

In Conversation with Ray Edmondson
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NB: This transcript has been edited for easier reading and comprehension. Contents of the talk however remain intact and true to its form.

Bee Thiam:

A very good afternoon to everyone. My name is Bee Thiam from the Asian Film Archive. Today, we are very honored to host Ray Edmondson, one of the most respected and knowledgeable audiovisual archivists in the world. Described as the moving spirit behind the creation of the National Film and Sound Archive in Australia, Ray served as its deputy director from 1984 until 2001 and was endowed as its first honorary Curator Emeritus. He is the recipient of the Association of Moving Image Archivist Silver Light Award for outstanding career achievements. Since 1996, he has been involved in UNESCO's Memory of the World program, offering its current general guidelines, and presently serves on its national, regional and international committees. His authoritative monograph *Audiovisual Archiving, Philosophy and Principles* was published by UNESCO in 2004 and is used by archivists worldwide. Ray is also a member of the International Advisory Board of the Asian Film Archive. In the next one and a half hours, we'll be having a discussion with him on a very broad ranging kind of issues that regional archives are facing today. Without further ado, I would like to invite Ray to the front.

Ray:

I think we're going to start. This is free form, which means you can ask a question at anytime. We have a list here that we'll kind of work through in a vague sort of way, but please interject when you feel there's something you want to ask. Also if there are questions you would like to raise now, Bee Thiam can just take a note of them and we'll work them into the discussion. Are there any things you want to raise now that you have in mind?

Bee Thiam:

We'll just take a very broad survey of the issues and concerns you would like Ray to address, and then after that we will start with some questions so that it will be more focused. Anybody want to give us a sense of what you're looking for from this session?

(Audience express wish to discuss about the issue of training).

Okay. I'm going to cover a few areas starting with how Ray got into film archiving, followed by some things that have happened to him in his 20 years with the National Film and Sound Archives, followed by some of the issues that archivists today face in Asia. At any one point of time, if you have any questions in regard to those issues, please feel free to raise them up, before we move on to the next topic to talk about. Okay? So I think I would first start by asking Ray - you've been involved in this for more than 30, 40 years and have been very active in audiovisual archiving work. What got you started and what is it in archiving that got you to have such sustained interest for so many years?

Ray:

Well, it kind of started when I was six years old. I was given a toy film projector for Christmas. I've been hooked on projection of film ever since. And that's why in our home we have a 16mm projector permanently set up so that I can show movies anytime in our lounge room. The medium has just intrigued me. Also, when I was eight years old, one of my aunts gave me a wind-up gramophone, the one with a steel needle. I was fascinated by the old 78-records. I grew up in Australia in the pre-television age. My childhood years were the years when we listened to childrens' radio serials. There was no television to watch and that was the kind of

culture that fascinated me because kids of my age, we would talk about what happened in the serials that we heard on a particular night, that kind of thing. So I guess the preservation of such things in later years mattered to me. When I was about 13, I went to my local picture theatre that used to have children's matinees. I saw a film that I'm sure none of you have heard of, called *Orphan of the Wilderness*. It was an Australian film, starring a kangaroo, probably the first Australian film starring a kangaroo, made in 1936. What was interesting about it was, children of my generation, when we went to the movies, never saw an Australian film. This was because the Australian feature film industry was dead and the only Australian film you ever saw was the newsreel. The newsreel company was called Cinesound and I knew the name. When this title came up and I saw "Cinesound presents *Orphan of the Wilderness*, I thought, "What? It's a newsreel company. What? Feature film made in Australia?" The whole idea of Australian feature films intrigued me. It was quite an affecting film and I just never forgot it. Later when I went to university to do my standard Arts degree, I was wondering what I would end up doing. I happened to see on television a documentary by an independent filmmaker called Anthony Buckley. It was called *Forgotten Cinema* and it was a one-hour documentary that covered Australian feature film history from 1906 until that point (1967). And I was staggered. I had no idea that this industry ever existed or that these films had ever been made. This was complete a new world to me. At the end of the film, there was a credit for the National Library of Australia, which was the source of the footage. I've never heard of the place. A little later as it turned out, when various organizations came to my university to have interviews to recruit graduates to their various organizations, there was the National Library of Australia interviewing potential recruits. So I went along to this interview, among the other places. I ended up being offered a cadetship, which would take me through the diploma of librarianship course and would require me to work for two years with the National Library in Canberra. So I accepted on the basis that I wanted to work in the film area. They said "Yeah, sure, sure, sure". They had no right to say that, by the way. As it turned out, I ended up in 1968 in the film section of the library in Canberra. The film section of that time was essentially a 16mm lending library. It lent documentaries to schools, universities, and community groups. This was a service we had in Australia. It was a free service and it was quite a remarkable network of film libraries in fact. The idea was to take film into places outside the standard movie theatres - into other places. And it was a very effective service. That was the main business. On the side, it had a sort of an archival collection which had had a number of hands building it up slowly over the years and which had no staff. It was just kind of attached to my job, which was to do mainly with the lending collection. So I just kind of stayed with it, one way or another. Every so often, I would think, "Do I want to stay here? Do I want to keep doing this?"

The first major decision I faced when my bond period of two years ran out was, "Am I going to stay here or do I want to do something else?" I thought I would just give it a little longer. [I knew that] if I'm going to find out how to do this sort of work, I've got to see some examples overseas, I'm never going to learn in Australia. So I did some research about film archiving in Europe and North America which is where all the action was, and put together an itinerary of places that I would liked to visit. Then I went to various organizations to see if they could fund the trip. In the end, the newly established Film and Television School in Sydney said, "Yes, we'll fund your trip". So [in 1973] I did a five-month study tour, starting off in London, at the National Film Archive in London, finishing up in Canada. That was a huge eye-opener for me. In the course of it, I attended the very first FIAF summer school. FIAF is the International Federation of Film Archives, and the first summer school was held at the East German Film Archive, as it then was. I just saw real film archiving going on and that was just mind-blowing. So I visited a sequence of archives. I got lots of ideas. When I came home, I had to write a long report [for the Film and Television School]. At that point, the National Library had decided they would create a film archive unit, which I was put in charge of. It is a long complicated story, which [ultimately] led to the creation of the National Film and Sound Archive in 1984, as a separate body from the National Library. I guess at various points in anyone's career, you kind of ask, "Do I stay with it?" It [might be] very frustrating. You might not get to see any progress in the things you want to see happening, and you'll leave. [However] it seemed like every time I saw an alternative,

something happened to keep me where I was and I'm glad it happened that way. So, it was not always easy because you were aware that all the time you were doing something that wasn't widely understood, widely appreciated, and in the context of the particular institution, it was not particularly well supported. Which led to, I suppose, a fairly nasty political fight in 1983/84, which resulted in the government saying, "Fine, we need a different institution." Well, they made it a separate body.

[We come to] the growth of the National Film and Sound Archive as a separate institution, which when it was created, had a staff of 15 and the budget of a million Australian dollars. Now it's about 200 people with about, I don't know, 20 million dollars or thereabouts. None of that growth has come easily. It always had to be fought for and justified. Sometimes you take one step forward and two steps back and then you keep coming forward again. All the time, you're actually convincing and advocating an idea, which will set a precedent. The idea of a National Library or a National Archives or a National Art Gallery, these are well established standard ideas, and you can always point to lots of other examples in other countries. But when you talk about a National Audiovisual Archive, that's less obvious and, you know, you can't say, "We want one of those in Australia, exactly like that". There's no exact [model] you can point to. And because it was both a film and sound archive, covering the whole audiovisual spectrum, that in itself at that time, was a relatively new idea. It's hard sometimes to justify, why you needed to spend so much money on this and why film and sound recordings were really so important. We, today, probably take for granted that film preservation is a good thing. Do we take that for granted? Not everybody does of course. I think everybody here would.

Bee Thiam:

How many in the audience here are archivists? librarians? filmmakers?

Ray:

Okay. I'm a bit of a hybrid. I was educated as a librarian. I'm a member of the Australian Society of Archivists but I suppose I would style myself as an audiovisual archivist. You can take your pick. They are related disciplines but they are also different disciplines.

