological archives. As anthropologists and artists, we wondered, what could we learn from our creative work in the archive? How might attention to unstable and fugitive documentary mediums and technologies in anthropological film archives help us to interrogate our assumptions about documentary tools in anthropology today?

Anthropological film archives are challenged to preserve the work of nineteenth- and twentieth-century visual anthropologists, who themselves believed in the enduring qualities of film to salvage what they perceived to be disappearing world cultures (Edwards 2001). Why and how did anthropologists believe that their documentary tools would provide enduring records of human activity? How could attention to the archival and anarchival materiality of anthropological archives help us grapple with contemporary digital documentary practices, which are emerging as part of a foundation of multimodal anthropology (Collins et al. 2017)?

The practical and ethical dimensions of archiving and preserving digital anthropological documentation and records of all kinds are an extraordinary and intensifying challenge for memory institutions in Canada and around the world (Owram et al. 2015). Additionally, as a result of material fugitivity, we see the stewards of these collections being compelled to edit the classification of the film to include "magenta" (or vinegar syndrome, its haptic/scent corollary) alongside other metadata and description.

FIG. 1 Studio set up in the British Columbia Provincial Archives. Photo by Trudi Lynn Smith and Kate Hennessy, 2018. [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]



FIG. 1

In the future, how will archivists append records to describe the corruption of digital records? How will conservators make decisions about what to keep and dispose of when there is nothing to touch, see, or smell? These questions provoke anxiety about the future of digital memory in anthropology, art, and beyond (Geismar and Laurenson 2019). They point to the ways in which anarchival materiality in archives drives human and nonhuman changes within knowledge and memory structures.

In this article, we have two primary goals. The first, contextualized by our research-creation work between art and anthropology, is to propose an *anthropology of the multimodal*, which foregrounds the material dimension of anthropological research. We describe film technology and its uses in anthropology as ideologically and materially situated, with the always fugitive nature of documentary technologies leading to ongoing predicaments in the discipline. The ideological foundation of much anthropological film (i.e., the salvaging of disappearing worlds) is seen from a new perspective by highlighting the spectacularly failing film stock on which the salvage anthropology was recorded. We present our work with magenta film as an example of emergent research in the anthropology of the multimodal. We draw attention to persistent entropy in all forms of documentation—both analog and digital—that disrupts the structure and function of anthropological documentation and archives. We offer four propositions for an

anthropology of the multimodal that: (1) call for engagement with the materiality of ethnographic research; (2) acknowledge the fugitivity of the ethnographic record and documentary tools; (3) highlight a concern with institutional power in the context of technoscience and its manifestations in the material; and (4) can include speculative research-creation practices to communicate anthropological knowledge and theory.

Our second goal in this article is to theorize *anarchival materiality* as a disruptive force in anthropological film archives. As we describe below, fugitivity is an expression of anarchival materiality. We use the example of two magenta film projects. First, we discuss John Marshall's *If It Fits* (1978), which was identified by Alice Apley and Frank Avenir at Documentary Educational Resources (DER) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, as an endangered film located in the Harvard Film Archive. Second, we describe our magenta film remediation *To the Burning World* (2018), which was part of our photography and magenta video exhibition at the Royal British Columbia Museum as process-based research-creation work grounded in an emergent anthropology of the multimodal. Our attention to anarchival materiality in fugitive film archives raises questions about the persistence and reliability of the products of contemporary multimodal practices in anthropology (Figure 2).



FIG. 2

Fugitivity as an Expression of Anarchival Materiality

As we describe above, our engagement with the material dimension of ethnographic research led us to the notion of the fugitive as one expression of anarchival materiality. Fugitive objects require human stewards of archives and collections to rethink classifications of objects and to adjust practices of care and conservation. Our study of fugitive archives resonates with emergent discussions of the fugitive in both anthropology and photography that seek to represent that which resists dominant structures (Berry et al. 2017; Campt 2012). As Campt (2012) articulates, fugitives are powerful reminders of the boundaries to which we ascribe meaning; they prompt us to demarcate things, people, events, and phenomena as insiders or as outsiders. Fugitives are boundary transgressions in the fact that the fugitive is neither fully inside or outside: “often an elusive presence, the fugitive has an ability to pass that camouflages difference while highlighting the very distinctions on which identity and community are based” (Campt 2012, 87).