Bee Thiam:

Do you want to talk a bit of when the National Film and Sound Archive was set up in 1984, what were the aims? How do you conceptualize that? What were some of the challenges that you had to overcome and how would you measure what you have achieved in the last 20 years, not only you, but the archive itself?

Ray:

Well, first of all, we had to get set up and I think the story of that really hasn't been properly documented yet. But the story of how we arrived at that point is instructive in itself. One of the factors in its creation was trying to build a profile for the work so that some of the real needs that we faced were understood. One project that we ran, the first commercially sponsored project, was called the Last Film Search, and we started it in 1980. It was literally a search of the country to try to find the surviving nitrate film. The film survival rate in Australia is poor. Of all of our silent films up till 1930, we estimate that we have about 5%. The other 95% is gone. That's not very good by world standards.

Bee Thiam:

That has been produced? What does 5% mean?

Ray:

5% of feature films, newsreels, documentaries, that we know about. I mean, there's a lot more that we don't know about.

Bee Thiam:

Like how many films are there?

Ray:

I think in the first 30 years there were about 300 feature films. There was one, maybe sometimes two, sometimes three newsreels every week. There were, we don't know how many documentaries, we know about hundreds, but I'm sure there's hundreds more of which we have no record at all. And of course all the advertising films and all the other things that were produced. So that totality probably comes to thousands of titles. I think we probably just have a few hundred. A lot of those are not complete, they're just fragments. We do know from surviving records that some of the best films of the silent era are the ones we don't have and probably never will have. But during the 70s, what started to grow, from very small beginnings, was the academic study of film in Australian in universities. And that led two of the most important academics, Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper, to publish in 1978 a book that was called *Australian Film 1900-1977*. Pretty boring title, but very self-descriptive. It was simply a documentation of every [known Australian] feature film from the beginning in the 1900s. Well, the first feature film was in 1906, but they went back a bit further, and up until 1977, which was their cut-off year. They documented [each film's] plot, what the reviews said, any other relevant historical information. Fantastic reference book. In the course of this, they indicated what the Archive held, what had survived. This was the first time that anybody who was interested could actually look and see what had been lost, and be horrified. On that note, it sort of brought the story together. But now you could see that most of these titles were gone.

That led to other things such as the Last Film Search. Our idea was that we would actually have a searcher, a staff member, with a caravan and a car, and he would literally travel around Australia. The way we organized it was that he would go to a particular country town and go to its radio station or television station, announce his arrival and say where he could be contacted. Then he would follow up known leads in that area, and he would also follow up any leads that came in [by phone in that locality]. Nobody had mobile phones then, so they had to ring into the radio station, which people did. We did actually find quite a lot of film. Sometimes in old picture theatres, sometimes in private collections, sometimes in very strange places, barns and you know, it's amazing where this stuff gets to. So some quite important films turned up in the course of it. What we didn't know, because we mostly did this by intuition, [was that we] had hit on something that was extremely publicisable, and that what we were doing was a romantic treasure hunt. Except we didn't realize that to begin with. Then the media started to cover it, because that's what it was. You know, here was a guy on this epic journey. And it sort of, you know, it sometimes got onto the front pages. It was on the front page of the *Australian*, our national daily, with a picture of Mike Cordell, the guy who was driving around with a caravan. [They called him] the Raider of the Lost Art. Every time something useful was found, he could go on television and say "Look what we found!" and show a clip. Tremendously boosted [awareness of] the Archive's existence. It communicated a message of how much was lost and about how much at risk all of the surviving material was. It just raised our profile. The Search, [at least] the publicisable part of the Search went on for 18 months, and the rest was years of follow up with people who had things, that kind of boring stuff where you've got to write to people and get things done and deal with it. But the publicisable part was the beginning. That along with other things simply added to our profile, and sent this message that Australia just wasn't getting its act together in protecting its film history.

So that fit into our creation as a separate body. What we had to do when we were set up in 1984 was to define what we were on about. So the government appointed a committee, National Film and Sound Archive Advisory Committee, essentially to write the grand plan for the new institution. I was appointed to run the secretariat and other people were involved and so on. After about 18 months, they came up with a document called "Time in our Hands", which was the grand plan. So it set out the objectives, it set up the embryonic policies, the vision, where it might head in the next 20, 30 years, the size of the losses [of audiovisual heritage], how big it should grow. You know, it projected staff growth, projected budget growth, all this sort of

stuff. All of which was very hopeful of course, because the government doesn't necessarily follow through when you ask for the hard dollars, you know. And they didn't. Nevertheless, the plan was there. What is interesting now is to look at that and see much has actually been done. And unconsciously or otherwise, the Archive has pretty well followed that plan. The main thing that it hasn't achieved yet and didn't have at that time and should have, was that legislation was never passed to make the Archive a legal entity and a statutory authority, and that's crucial. For various political and other reasons, it didn't happen at that time and the government's [since] changed and so on. It still hasn't happened and that's one of the dilemmas we're having today. But [at least] it was set up ...

There was a Charter, which basically set out its philosophy. It wanted to preserve and make accessible the audiovisual heritage of Australia. And it defined what that meant with a fairly long definition. It covered, in theory, all of film, all of television, all of radio and all of the sound recording industry and it wasn't restricted to Australian productions. It was like a global vision. It obviously required selection and a whole lot of things. It supported the idea of legal deposit and called for that to happen. It delved into the need for training because at that time anybody in Australia working in this field just learnt on the job. There was no training. It delved into Australia's role in the Asia-Pacific region. It didn't foreshadow things like SEAPAVAA but I guess it kind of unconsciously saw that kind of thing would happen one day. It also dealt with the need to build relationships with the film industry, with the various sectors that would support the Archive. So when you look at it, you think, okay, we really had to figure out at that time, largely where we wanted to go and really that's the path that we followed. ["Time in our Hands"] is now a rare book actually. There were a lot of copies printed by the NFSA at that time. It's something that should actually be digitised and put on the NFSA website, and probably will be at some time, but it's reassuring I think to see that committee at that time, actually got it right, I think, overall. Remember that in 1984, many of the technological changes which are common place for us [now] did not exist. There were no CDs, there were no DVDs. We did have videocassettes, but they were pretty new at that time and so videotape was largely conceived as a reel-to-reel thing in the various large formats that we had at that time. Film was 35mm, 16mm, 8mm and there was no internet, and so on and so on. It is important with any report, especially when you're dealing with an audiovisual archive, to put it in the context of its time. Many of the developments which we are now simply just used to did not exist then. So therefore they're not foreshadowed in the report. Nonetheless, the fundamentals - the principles and the vision - I think they proved to be pretty correct.

Bee Thiam:

If there are any terms or acronyms that we use that is not clear for you, please feel free to raise your hand and we would explain. Because I know sometimes we can get carried away with this, okay? Just now you mentioned that as the National Film and Sound Archive in Australia grew, you also realized there is a regional role. And in 1996 you actually were commissioned to do a report on film archives in Asia. So can you talk a bit about that, what did you discover, and perhaps some updates from there, 10 years on.

Ray:

Okay, we did a survey of collections. Just to try to get some numerical data and to cover the archives that we knew about. So we became aware that there were some quite large collections in Southeast Asia. There were quite a number of archives. It was much harder to be clear about their conditions and the state of preservation, the level of skills, and things like that. I think, in retrospect, when we looked at the result (you always do this) we could have designed the questions better: people will sometimes answer the question one way and another one a different way, so they interpreted the question differently. But we saw a very large amount of film and television, and a not very clear picture of how it was being looked after, and certainly quite a lot in danger. The great problem, of course, in this part of the world, is the climate. The heat and the humidity that just destroy film and tape, unless you keep it in climate-controlled conditions so you counteract those effects. The stuff deteriorates, mold grows on it, all sorts of

things start to happen. This may be somewhat less of a problem in Australia because the climate is a bit different, but it's still a problem. It is less of a problem in Europe which is where this [audiovisual archiving] field started - and it is significant, I think, that vinegar syndrome was first discovered in India - in a humid tropical climate - but nobody wanted to recognize it until 10 years later when it started to happen in Europe, I guess to the detriment of the field as a whole.

Vinegar syndrome: some of you might not know what it is. It's a chemical reaction that happens to triacetate film in hot and humid storage, where there is a reaction that happens within the film, where a degradation process starts and it gives off gas that smells like vinegar. It's a chain reaction that you can't actually stop, you can slow it down but you can't actually stop it. So the film just degrades and starts to literally fall apart over time. This, we discovered, has affected a lot of collections in Asia because of where they've been stored. Some of them I've actually seen myself in my travels. Some of them are in very bad shape. I'll give you one instance. My first visit to the Philippines, which was in the early nineties, was the first time I met people who would later become very active colleagues in the work we do. We went out to one of the existing film studios which was no longer active in production. But it had all its film, its negatives stored in this big barn-like structure. We kind of heaved the door open, a rusty door. I walked in and I walked out again. I was just hit in the face. The accumulated vinegar syndrome [gases], it was just unbelievable. Nobody had looked in there for a while you know. It was just sitting there stewing in its own smell and all degrading. They then took some action to ventilate the building and then to relocate the films. But no one had sort of thought, well maybe a problem has been developing here for a while, because no one had looked. There was, and there is, no National Film Archive or similar such body in the Philippines yet. It's a serious lack in that country. So there was no central body to say, well, we need to be checking these things out. There's since been formed a society of film archivists which in some ways fulfill the role of a national film archive by coordinating a lot of separate collections. But there is still no single institution. They still lack that. So this was not an isolated problem. That was a problem they had in Vietnam as well and in other countries.

How did they solve it in Vietnam in later years? They were able to build better storage vaults. They ventilated all the films. It sounds simple. You wound every reel of film through and you ventilated the gas. Then they developed a substitute for a Kodak product called a molecular sieve. They developed something similar which is a little packet of chemicals inside an envelope and you put this in a can of film and it soaks up the gas. When I first saw the collection in Hanoi, the smell was terrible. I could walk through the same place today and you won't smell a thing. Now the vinegar syndrome is still working away there but it's working away very very slowly. So they figured out their own method to do it and they've done it. But coming back to the original survey, it kind of gave us a broad inkling but we need another one [now]. In fact, SEAPAVAA has proposed to UNESCO that there be, I think, a much more thorough survey, of the condition of collections in Southeast Asia. We've figured out the budget for it, we just need the money. We haven't got the money yet.

Bee Thiam:

Are there any other questions? So, if you guys have questions, just raise your hands okay? If not, I'll just keep asking for you. So you mentioned about archives in Asia. So let us perhaps do a list of the archives in Asia. There is the National Film Center, Japan. Just now we mentioned about the National Film Archive in India. There is the China Film Archive. There is the Korean Film Archive. There is the Vietnam Film Institute. There is the National Laos Film Archive. Did I miss out any?

Ray:

Well then, we'll keep going okay? So from Laos, next door is Cambodia, which has an interesting place called the Bophana Centre which is not really an archive. It is an access center that puts [together] aspects of the Cambodian history that exists in moving image, to make it accessible

to school children, and I guess the general public. I've never seen anything quite like it. It's rather unique. There's the National Archives of Cambodia that has films but is in no way ready to handle it them at this stage. In the Philippines there are bodies like the Cultural Centre of the Philippines, Philippines Information Agency, ABN-CBS television network and others who have quite substantial collections of film [in accordance with] the charters of their various organizations. They try to do what they can to protect the collections but there's no center. And although the Society of Film Archivists has been pressuring the government to get something to happen, it hasn't happened yet. So there's just something about the political environment of Philippines that makes it extremely difficult to get started. It doesn't stop all the many people who are involved and who are very keen and very confident people, doing what they can in their own settings and pushing away at this, but that's the Philippines. Malaysia - there is no place that I would actually call the National Film Archive of Malaysia. There's the National Archives. There's the National Library. There's Filem Negara, that's the state film production organization. There are various television networks. Now they all have collections. But again there is no obvious center for dealing with the audiovisual heritage yet. There's one on the drawing board that the National Archive plans to put up but it hasn't happened yet.

Indonesia: I've just come from Jakarta this morning; I was over there for last few days visiting some of the places. In Jakarta, you have the National Archives (Arsip Nasional), the National Library, the Cinematheque (Sinematek) Indonesia, and the various television networks and probably others that I haven't visited. The Sinematek Indonesia is probably the oldest film archive in Asia, I think. It's been there for a very long time. It was founded by a filmmaker called Misbach Biran. It is part of a foundation called the Usmar Ismail Foundation and it has a significant collection. But it has no money. So it has real problems with its storage, it has real problems with vinegar syndrome, and it has real problems with its lack of budget, which allows it to pay staff salaries and no more. It's a research place, a lot of research students and filmmakers use it to research the film collection, but they do not have any money to buy any new journals. Can you imagine that? It is really, sort of down the bottom. The National Archives has quite a large film collection and quite well stored. It wasn't clear to me how much it's growing, or exactly what the policy is, what the selection policy is. The National Library essentially collects consumer formats: under legal deposit, they can get DVDs and CDs and so on. They collect those and you can walk into the National Library and there are viewing booths so it's quite easy to get access to them. You go to their website, a lot of their catalogue is online, but they realize that what they're receiving are consumer formats and not preservation formats and that's an issue for them. There are several television networks. The one that I visited was TVRI, which was the government network. They've been privatized. Large collections of tapes of different formats, not enough storage space, not nearly enough equipment, huge piles of tapes, which they can no longer play. One-inch reel to reel tapes, no machines. U-matic tapes, no machines. So they don't know what condition they're in. Now the good thing about it is, there's a lot of good stuff there. The bad thing is, we don't know really what shape it's in. For some of these activities, funding is probably uncertain and so it's hard to map out the future. There's also no history of coordination between institutions. They tend to do their own thing and not much talk to each other. Where does that bring us? Yes, please.

Member of audience asking a question:

Just listening to your narratives of the various national archives, I thought it was a fascinating analogy of ... (unable to make out sentence). I'm coming from an academic standpoint. I've benefited from archival work and so in a sense, we take for granted that there are archival materials that we can turn to. But we never quite think of just the work. Where does the funding come from? I'm going to use this to ask a general question in terms of questions of educational strategies. What kinds of strategies would you suggest, not only in terms of educating. Questions of education, educating people about the archive at the various educational levels, not only at junior college level, but also at university level. And I think a more important question, how do we educate, say for example the sponsoring from governmental bodies, the importance of archival work. It seems like this is a crucial thing since

all the narratives are really crisis narratives, right?

Ray:

We could be here all afternoon talking about that one but I can probably give you some "for instances". Well, let's start with Laos, of all places. Laos is a fairly poor country. I remember the beginning of its Archive because my first visit to Laos more or less happened to coincide with it. And they were given by their Ministry of Culture, a second hand building, which used to house a film-processing laboratory, which has long since you know, been inactive. They had this building. Some piles of film cans, no shelves, nothing. Today, they have a brand new building with wonderful storage vaults, office spaces and equipment and so on and so on. And they have a system of sharing films. They don't have a good cinema in Vientiane. They're refitting an existing hall to do that, which they'll do. So they use the open air. Not only in Vientiane but around the countryside. They have a traveling cinema unit. Also, they make video clips for television. At least once a week, something from the Film Archive turns up on television and you know where it's come from. Now in Laos, with state run television, [the archive] has no problem, it just goes on. And there is government support, but not a lot of financial support.

How did they get the building? The Vietnamese build it for them. How do they get the Vietnamese to build it for them? The director of the Lao Archive and the Director of the Vietnam Archive colluded. They met at a SEAPAVAA conference and said, "Wouldn't it be a good idea 'lf'". Okay. At subsequent conferences, they figured this out and finally got the governments to sign a cultural support agreement, or whatever, whereby Vietnam, which does give assistance to Laos in various ways, managed to get this to the top of their priorities. So the Vietnamese government paid for the building and paid for the training of the staff and so on. Because during the war in Vietnam in the 60s and 70s, Laos had been bombed as well as Vietnam, by the Americans. The Lao film had ended up in Hanoi for safekeeping. It sat there for a long time. A point arose, long before this new building was put there, where the Vietnam Archive were happy enough with the progress that the Lao Archive had made at that stage, to hand the film back. I think about 12 hundred cans of film went back to Vientiane. Then the building came along later.