In archives, fugitives are marked by material transformations, new preservation structures, and revised classifications. For example, when color film stock was identified as fading due to the inherent chemical makeup of its emulsion, archival storehouses were filled with banks of freezers to slow the timeline of archival loss. A film affected by bacteria and fungi may have its description change over time from subject or maker to dangerous or contaminated: from documentary authority to “vulnerable materiality” (Ripmeester 2016, 65). The magenta hue of film is an example of anarchival materiality, the generative force of entropy in archives.

Anarchival materiality signals the force of material decay in the archive. It is a force that changes the order and classification of things. It is a force that obliterates the things that humans try to save. In *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida proposes that the anarchive is a human drive to death, a destructive force that “will always have been archive-destroying, by silent vocation” (1995, 10). The anarchive is a force in archives that “eludes perception” (Derrida 1995, 11) but has a capacity to erase the archive (Kujundzic 2003, 167). Following Derrida, Erin Manning’s seven-point definition of anarchive helps articulate the central role of an anarchival impulse in archives. To Manning, the anarchive exceeds, but needs the archive; it is a supplement, an excess energy (Manning n.d.). Foster’s (2004) recognition of an archival impulse in contemporary artworlds considers how artists working in archives in the early 2000s were privileging the fragmentary, the temporary, the material, the indeterminant, “retrieved in a gesture of alternative

FIG. 2 Film still/screen capture of *If It Fits*, John Marshall, 1978. Image courtesy of DER. [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

knowledge or counter-memory” (2004, 4). Foster proposes that archival art might be animated by an “anarchival impulse” to describe how artists are “concerned less with absolute origins than with obscure traces ... (and) drawn to unfulfilled belongings or incomplete projects ... that might offer point for departure again” (2004, 5).

Understanding destructive qualities within filmic materialities is a long-standing interest to scholars and artists. Film historian and curator Paolo Cherchi Usai argues that “cinema is the art of destroying images” (2001, 7); for example, a film can only pass through the projector a limited number of times before it is destroyed. Barbara Flueckiger’s recent discussion of the film as a tangible object reminds us of the multisensory aspects of film decay, “accumulating olfactory, haptic, and even acoustic dimensions” (2012, np). Bill Morrison’s work with decaying and disintegrating film shows the limits of materiality and preservation (Carone, 2017). *Dawson City: Frozen Time* (2016) was made from found nitrate footage discovered buried within a swimming pool and ice rink under the permafrost in Dawson City, Yukon, Canada. The film and its editing together create tensions between the storyline and the destruction of the film as silent-movie-era actors uncannily oppose their destruction, dancing, gazing, and melting in and out of the frame. The film highlights the tension between the drive to preserve and the ultimate fugitivity of all things, material objects, and the humans that they picture alike.

Anarchival materiality, in our use, brings in a more than human drive toward destruction into the archive: the lively materiality of atomic vibrations (Bennett 2010); the role of material and relationships that change things; and a force compelling human caretaker to reorder, move, reclassify, and encounter new things being made material. Anarchival materiality has kinship with recent film theory that argues for recognition of the inherently transitional nature of film, and a call for archiving policy that reveals the unsettled nature of the medium (Fossati and van den Oever 2016). Film theorist Paula Amad argues that early film was always a counter-archive, always filled with “rifts, voids, and disorder of a radically new type of history” (2010, 123), always working against an impulse of control or order. Anarchival materiality is a force in archives that is always a part of them.

And so we ask, where the colonial archive has functioned broadly to support an impression of permanence and stability in anthropology, how might the action of uncooperative archival residents and their ghostly impressions signal impermanence and instability? These questions are

FIG. 3 “The hulks of the brick factories return to the screen to haunt us” (Merry 1982, 986). Film still/ screen capture of *If It Fits*, John Marshall, 1978. Image courtesy of DER.



FIG. 3

central for us in our attempt to understand and document anarchival materiality; our research-creation work with magenta film and archives leads us to the proposition that an anthropology of the multimodal must acknowledge the material fugitivity of the things anthropologists document and collect, an issue of central concern today both for the history of the material anthropological record and its digital futures (Figure 3).

Lively Magenta: Anarchival Materiality in Anthropological Film Archives

John Marshall's 1978 film *If It Fits* documents a politically charged moment in time in the city of Haverhill, Massachusetts, in which visible entropy and dynamic political change are placed in stark tension with one another. Footage taken while traveling down a contaminated river shows deteriorating brick industrial buildings cut with scenes of factory workers, leather processing, and a mayoral election. The story progresses through the telling of oral histories that weave between local civic circumstances and the labor history of the United States. In her 1982 review of *If It Fits*, anthropologist Sally Engle Merry finds the story of the shoe industry in Haverhill a powerful visual portrait of postindustrial decline.

Although agitated by Marshall's observational, gentle, cinéma vérité style (Tamés n.d., np), Merry nevertheless identifies the story as important in its representation of a process of many "New England towns that had been thriving industrial centers in the 19th century," whereby "the prognosis for the town is grim: it appears powerless to stop the economic processes which are virtually making the whole town obsolete" (1982, 986).

Merry's review, rich with the language of haunting, dislocation, and uncertainty, provides an orienting vocabulary for understanding the unexpected nature of filmic materiality in archives. Held in the Harvard Film Archive and distributed by Documentary Educational Resources, the 16mm film is currently vulnerable to the material force of entropy.¹ Shot on reversal stock, the original film is stored in freezers at Harvard Film Archive to slow degradation while the circulating prints of the film experience color fading that transform it into something entirely different from its original print. Viewing a print of *If It Fits* today, one will notice—alongside the deterioration of brick factories and dissent between narrators—the flush of magenta, a hue signaling the anarchival nature of color motion picture film.

The magenta hue found in the footage of *If It Fits* is an example of the anarchival materiality of color in film and the inherent instability of color motion picture films across archives. As DER conservators work toward digitally restoring *If It Fits*, they join with a wider community of practitioners in various scales of institutions caring for and laboring to reconstruct and restore twentieth-century film collections. The persistence of the material legacy of anthropology depends on their labor and resources.

Vibrating Atoms in Fugitive Archives

Fugitive magenta films signal a condition through which all film archives are always working. Poor image stability in professional motion picture color negative and print films by Kodak and other companies has radically affected film history in all spheres, from amateur to professional, and in Hollywood and anthropology alike. Most of the color motion picture film that was used in everyday and professional applications in the twentieth century was rooted in a common underlying structure and technique of manufacturing. This process is a subtractive color system composed of gelatin emulsion layers divided among cyan, yellow, and magenta dye molecules coated onto a plastic substrate. Over time, chromogenic stock became legendary not for the capacity to capture and represent

FIG. 4 Film still/screen capture of *If It Fits*, John Marshall, 1978. Image courtesy of DER.



FIG. 4

life, but for its transgressions and the radical instability found in the dye emulsion process (Figure 4).

The molecules of chromogenic color film are large, complex, organic molecules composed of only a few elements (Reilly n.d., 9). Minor differences in the arrangements of the atomic structure of dye molecules (consisting of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, and nitrogen) determine the dye color (or lack of color). Dye molecules are boundary crossers: Through immersion in the world over time—a world full of heat and water—structural rearrangements take place in the film. There are millions of individual dye molecules, and when these are disturbed, it may sever the ability for the molecule to interact with light. The effect of rupture is that the atoms will rearrange or split and the molecule will become a colorless structure or a new color (Reilly n.d., 9).

Anarchival materiality is a force in film archives that drives the lively action of these structural rearrangements (Bennett 2010). Inside the filmic image, vibrations and collisions between molecules break and change their chemical bonds, and in that breakage, a color like cyan becomes colorless. The film stock begins to emit a vinegar smell, thus signaling other forms of breakdown in the film that is often experienced as gooeyness to the touch. Even films that are kept in controlled storage in freezers will slowly break down.

The fugitivity of color dyes becomes visible at 30 percent loss, after many millions of molecules have already changed. Cyan is usually the first to go, then yellow, leaving magenta as visible evidence of entropic vibrational relations.