Now there's been a sort of progressive growth, but to me, it's quite a spectacular story, in that setting. But what the Director of the Archive, Bounchao Phichit, has managed to do is he's educated upwards, [educated] the government. He's been very astute to just be sure that everybody in a position of power, who needs to know about the Archive, knows about it. And when there's an event, they're all invited. Right! So they all know what he's doing and they actually see an output and they see some of their own country reflected on what he shows, and then they see it on television. Then he's very unique, going around the country, showing film in country villages and so on. He produces video CDs, VCDs of materials from the Archive. And he has kind of linked himself into, I suppose, the government propaganda effort about publicizing Laos and so on. Fine. You know, we'll do [a compilation on] 25 years of this, 30 years of something else: what's an anniversary that we can celebrate? We'll do your production, you know, and all of it comes from the Archive. So it's educating anybody who is in any position of authority to spend money and the education authorities all know about the Archive because of these public activities.

Okay, let's come back to Australia, what did we do? Well, when we were very small, I did the simple and cheap things. I tried to get news coverage for finding old films. I don't know how it would work anywhere else. But in Australia at that time, it worked the trick. You could say you've found this film or that film and it was good news, for some reason. So we would say, I give you a particular instance, a film made in 1920, called *The Breaking of the Drought*. A feature film. It was a great find. It was found underneath a house in Sydney. I have no idea how it got there, but anyway, there it was. So we put out a press release [which got onto] the front page of *The Australian*, with a still from the film. It was brilliant stuff. And we just kept doing it so that people got the idea that we were actually finding things, that we did have a mission

to fulfill and, you know, that it mattered. We actually discovered there was a real sentiment for film history in the Australian population. So that was part of the publicity.

We had a method of targeting politicians. This sounds terribly calculating but you have to remember that your money comes from them. If they don't know anything about you, well, they might not take any notice of you. So we thought, we need to discover who [among] out federal politicians in Canberra, where we are, is likely to be interested in the Archive. How can we kind of engage their interest? So you sort of look around and think, it's likely that person might be, and that person might be, and the minister certainly ought to be. So we would invite them over to the Archive. We'd say, "Come over. We'd like to show you around the place, show you what we do" and surprisingly a lot of them said, "Fine". You would pick a time where they're likely to have some time [to spare], and [when] they were in Canberra, not in their electorate. So we prepared [for] the visit. We researched them and their electorate. Whereabouts in Australia did they come from? Okay, they come from this part of the country and these are the towns in it. Do we have any old film of those towns? What is the nature of the economy, is it rural, what goes on there? What do we know about the person? What are their hobbies, likes, dislikes? Some of these [things] you actually get from the parliamentary directory, and *Who's Who*, and things like that. They've chaired this committee and that committee; they've been involved in this organization. It tells you a lot about them. So what is it in our collection we can find that is directly relevant to them? And how old are they? When did they grow up - in the radio era, in the television era? What did they watch?

You see, we all grew up with radio, television, films that are important to us. And the important thing about the Film Archive is that it's part of the popular memory and everybody relates to it. Whether they realize it or not, everybody relates to it. So what can we find that sort of presses the buttons with them. I'll give you an instance. The current Prime Minister, John Howard, when he was Leader of the Opposition, we brought him over, took him around. I don't know how we found this out, but we discovered what his favourite radio serials were when he was a kid. Now he's the same age as me and he grew up in the same part of Sydney as I did, and he would have listened to the same programmes. So that wasn't too hard. And we found out that his favourite [radio] serial was a thing called *Hagen's Circus*. (I didn't listen to that [as a child] - I listened to another station). And so okay, we walked him around and when we got to the room with a film viewing table, we just happened to have something there that shows him, or that I think was directly interesting to him. When we walked into the sound booth, we just happened to have an episode of *Hagen's Circus* on the turntable and we put it on. You do this kind of thing. Sounds calculated. Yes, of course, it is. But also, it tells them that you've taken the trouble to find out about them and to make the Archive directly relevant to them. If you can do that to them, it means you can be directly relevant to everybody else. There might not have been any direct pay-off in that. What you also do when they leave, you give them a CD or a DVD or whatever of what you've shown them.

And I've seen them. Our minister, we gave him a CD, got him in his car and he put it in, you know, and turned it on straight away. They don't forget that, because usually when they visit institutions, they don't go to that kind of trouble. [The institutions] just kind of give them a standard tour and a cup of tea and send them away. So when it comes to arguing for budgets in various committees where these things are discussed, at least they know about us. And at least they know - I've seen this happen - now you need more money for film preservation or whatever it is. For the Last Film Search we had a slogan, "Nitrate Won't Wait". Slogans are important and politicians understood them - you have to present the message in very simple terms. And guess what? We got a lift in our nitrate budget - our copying budget.

Man asking question:

(48:23 - 49:40) inaudible for transcription

Ray:

The answer for the last is probably no. But I mean this is now suddenly a huge challenge for all of us and I said that politicians like simple ideas like a slogan. And unfortunately, one of the simple ideas they now have is - digitalization. You digitalize everything. You can just digitalize all that film and throw it away and everything's fixed. We constantly have to educate people all the time. It's hard, because we are taking them away from their comfort zone and simple ideas to much more complicated ideas. With things like *YouTube* and that mass of material that is out there, I don't think any of us are equipped to handle it, just the sheer quantity of it. The best we can do is sample it, which we will be doing. We don't have the resources to do anything more than that. How on earth do you select from the vast amount of stuff? Really, it's just expanding exponentially.

I guess we would ask the same question just going back a few years when we had to try to solve [the question], "What do we do about Australian radio? What do we keep?" I don't know how many radio stations are there, there are hundreds of radio stations in Australia, all pumping out stuff 24 hours a day. All of it is important to somebody and how much of it do we keep? We can't possibly keep it all. The only country that can attempt to keep it all is France, I'll tell you about that in a minute. It's a very different situation. But in a country like Australia, economically and practically, we can't. We can at best sample what's being pumped out. Do we have a rational way of doing that? Well, maybe partly, but not as well as we ought to be doing. We can only take grabs and samples of programmes, unless we get a vast increase in the capacity to record and to catalogue. What happens in France? There's a body called INA (Institut National de l'audiovisuel), which records, off air, the entire output of the main television channels and the main radio stations, 24/7. The lot. And the lot is preserved. Every film made in France and released in France goes to the Centre National de la Cinematographie, the national film archive. The quantity is prodigious and for the French, they'll fund that, they'll pay for that. I don't know any other country that gives such a priority to audiovisual archiving the French do. Interesting cultural discussion there, I guess. But the French do. I don't know any other country that does anything remotely approaching that, and it's certainly not possible for us in Australia.

So you build, you start by sampling, then you start making arguments, and you say, "Look, this is what we're missing". There's also an issue of perspective. I've noticed that in most countries where television and radio are preserved, what they collect are the programmes - not so much collecting the experience. And there's a kind of mental leap that you have to make, because every television programme sits in a context of commercials and station breaks and surrounding programming. If you're going to study the impact of television 20 years from now, you can't do it by just having single programmes. You've got to have the lot recorded, to understand how and why things were presented - and especially the commercials, which more than anything else, mirror the time that they were made.

When I think of radio, we have in [the Archive in] Canberra a lot of the radio shows that were syndicated. [Equally] a lot we don't have because they were destroyed. But a lot of radio [programs were] syndicated: the serials, quiz shows and various other things, which are packages of social history. What we don't have is the context. I can remember as a child - because I'm that old - what it was like listening to the radio. Not only when you heard the programme, but the surrounding stuff - the commercials that were actually read, often they were not [pre-]recorded. The manner of presentation, where they used gongs - you know, ding ding ding - and the time pips. "The time is now 8 o'clock - something - something". There was a style of presentation that we [now] have absolutely no record of because it was never actually recorded, and it's only [present] in the memory of people like me. Similarly in the early days of television in Australia, there was a style of presentation that is in no way recorded except in individual memory. I don't think we have even begun to document that. What we are doing now is taking slices of a day's output and saying here's a sample of television presentation today, and so you take some slices like that and that gives you some guide to the context. But it seems to be most countries have not done this and we've been very late to getting round to this in Australia. It actually requires a kind of paradigm shift up here. It took a long time to do anything about it. I mean, to me it was important but it seemed to be not important to anyone else who

was fixated on the programme.

So, this is a partial answer to your question. When you get to the issue of preserving digital productions, and its going to become a bigger and bigger issue for us. Not only because we have materials in the analogue domain, where sooner or later we'll have no choice but to move it to the digital domain and keep it in that form: and the transfer process itself becomes pretty critical because of the quality of what we do. A lot of what's being done is being done very badly. But once you've got it in digital form, how do you keep it? Nobody has any experience getting digital files [to survive] for a long time to come. It's a totally new field. What can go wrong? Well, you can lose the file. It's happened. Once something is in the digital domain, it's in constant movement. You're constantly recopying it, constantly looking at the software to see if it can still read [the file]. The hardware and software constantly changes, [so you must] keep the files refreshed and viable. It's a never-ending issue. What will the long-term cost be? Nobody has any idea. Sure, we know that storage charges keep going down. There'll be some sort of base level that I'm sure they'll reach where they can't go down any further. On the way through, there's this constant recycling movement and so you get caught up in this sort of notion - we always seem to have simple and wrong ideas that intrude on our work. When CDs first came out - oh! put everything onto CDs. Now we know that CDs are not a preservation medium. They aren't reliable. But we didn't know that at that time. So we only accrue over time, knowledge of how a particular medium operates and all that knowledge kind of looks backward.

We now know a lot about film, which I wish we knew 50 years earlier because back in the 50s when we first started transferring nitrate to acetate and burning the nitrate - which was a really stupid thing to do - we all thought it was the right thing to do. Now we can't get [the quality and the information] back because we made really bad acetate copies. Now the technology for copying has improved out of sight. If we still had the nitrate material we could make far, far better copies. In some areas, archives still hung on to their nitrate - but a lot didn't. They just destroyed it because they had a storage problem [and it was] inflammable. And because we had sometimes hysterical regulators who said "It's inflammable you know, you can't take it anywhere. Get rid of it". [In reality] it's less of a problem than [storing and handling] petrol, but somehow this idea gets planted in people's minds. And what I think is also getting lost in the discussion is, what do you lose when you actually take something from the analogue domain to the digital domain. And it's becoming less and less fashionable to talk about that. Let me give an example.

INTERVAL - CHANGE OF TAPE

Ray:

So you went back to your computer, did you?

(lady replies)

BeeThiam:

She's not a fan of Mona Lisa. Convenience.

Ray:

Oh I see.

Ray:

Okay. You see you have to answer the question. Since you can digitalize the Mona Lisa and put her on millions of computer screens, why would you bother to go see the original? But people do. So if you can digitalize a film and put it on a computer, why would you bother having the

celluloid?

(lady replies - about being invited into a story.

Ray:

Can you tell the difference?

Lady:

Yes. (She says more - about being more centred and it being an inexplicable and sensory experience)

Ray:

Yeah. This is a very interesting debate. There will be people that tell you there is no difference. I agree with you, there's a sensory difference. But one thing that happens when you transfer what I call the content of film or videotape to another medium, is you lose the connection, there is a link between the content and the carrier, you lose that connection. Now that's probably not so important with videotape because you can't actually see anything on the tape [with the naked eye]. But for film, [because] of its particular nature, it means that quite a lot is lost.

Take an original film negative [as an example] and I give you an instance. I'm going to pick a particular film in Australia, its called *On Our Selection*, from 1932. It was shot in the early days of sound production so there was a picture negative and a sound negative. The picture negative had splices at every point where the scene changed. We know from looking at the negative the age of the film stock, and it tells us that Australians [at the time] used outdated film stock. They probably bought it cheap from America. We didn't have big budgets. When we look at the sound negative, it's a little hard to describe in words, but everywhere where there's a splice, there's a little triangle that has been cut out of the film on the splice. Why have they done that? Because it covers the click of the splice - and so there's a transition you don't hear because that little triangle prints black on the film print. But if you just listened to the track [without knowing this], you wouldn't know that's what they did. You have to see the sound negative.

They couldn't mix [optical] sound in Australia in 1932; they could only fade it in and out. They couldn't mix voice and music. So that be very clever in the way they laid their soundtracks to try to fool the ear. But if you turn the volume down, if you want to fade the sound out or fade it in, how do you do it? Well you couldn't do it electrically or electronically, because they didn't have the technology. They could just record sound flat, okay? So, how do you make it fade? Well, you take the sound negative and you dip it in peroxide like this. You just count 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8, [dip film in] 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 [pull film out]. What do you get? The track at the bottom has disappeared completely and there's a slow fade up to the top, and when you print it, it comes out in reverse, and so the track fades out to black. That's how you get a fade, and the sound goes down. You don't know that unless you actually look at the negative, and if you know something about the practices of that time, you can figure out that's how they do it. So there's this kind of history that's actually written in the artifact itself and if you just shift the content across to something else, you cannot shift that information, its part of the physical artifact.

Colour systems: there have been many film colour systems, the most popular one at the moment is Eastmancolor, [and it] dominates the market. There's also Fujicolor and there's others. But historically, there are many different colour systems. Some would be based on three [primary] colours, so you got a full colour spectrum. Some were based on two colours and you got a kind of compromise spectrum that doesn't cover everything. And the earliest commercially successful colour systems were two colour systems. The first Technicolor system was two colour, red and green, and there was Cinecolor, which was, blue and orange. I find that visually fascinating because of the tricks they tried to use to convince you [that you could see]

the full spectrum of colour, when it wasn't. But I have seen these films projected and I can tell you, watching a two colour Technicolor print from 1928 is absolutely stunning on the screen. Absolutely. I've never seen any medium that can actually replicate the visual effect of that particular colour system.

In Australia we didn't have three-colour commercial film processing systems in our film industry until 1950s. So any colour film shot and processed in Australia [before then] was shot using the bi-pack [two colour] system. This meant that in the camera you had a orthochromatic negative, which was a black and white {stock} sensitive to blue-green wavelengths, and in front of it you had panchromatic stock. Wait a minute, it's the other way round! [Orthochromatic closest to the lens, panchromatic behind]. At the back you had a Panchromatic negative was sensitive to the whole spectrum. The light came through and hit the orthochromatic negative first and registered the blue-green [information], so you have the chemical change. So the light that went through it to the negative behind registered the red orange wavelengths. You end up with two [colour separation] negatives. You then printed the film on a stock that had emulsion on both sides.

What you end up with was a film print, black and white apparently, with image on both side of the film. You then floated the film along a dye bath. The image that resulted from the orthochromatic negative you floated across a blue green dye, then you flip to the other side and float [the other image] across a red orange dye. And you have to float it on the meniscus of the top of the dye bath. If it sunk in, the film was ruined. Now the precision of this was, you know, extraordinary. But what you got, when you looked at the film, on one side you had an orange image, on the other side you had a blue image. [Together they make] a colour image. And when you projected it you got a pretty good result. But, you could never get it into sharp focus because you had two emulsions and a piece of film in between and so you try to focus on the middle of the film, and so this [limitation] was part of it. How do you copy that to another medium? You can only understand it and appreciate it by showing it on the original technology. So there is this sort of thing about the nature of the technology, the nature of the artifact, to fully understand what it was like to see these images. And, yes, you can move the content across but something is lost. For some of us, it might be a bit emotional but certainly there is a difference.