The fugitive film archive is dynamic and haunted by magenta traces that refuse the always-imagined stability of the world as four-color separation. A moment in *If It Fits* shows a bridge filmed while traveling down a polluted river. It is hard for us to imagine that the image was at one time full color, just as it is hard to imagine the town's economic heyday: the imagined rich colors of the river, the sky, and the bridge, all transformed into a warm flood of magenta left behind after the atomic vibrations released cyan and yellow. The postindustrial decline is captured in the metaphor of the decay of the film and is embedded in the materiality of the film. Anarchival materiality is transforming postindustrial images into postatomic ones. This atomic, molecular, vibrational field reminds us of the ongoing struggles and constant disturbance of dispossession and decline. The film stock, and the ethnographic film's story, are in cooperation: a world filled with "minor contingencies" and "asymmetrical encounters" (Gan et al. 2017). The city itself has long transformed; its documentation on film has also become something new.

Material Disruption of the Salvage Paradigm in Anthropology

Anarchival materiality in anthropological film archives therefore works both materially and discursively. What do we mean by this? We have already described in some detail how films become fugitive as they are subjected the entropic force of anarchival materiality. Here, we argue that the historical ideological foundation of much anthropological film—the salvaging of disappearing worlds—depended on an imagined persistent record of those worlds on a stable medium in a permanent archive. As we have established, however, the archive is fugitive—in the long term, it will not be preserved. The force of anarchival materiality is requiring archivists and conservators today to engage in expensive and possibly futile salvage initiatives to restore the deteriorating film stock on which so much both nineteenth- and twentieth-century hope for documentation of the human experience was directed. The failure of the medium is therefore one bright signal of the failure of the salvage project.

Can our current reliance on digital tools find an analogue with historical belief in the power of new technologies to do the practical and ideological work of anthropology? As Edwards (2001) describes, Alfred Court Haddon's Torres Straits

expeditions, and the use of new documentary (multimodal) technologies (i.e., the Newman and Guardia cinematograph, still photographic cameras with Ives and Joly's color photographic processes, and phonographs with recording and playback functionality), were justified by the need for salvage ethnography. Reflecting a moral urgency and anxiety that the failure of the salvage project would reflect badly, Haddon wrote, "Now is the time to record.... The most interesting materials of study are becoming lost to us, not only by their disappearance, but by the apathy of those who should delight in recording them before they become lost to sight and memory" (quoted in Edwards 2001, 164).

Alan Lomax, writing in the 1971 *Filmmakers Newsletter*, recalled Margaret Mead's 1960 presidential address to the American Anthropological Association, in which she urged the use of documentary technologies in ethnographic practice (a call that was met with skepticism by "notebook oriented scholars"). A decade later in 1970, Lomax writes, Margaret Mead was elected president of a new working committee called the Anthropological Film Research Institute that would call for the Smithsonian Institution in Washington to establish an ethnographic film archive. This was to serve as a repository for footage and would especially support "films of cultures and tribes about to disappear" (Lomax 1971, 1).

The salvage impulse burns brightly in Lomax's call to action for the preservation of ethnographic film and the creation of what became the Smithsonian's Human Studies Film Archives (HSFA). He wrote: "If action is not taken now, not only will science have lost invaluable data, but much of the human race will have lost its history and its ancestors, as well as a vast treasure of human creativity in adaptive patterns, in communication systems, and in life styles" (1971, 1). For Lomax, the documentation of preservation of a record could function to postpone what he called "the otherwise inevitable cultural grey-out" (Lomax 1971, 3).

More accurately, the legacy of anthropological film archives today can be characterized as a cultural *pink-out*, where the force of anarchival materiality now requires the salvage of degrading film stock at the Smithsonian and in film archives across the planet. The ocularcentric bias of anthropology as a discipline, which, as Anna Grimshaw writes, functions both as a methodological strategy and as a metaphor for knowledge (2001, 7), is further upended as the accumulation of scientific data in film archives that was once considered to be *authentic* becomes *anarchival*. It is fugitive because materially, it cannot be preserved. It represents one dimension of a fugitive anthropology that moves forward precariously and unpredictably,

destabilizing in its entropic transformation into something new (Berry et. al. 2017).

Lomax echoes a long-standing interest in the potential of film as a means to “collect everything while there is still time” (Amad 2010, 62; Stewart 1993). As Paula Amad points out in her book about Albert Kahn’s Archives de la Planète in the early twentieth century, the use of film in documenting everyday life reveals an “implicit if paradoxical faith that the tools of modernity and progress ... would act as ‘fact’-gathering, document storage machine capable of observing and recording ... the contemporary phenomenon of movement and change for the purpose of a comparative global source of documentation” (2010, 68). To Lomax, documentation in anthropology is future-oriented with a belief in technology’s power to describe and store the world. The belief in technology to support anthropological practices has not abated; this is evidenced in the recent reframing of the Visual Anthropology section in the journal *American Anthropologist*, which is premised on the inclusion of new forms of media to support anthropological practice (Collins et al. 2017; Takaragawa et al. 2019).