Not so long ago, at George Eastman House in Rochester, I saw a black and white nitrate print of a *Laurel and Hardy* film. This happens to be an absolute favourite of mine, *Babes in Toyland*, made in 1933. Beautiful print, absolutely stunning image on the screen and I thought, "Why does it look different to the way I've seen this film on other occasions"? It was the print itself, because film emulsions in the 1930s were much richer in silver than they are now because the price of silver went up. So you actually have a different visual impact because of the physical nature of the print.

These are probably very subtle things, but they are nonetheless part of film history, part of the experience. Once you move the content to another carrier, [something is] simply lost, that's all there is to it. Now we face a problem in the long term. At some point, the industry worldwide will shift to digital projection, I think. I'd be amazed if it didn't happen. When it does, it will be the death knell for the mass production of a lot of film stocks. The industry will change its distribution system and a whole lot of things will change. What do we do as the range of film stocks that archives can choose from, keep shrinking and shrinking? What do we do when the time arises that we can no longer actually make new prints to show, when we simply have to show the digital surrogate?

Now, as an economic force we know we're not large enough to run our own film stock production facilities and so on. We will, as we always have had to, go with the technology as it is available to us and we'll adapt to it. So probably the most we would be able to do is to keep the artifact preserved as long as it is usable. Now, film can last for hundreds of years, I think we can probably establish that by now. Properly stored, properly looked after, and treated as an

artifact, like any other artifact. Like Mona Lisa, which is an artifact. Like museum objects like statues and so on. How long would we be able to project [film prints] in the original form? I don't know. The film might be brittle with age, maybe we would have ways of restoring it and making it supple that we don't have at the moment. I don't know. Maybe we will develop ways of being able to make new prints, possibly using digital electronic means. I don't know that either. But, we may get to the point - at least in mass production industry terms - that what we end up with is an artifact, and that's what we're keeping and showing when we can, so we do give some access to the original experience while it is possible to do so. Sounds a bit grim doesn't it? But these are the realities that are facing us.

Some of these [prospects] might be some distance off but we always have to think about the worst and possibly the best of what might happen and be prepared for it. [Some moving images] are created in the digital domain; it is increasingly where moving images are. Fine, that's where they are going to live and die, in that domain. You can transfer them to film, that's possible but if they were shot in [digital] form and you project them in that form, it's logical that you appreciate them in that form. What are the limitations of digital projection? It's not perfect. There is always a debate about how good are various projectors and the economics of digitalizing cinemas is wrapped up in the [economic] life of a digital projector. It's much much shorter than the life of a film projector. Film projectors don't wear out. There are many cinemas in Australia with projectors that are 50 to 60 years old and are [still] working perfectly. Why would we need to change? But digital projectors have a life of - what? - how long does your computer last? One year? Two years? Three years? Well, that's the lifetime we are looking at, and so the cinema owner has to decide whether to invest in that technology and [figure out] how he can get his investment back. And it's probably one of the things that have been holding the process up. Nevertheless, I think that's where it is headed. In the future, we would just have digital projection -but the economics are different.

Being a cynic, I say that one of the things that is driving all of this [change] is not the quality of what you get on the screen, which might actually be worse than the 35mm image. It's the control. You see, when the film print goes out [to a cinema], it's a physical item and the distributor does not have physical control over it. They might lose control of it, and they sometimes do. That's how collectors get hold of them. But once you get a digital file, you're sending it down a network to the cinema, you can code it and say it is going to be shown (say) on these three days, these times, and after that you can't read the file. [The distributor] has total control over the way the film is going to be exploited. That's got implications for archives, because there's no point in an archive having a file that it can no longer read or copy. It's a total negation of what you are there for, and since it's all propriety software, you are not going to know how to break the code.

So these are the real implications. Is there anything that's built into that file, that is going to make it inaccessible in the future to the archive? That's simply not an acceptable situation. I'm not sure if we have actually answered that question yet. That's an industry issue, a policy issue. I think it's got real implications. It's my view that when a film comes into an archive for preservation, yes, we honour the copyright. If the film is a physical copy on deposit, if it's a voluntary deposit, how do we honour that ownership? But it's the archive's job to preserve it, especially if you are spending public money on that task. The archive should be free in its own professional judgment to make whatever copies are necessary to continue the preservation [of the film or program] and they shouldn't have to ask anybody about permission to do that. A library would never ask that, if it preserves a book. It does whatever is necessary to continue its life, and we should be able to do the same. But not all producers think that, so the legalities of what we do is another aspect of it.

Bee Thiam: Do we have any other questions?

Audience:

On the question of copyright, if we have a filmmaker who has a huge collection of film prints and doesn't have the space for it, would a film archive take them in if there are some conditions such as, if the film has some copyright issues within a film print, say the music, or maybe its a compilation and there's one particular film that's not copyrighted to that filmmaker. Should the film archive take in such material and if it does, should it consider something like a safekeeping contract for that particular film title that's not copyrighted to that filmmaker?

Ray:

That actually brings up a number of questions, Karen [referring to person who asked question]. Look, I think whenever you take in a film from anybody, if it's a donation or a deposit, you need to cover yourself. You need to document what's happened in writing. So, whether it's an exchange of letters or whether it's in the form of contract - or whatever works. There needs to be a very clear understanding of the basis on which you take it in. Now an archive can take in films from a collector or from some individual who does not have copyright to the film, but the archive takes it in. I don't think it's breaking the law to do that. The issues only arise when you actually want to show the film, give access to it and so on. So I think there's a principle involved here and sometimes producers want to exploit an archive, especially if they're commercially storing their films and they would like to have free storage instead. This happens in Australia anyway. A producer can go to a commercial storage company, you've got some climate controlled storage places and so okay, I'll store my film. You know, the rental space is so much a metre, so much a month, and they keep paying. But of course, its a much better deal if you can come to the National Film and Sound Archive and say, "This is my film, please store it for free, and I'll just take it back when I want to". So you've got to have something to cover that situation.

What we now do, didn't always do, what we now do, is to say fine. First of all, this is the film we want. Okay, that's what it says in the [selection] policy. Secondly, when we take it in from you, we assume it's your physical property, that would remain the case and yes, we would store it and give it the normal care that we give everything else. If you want to retrieve it to have some laboratory work done, we would charge you a service fee, for whatever we have to do, and then you would send it back to us. But if you want to take it out permanently, we'll send you a bill for all the storage charges. The principle is, as a public body run on government money, we can't subsidize your storage charges. If you're using us as free storage well, that doesn't work. If you're handing it over, in effect, permanently, that's okay. That's in the national interest. But if you are really using us as free storage temporarily, then really you have to pay for it. That principle is written into the contract. So it actually discourages frivolous action and it discourages withdrawal. We don't want people to put something in and five years later come back and say, "Oh, we'll take it out now. Thank you very much and goodbye." That's really not fair to the public.

[There's something else we] over time were able to do, and this really depends on building relationships with producers and distributors. We would receive films from people. Oh, let's take one step back.

I don't know if you have film collectors in Singapore, but we have a number of them in Australia and that's where many of the films in the archive came from. The standard collector who has 35mm prints [actually] has a collection of stolen property. Right? Well, how do they get the prints? Usually, a [film] producer does a deal with the distributor and they say, we'll make 50 prints of this film and you'll handle the distribution and the deal is for five years and at the end

of five years, [we] want all the prints to be returned, destroyed or whatever. This would all be covered in the contract. How a lot of prints found their way into private hands is that at the end of this five years or whatever period it was, the man at the film exchange would pass a couple of prints to his collector friend, on the quiet. So it goes into private hands. Legally, its stolen property. [The person at the exchange] would report officially that the print was destroyed. This is quite normal. The film would get to the end of its run and the deal would be that the distributor would destroy the prints - and literally they would do that. So someone in the dispatch area would be told to go and destroy 50 prints of X and produce a declaration that it had been done, which they would give to the producer. And so the man in the dispatch area would do that, he'll [prepare] the piece of paper: and fine, it's all done. But what has he really done? He has passed some [prints] to his pal.

Now that's the only way sometimes that [particular] films have survived....because the prints passed into private hands illegally. Technically, its stolen property. How do we get over that fact? As an archive we want to ensure the survival of things, no matter what source they come from. Sometimes, collectors are quite fearful of anyone knowing how they got their collection. So on one hand we have to deal confidentially with the collector and say, whatever we get from you, we will not reveal the source. So we will tell the owner of the copyright that we have the film but we will not reveal where it came from. The copyright owner can enforce their copyright. They are legally entitled to do that but they will not know where [the print] came from.

At one stage we actually had a meeting with all the main distributors and we said to them, look, we want you to regard the archive as a kind of amnesty place, so that you can be confident that we are doing the right thing by you legally and the collectors can be confident that their privacy will be protected - and you, the distributors, have nothing to lose from this. You've only got something to gain, because you will maybe get access to films you don't [presently] have that you can enforce your copyright over. We got that agreement. So we are able to say to the collectors, this are what the distributors have agreed to, and you know we are sort of the middle ground. We're the amnesty. Now, we couldn't do that in the early days. We had to build up relationships with people, to feel confident putting that to them, and when we did, they agreed to it.

So, I don't think I've answered the question Karen, but I think, so much rests on the relationships that you've built up with people, and feeling confident to assert some principles. I don't think a well-run archive is going to illegally use films. So it's not going to ignore copyrights where they exists and where you know who the owner of the copyright is. You've got to get permission and so on. But it takes time, sometimes, for people in the industry to learn that, and to accept it and to trust you to do it. So much of what we do is based on building up trust, and in that case, it took some years to do it. But it happened in the end.

Bee Thiam:

Are there any other questions? Training.

Ray:

Yes, we didn't get to this. Training. In Southeast Asia at the moment, there are no academic training courses. Lucy [\[referring to person in audience who raised issue on training\]](#) has done the course at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, England. That's the only such course in Britain. There are at least three, possibly more now, similar M.A courses in the United States. There's one in Amsterdam, there's one in Berlin. There may be others. These are postgraduate courses in universities that you can do, but you've got to pay to do them. They don't come free. So, you have to be willing to make the investment. There is also, coming out of Australia, a course that is delivered by Internet, by Charles Sturt University. That is cheaper to do because you don't have to spend a year on a campus somewhere and you can do it by basically logging in

for the course every week, and doing what you need to do [online]. Those are the formal courses. All of them involve spending some money; they certainly involve the commitment of time and a personal commitment.

Now, what else happens is that organizations like SEAPAVAA especially, FIAF to a lesser degree, FIAT (Federation of Television Archives), run workshops of various kinds in various countries. The most relevant one here is SEAPAVAA (Southeast Asia-Pacific Audiovisual Archive Association), which has run workshops in most countries in the region. Sometimes they might be two or three weeks [long], more often they are one-week workshops on a very focused topic. They are mostly funded by UNESCO, which is why SEAPAVAA is able to do them. They are not an answer to everything, but they're better than doing nothing and it means that some people get some exposure to some issues. I think a lot more needs to be done. I think the courses that are run by the various [audiovisual archiving] associations need to be better coordinated. It's a bit of a mess at the moment.

But I think - this is a personal opinion - there needs to be a formal course within Southeast Asia, possibly run out of Singapore, attached to one of the universities, and one that covers, I guess, the same sort of issues, background, so on, that the existing courses do. The topics that need to be covered are fairly predictable. But it needs to be done in this part of the world, for economic reasons, so that people don't have to travel to Europe or the US to do it. But also, so it picks up the realities of archiving in this part of the world. There is a lot of work involved in developing [a course] and it initially needs a university that is keen to do it - because they won't make any money out of it! The field is just too small for that. A typical class size in the courses that I've mentioned is about 10 to 12 people. They are not great money-spinners.

But they're very necessary for us. They've only been around for the last 10 years, and it's a sign, I think, of maturity in our profession. Now you can actually get a piece of paper that says you have a degree in film archiving or audiovisual archiving. This was not possible 10 years ago. It gives people a formal frame of reference for the work they are doing, instead of just making it up on the job, like I did, and like people my age did. You can now do this, you get a theoretical grounding in the whole field, in the nature of the media you are dealing with, its history, the ethics, the philosophy, the principles, the development policies. All of these courses are intellectual as well as hands-on. It's relatively easy to teach the hands-on stuff, like how do you rewind film. It's rather harder to teach the intellectual aspect of it. You just have to focus on it like any other university course and do the hard work. But it's essential and it kind of gives a new platform to our profession because people who have gone through these courses are spreading out around the world and having their own effects in the archives they've joined. They're kind of a new generation that's coming through now and I'm delighted to see it happening. But I would like to see in this part of the world, a similar course that is adapted to the region and is taking in students from all across the region.

(Women asks a question [29:39 - 30:24 2nd half] - about devising courses with government funding and the alignment of goals to see this happening)

Ray:

I think there are a couple of issues there. If you're going to have such a course, people have to be able to afford to come to it for a start. Which raises one set of funding issues: where does the money come from? Well, maybe, some funding could come from ASEAN. ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information have done that to a degree with the [Charles Sturt University] internet course. Maybe UNESCO can help out. I think there are ways to explore; ways to have individuals do such a course.

How do you get governments to fund the work properly? That's a much harder question. The only way I know to make it happen is that the people involved in the profession have to be the advocates of change. Sorry, but I don't know any other way to do it. I don't think any

government or any minister would wake up one morning and say, "I know, I'll give 50 million dollars for a film archive". You don't need to work and it gets done! Well, that never happens! It depends on the government, but they respond in various ways to what they perceive as public pressure, or what would get them re-elected or whatever. It isn't just done because someone thinks that it's a great idea. And so it has to come from us. We have to be the ones that do the hard work to convince the people who control the money to change things. It's not simple and you don't get quick results. It varies from country to country. But honestly I think if it can happen in Laos, it can happen everywhere. Really. I mean that's a rare story for everyone. It's just staggering.

How do we do it in Australia? We have a large archive now, but back in the 70s, we had almost no archive at all. How did all that happen? Well, it didn't happen because the National Library or the Government said, let's give some more money to this or let's set up a separate institution. Everything that happens in Australia happens response to public pressure. By that, I mean pressure from people who worked in the field as we were doing, or people that were interested for one reason or the other in the health of the archive, and the health of the whole situation on film preservation. It is kind of a growing body of concern, a growing body of people who tried to figure out [what to do. They] initially started complaining to the National Library and then started writing to ministers. It started a whole lobbying effort and it spread out to film societies and all sorts of related groups who had a legitimate interest in having a good archive. I don't know how it works here, but letters to ministers in Australia has a statistical effect. If they get a lot of letters on a subject, they know - oops, I've got to pay some attention to this one! That's how it works, I'm afraid. It might take a while, but in the end [politicians and governments] respond to public pressure.

So every [archival] advance in Australia has come from grassroots advocacy. Unfortunately, it still does. I don't know any other way that it happens. And I wish it were easier than that. But maybe it's good that way, because what we have to do in the course of it is convince people that the things that are of value to us are really of national value. Who are the best people to [do the] convincing? How many here have ever spoken to a politician about their work? Oh... that's BAD. Congratulations to you! Now really, are you frightened to do that? Is it scary stuff? They haven't got two heads, you know. They are just ordinary people like us, with ordinary interests. You'd be surprised.

I think the first politician I [ever] spoke to who I found to be interested in the archive, back in 1970, was someone you've never heard of. His name is Chris Puplick and he was a senator, a Liberal senator, in Parliament. I've no idea how I came across him but I think I invited him over one day and in a very small way he was interested. And somehow he maintained the interest. Today, he's no longer in Parliament. He's an academic. He's the also the Chairman of one of our advocacy groups, Archive Forum. He's very important in the scheme of things, because he's kept his party connections. He knows the Minister. He knows what buttons to push. It's really important in the scheme of things. He is an ordinary person, a very approachable man, very articulate, a very good speaker and writer, and he has a very deep belief in all sorts of cultural values that are represented by the film archive.