Cherchi Usai (2001) writes that the imagined perfection of a filmic image to represent reality and be replicable does not exist: The conditions of viewing are never repeatable. *If It Fits* and other fugitive ethnographic films in the Harvard Film Archive, Smithsonian Human Studies Film Archives, and other archives around the world no longer function as their creators intended. Anthropologists have long demonstrated faith in technologies such as film to preserve a record of human activity—a salvage paradigm that today is undermined by deteriorating film stock and obsolete file formats. How are multimodal practices in anthropology today an extension of that dynamic? Museum anthropologists have long pointed out the contradictions between the documentation and transmission of cultural heritage, in which documentation becomes frozen once removed from dynamic lived experience (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004; Krmpotich 2014; Krmpotich and Peers 2013; Kurin 2007). Lively magenta films visibly disrupt the discursive frame of salvage anthropology and the persistence of documentation by demonstrating the failure of documentary technology. This is a vibrant warning to anthropologists today working in a multimodal paradigm.

Fugitives in the Archive at the Royal British Columbia Museum

In 2018, our exhibition *Fugitives in the Archive* opened at the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria, B.C. (Hennessy

and Smith 2019). Through the photographs, videos, and assemblages of fugitive objects in the exhibition, we asked: How are decisions made about what to keep, and why? What can be learned from the tension between our imagined idea of museums and archives as stable repositories of our histories and memories, and the ways objects show us how dynamic and unstable collections can be? How does this change the way we think about our digital practices today (Figures 5 and 6)?

The exhibition included a series of photographs that document fugitive objects and a ten-minute experimental video called *To the Burning World*, a remediation of fugitive magenta 16mm film from the BC Archives. It is a re-edit of Kelly Duncan's 1978 film *To Build a Better World*. The story told by the original film suggests that British Columbia's forests and plywood industry would have transformative and enduring effects across domestic and industrial worlds. The film promotes capitalist extractivist economies based on timber resources. Following the logic of progress found in the film, this future promises efficient and strong building practices and forest management to be carried out in standardized and predictable ways. In the summer of 2018, while skies over British Columbia glowed magenta and the air was choked with smoke from burning forests, we reworked *To Build a Better World* to create the digital film loop that slowly layers onto itself until all form is obscured. Our reworking of the magenta film was meant to evoke the extent to which utopian views of natural and industrial worlds have not been realized in the present. They imperil forest ecosystems. Colonial forest management practices began with the seizure of Indigenous lands, harvesting of old-growth trees, and subsequent monoculture replantings and urbanization. One way we experience the effects of these practices today is through climatic destabilization and the chaos of high-temperature forest fires.² Our video, *To the Burning World*, presents the idea that the utopian promise of standardization to create "better worlds" (and lasting images of them) has failed to contain the world's complexity and to acknowledge the fugitivity of all things (Figure 7).

Like a glitch in film, the disorienting impact of breaking the narrative through layering not only creates "textual openness" that allows for other readings (Russell 1999), but rather shifts to focus upon anarchival materiality that provides *textural* openness; this results in breaking the modernist narrative of progress, including the archive as a stable institution with durable images. The first half of *To the Burning World* tracks the central narrative of the film as men are shown cutting down old-growth trees, planting trees, working in plywood factories, and building houses. We selected and layered film clips



FIG. 5



FIG. 6

digitally, and slowly the story becomes equally more pink, more chaotic, and more obscured. At the peak of the chaos, the film cuts to what is known as the “Shirley image,” a close-up of a woman wearing bright clothes used in film and photography as a “norm reference card” (Roth 2009). In *To the Burning World*, the infamous “white gendered reference point” (Roth 2009, 111) is awash in undulating tones of magenta, opening up the possibility for questions about color balance imagery that was grounded in patriarchy, white supremacist practices, and “flesh tone imperialism” that excluded properly exposed images of those who have darker skin tones (Roth 2009, 125). We edited the film to amplify the image: The model’s sustained gaze faces the viewer and—layered with other leader clips, such as handwritten text and copyright symbols—the magenta model fades in and out on the screen. Formerly outside of the film’s reading, textural openness rearticulates the film’s structure, content, context, meanings, and materiality (Figure 8).

Toward an Anthropology of the Multimodal

In a recent coauthored article, we call for an anthropology of the multimodal that “is premised on what we believe should be an ongoing obligation to try to make sense of the technologies and inheritances on which multimodal practices depend” (Takaragawa et al. 2019, 522). The project that we undertook at the British Columbia Provincial Archives, and continued in collaboration with Documentary Educational Resources, builds on this article and is an attempt through research-creation to actualize an anthropology of the multimodal both by making the material legacy of archival and anthropological documentation the focus of our work, and by engaging in multimodal art practice as a generative expression of our research. Based on this work between art and anthropology, we offer four propositions. An anthropology of the multimodal:

1. Engages with the materiality of ethnographic research: its tools, its preservation structures (including memory institutions and their ideological foundations), and its media.
2. Acknowledges the fugitive nature of documentary tools and everything that anthropologists document and collect.
3. Is concerned with power and its manifestations in the material, including political economies of technologies and the role of humans in the reproduction of power structures through the design and use of technologies.
4. Can include speculative art and research-creation practices to generate and communicate anthropological theory and knowledge.

FIG. 5 Installation image of exhibition, *Fugitives in the Archive*, Kate Hennessy and Trudi Lynn Smith, 2018. Photo by Rachel Topham. [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

FIG. 6 Installation image of exhibition, *Fugitives in the Archive*, Kate Hennessy and Trudi Lynn Smith, 2018. Photo by Rachel Topham. [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]



FIG. 7

The four propositions work together to highlight an anthropology of the multimodal that uses research-creation to amplify discussion about documentary tools and archives in anthropology.

In relation to the first proposition, Haidy Geismar and Pip Laurenson have identified in an unresolved space in material culture studies in anthropology what they call “material culture without materials” (2019, 179). Building on attention to the material in anthropology as “interested in the capacity of material culture to act in the world, whether theorized as agency (Gell 1988), actants (Latour 1996) or vibrant matter (Bennett 2010)” (2019, 179), Geismar and Laurenson look to art conservation practices to call for a more sustained focus on materials and making, including technical processes and their relationships to skill, knowledge, conservation processes, and inevitable social and technological change (2019, 193). We point to this work as an example of an emergent anthropology of the multimodal that engages with the materiality of ethnographic research, including its tools, preservation structures, and diverse media.

In relation to the second proposition, engagement with materiality forces anthropologists and archivists to acknowledge inevitable entropy and transformation and perhaps begin to more fully address it. Indeed, the fugitive nature of



FIG. 8

documentary tools has long been an open secret; filmmakers and archivists, including ethnographic filmmakers, have been aware of the problem of instability. Beginning in the 1970s, when John Marshall was making *If It Fits*, a robust discussion about the crisis of permanence in color film was taking place in amateur and professional media worlds. Even celebrity filmmaker Martin Scorsese became involved, instigating and circulating petitions against Kodak's notorious secrecy about their film instability. These discussions have many parallels with present-day discussions and concerns about the impermanence of digital documentation. We suggest here that the optimistic view of the potential of emerging media to document people's experiences must be tempered with questions of what it means to document using digital tools and the precarity of digital archives.

How could acknowledging the impermanence of media change the impulses through which we use them? A consideration of this question connects to our third proposition (see Takaragawa et al. 2019). It is crucial to keep considering how power, inequality, patriarchy, and white supremacy, for example, are imbricated in and throughout our documentary tools and media we use, and in the institutions and technologies tasked with storage and preservation. In particular, an anthropology of the multimodal foregrounds engagement

FIG. 7 Film still from *To the Burning World*, Kate Hennessy and Trudi Lynn Smith, 2018.

FIG. 8 Film still from *To the Burning World*, Kate Hennessy and Trudi Lynn Smith, 2018.

with the materiality of anthropological tools and documentation to confront their broad environmental and ethical impacts on human and nonhuman worlds. As we claim with our coauthors:

Although the idea of multimodal anthropology may challenge dominant paradigms of authorship, expertise, capacity, and language, we argue that there is nothing inherently liberatory about multimodal approaches in anthropology. Therefore, as our discipline(s) increasingly advocates for the multimodal in the service of anthropology, there is a need for deep engagement with the multimodal's position as an expression of technoscientific praxis, which is complicit in the reproduction of power hierarchies in the context of global capitalism, "capital accumulation" (Collins, Durington, and Gill 2017, 144), and other forms of oppression. (Takaragawa et al. 2019)

Finally, through our fourth proposition, we demonstrate that there is potential to address these material and ethical challenges in the practice of research-creation—an approach including art-based, art-led, or practice-based research. As a method increasingly visible in anthropological work, it hybridizes artistic and scholarly methodologies and legitimates hybrid outputs (Loveless 2015a, 41). A controversial and unresolved term, it signals and raises important questions about the reshaping of artistic research into an academic discipline (Steryl 2010), while arguing against collapsing artistic labor as research and asks, what is at stake in pedagogy, practice, and experimentation (Loveless 2015b, 53; Manning 2016, np)? Like Natalie S. Loveless, we see research-creation as a reconfigured approach to interdisciplinarity, "rather than uncritically adding one disciplinary apparatus to another, research-creation marshals new methods that allow us to tell new stories, stories that demand new research literacies and outputs" (2015b, 53). In the work presented in this article, we use creative methods (photography, video, the studio setup) as generative tools to work with archives and archivists in situ, and to produce works for public exhibition and dialogue.

Conclusion

Toward an anthropology of the multimodal, we view magenta as a disruptive force that creates an entry to understanding documentation and archives as impermanent and always in a dynamic state of transformation. Fugitives within archival structures reveal potentials in entropy, triggering new

configurations and articulations of the world (Barad 2007). Films that may have once been described and organized by subject, author, or time period are now reorganized as a result of the liveliness of materiality. Films that once appeared unrelated become entangled in the pink.

What can we learn from vibrating atoms in fugitive archives? Through our work with magenta film, we have described how anarchival materiality disturbs the hungry relationship between timber resources and urban development in *To the Burning World* and the impulse of salvage ethnographic collection of *If It Fits*. We suggest that the generative action of these films fading into unstable magenta hues challenges the promise of patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist logics; utopian technologies; and scholarly methodologies.

In our initial work with the British Columbia Provincial Archives (Hennessy and Smith 2018), we explored the multiple ways in which archives and objects become fugitive, for example, because they exist outside of the order of the archive, because human caretakers decide they are no longer valuable, and because materially they cannot be preserved. The failure of motion picture film is a harbinger of the fugitivity of all things, a disruption (both rapid and glacial) that works against promises of standardization and safeguarding in archives and collections. Entropy is always and already intervening on the monolithic promise of modernity that echoes throughout many of our media practices. How do transformations in film archives undo and remake our understanding of our practices as anthropologists? Recognizing the importance of anarchival materiality and the fugitivity of all things in anthropology highlights ways in which the salvage project echoes in the present, through our tools and our often unquestioning beliefs in them. Our creative work with magenta film helps us see how the utopian promise of standardization and archival stability that is imbricated in the technologies of anthropology—analogue and digital—ultimately creates havoc in archives and collections.

We cannot help but see fugitivity at work from film archives to the everyday experience of the living human and non-human worlds. In their introduction to *Haunted Landscapes of the Anthropocene* (2017), Elaine Gan, Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, and Nils Bubandt ask: What kinds of human disturbance can life on earth bear? To the authors, an uncanny haunting is found in a relational remainder, a trace of a past relationship, for example, in the form of a seed dispersal mechanism on a plant that is no longer activated due to the extinction of a bird or another animal. Reminders provoke a consideration of multiple pasts, human and not human. The remainder is another expression of fugitivity, where the specter of the past

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in the present provides a setting for understanding and discerning rupture, and endings of life as we know it (Gan et al. 2017). Film archives are one of many locations in which these relationship remainders are visible.

Notes

1. Frank Aveni and Alice Apley at DER identified *If It Fits* as a film print that had experienced degradation. While they work to fundraise for films that require preservation, Frank Aveni explained to us that DER distributes the best available digital form of films, despite flaws, so that they remain available and in circulation while they work toward creating a restored version of a film.
2. Wildfire in Canada has recently been dubbed the “fifth season” by 350.org (<https://350.org/5thseason/>).

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