[Personally] I think I'm a very poor politician, a very poor lobbyist. But I discovered that I could actually go to [politicians] and talk about these things and I would actually find some response. So I just learnt to do it: to go and knock on their doors, phone them up, try to see them - and do it repetitively. Now, I don't say that I enjoy doing any of this, but it was just obvious that it was necessary, and so you do what is necessary to protect your archive. In the various courses that I teach in, I try to make a point [of the fact] that we are all able to do that, every one of us. We will do it better than any professional lobbyist. Now there are people who are professional lobbyists. We are not and we shouldn't be. But we could be more effective because we know our subject, and we believe in it. We have a conviction about it and that's what communicates. Not the clever words, not the slick presentation. Just the sense of commitment that what we are doing matters. And so things change because people like us do that kind of grassroots work.

They won't change any other way. I think that's how you build a long-term base. So, we shouldn't be frightened to do it.

There's a kind of public image of archivists and librarians being very quiet and retiring people, who would like to just sit in a corner to work on something, and who just want to be provided with the things they need and want people to go away and leave them alone. That's true for some people. It should not be true for any of us. If we really are convicted about the work that we do, and if we really want to keep our promises to the people whose material we invited in, then we are obligated to try to create an environment in which their films are going to survive. That means building funding bases, political bases and stable institutional structures and all the rest of it, so that after we're gone, the work continues on.

It's what we should be doing - and this goes on to another subject, but I think too many institutions end up being built around a personality. When the personality goes, the institution collapses. I think it's a test of our professionalism that we [work to] make ourselves redundant. So in the end, when we have to walk away - and we will all walk away from it at some point - [the archive] keeps going. And I think that's the important commitment. Even though nobody will notice, and nobody will thank you, and maybe somebody will also take credit [for what you do]. It doesn't matter. That's how we keep our promise to the people whose trust we are inviting.

Bee Thiam:

I think we have time for one last question. Yes?

(Lady in white speaks [39:25 - 39:49 2nd half])

Ray:

Well, is it commercially viable? Yes, up to a point, because companies like CNN are doing this with their news archive. I must presume it is commercially viable or they wouldn't be doing it. But such a company needs to be able to delve back into a very large resource of material. What I don't know is what standard are they doing it to and whether they doing it for all their material, and what are their selection criteria. Another organization that does its own archiving - which presumably is commercially viable - is Disney. But it's obvious that Disney doesn't do it perfectly. When any commercial organization does [its own archiving], its limitation is the bottom line. It's what the shareholders will accept and their calculation of how that work can be amortized, how they would make profits in the future. It has to be; they have no choice. So what they do is limited by all these considerations.

That's why, what I call cultural institutions or government-supported film archives or non-commercial film archives, have a different perspective. Because they are doing it from a cultural perspective - and they are doing it not because this or that film is worth a lot of money, or that it's going to make a lot of money. They're doing it because it's important for other reasons, artistically, culturally or historically. They are preserving it for those reasons, and their standards are not going to be governed by commercial considerations - but [rather by] how do you maximize the survival of the image and sound quality over time? That's what would govern it. So I think while you can encourage commercial organizations to do what they can, I think it's the others that have to do all the rest of the work that would not be commercially viable and never will be. It's society investing in itself, and that's of course what we need to convince the politicians and our funding sources about.

There are some archives that work on philanthropic endowments, where some rich person - this happens [particularly] in America - endows a particular activity. But that certainly isn't normal in Australia. When it does happen, that's fine but it's also got certain limitations. So, if you want to be sure that something will be digitalized to the best possible quality, and is put into a long term survival context, I don't think that can be a commercial context - not even Disney. I

mean, no company has guaranteed survival forever. Well, no [public] institution does either but our [preservation intentions are that material will last forever]. We don't have to put a deadline on it. We need to try and create stable organizational structures and legislative protection that can allow that to happen, and that would never be a commercial situation.

Companies get bought and sold. I don't know if you follow the buying and selling of film libraries in the United States. But if you look at all the companies, the big studios that used to make films in the past, most of them don't own the films they made then. They've been sold to somebody else, and they've sold it to somebody else again. It's an absolute maze to [work out] who owns the copyright to a lot of this material now. The only one that hasn't done that is Disney, which interestingly had a kind of archival policy from the beginning. They've protected their own stuff to a degree and they don't sell it to anybody else, which probably is pretty smart on their part. But you will find they have not perfectly preserved everything they have made, by a long shot. So, even for them, it's a commercial decision. Does that answer the question? I'm not sure.

(Lady in white speaks again [44.14 - 45.04 2nd half]) - inaudible

Ray:

Well there's still many companies that do that, yes. I can't tell you the cost. You can only know that by going to them and asking, and I can't even tell you the specific companies, but I think you'll probably find them on the Internet if you go looking. What they have to do is run the film through a telecine machine and convert it into a digital file, and you end up with a file, a pretty large file. And so you need a server, which the file can reside. Yes, there are companies that do that. But I can't tell you the prices and of course the quality of the work they do will be related to the price they charge. You have choices about [for example] how many lines. Is it done television standard? Is it done to 625 lines, or 1000, 2000 and so on. That's the choice you have to make. But you can certainly get it done commercially.

Bee Thiam:

I thought it would be appropriate for us to end also on a note of what are some of the challenges and hopes you hope for the archiving community today. You've said that many people feel that the traditional role of a film archive is to preserve. You have, in the last one and a half hours, showed that besides preserving and doing archiving work, a big part of it got to do with how you are able to communicate the message and its importance. You have also mentioned on numerous times that the future emphasis for film archive is access. So perhaps do you want to talk a bit about that to end off this conversation?

Ray:

Well, there's no point in preserving anything if there's no access. It's a fairly futile activity. Which is not to say that a lot of archives in the past haven't had that approach. If you don't give access to your collection, you actually call into question why you exist - especially for public institutions. Sooner or later, someone's going to ask: all this money is going in, what's coming out? So you must give access. There are a whole lot of ways of giving access, of course. The traditional way is the research approach where someone comes into the archive and says, I want to look at these things and you retrieve them and help them in their research. But I think there are many other ways an archive can give access to increase its public profile.

I mentioned what Laos does. Among the ways which any archive can [use] is to produce DVDs, for example, which you sell. In Australia we produced, over time, a range of VHS cassettes, DVDs, CDs. Many of these were sold to schools, which use them in the classroom. So that educates younger people, and they know where it comes from. If you own the rights to any material [in your collection], you can exploit those rights. Not only in a product form: you can sell them to television - we've done that - where you do a deal with the television network and

get your material shown on television and get paid for it, and can identify where it comes from. You can use television and radio as outlets.

At various times we have had radio programmes, featuring a compilation of material from the collection. We've talked about it and invited listeners' input. You're engaging the listening audience in what you're broadcasting [using] a lot of old radio programmes, songs and sound recordings. Radio is a very effective way of reaching people. There are various ways you can get on television, too: you can approach the news [room], do something to get on the current affairs show, have someone who turns up regularly on a chat show with something to show and talk about. All of these things can be quite successful. They are all ways of providing excess.

[Then there is] releasing films on the normal theatre circuit: giving a new lease of life to an older restored film. Do it commercially. If you chose the right distributor, and help them devise a marketing plan and so on, it's quite possible. So there is a market that is developing for restored films. It's happening in Europe. It's partly based on festivals like Pordenone, and television networks start to pick up some of the older material that's in restored form and start to telecast it and produce programmes about it. There are quite a few of those now.

Restorers like Kevin Brownlow in England continually produce compilation programmes that highlight film heritage, highlight events, use old footage. Look at all the compilation programmes for a [particular] period, Second World War, for example. There's lots and lots of them. And they get better all the time because they keep coming up with new themes. A favourite of mine is Kevin Brownlow's three part series, *The Unknown Chaplin*, which [included] background footage of Charlie Chaplin, showed him rehearsing, showing him to be really professional. That has to do with the way in which you present what you've got. You don't just show it cold, you put it in a context; you wrap it up in a way that is attractive to viewers. You can even get [your own] television series made.

Now we did this in Australia. We actually agreed with [one of the commercial networks] to make a television series about the Archive. You imagine that? How boring!?!? We had a 12-part half-hour series called *The Australian Image*. It was built on the work [of the National Film and Sound Archive] - it narrated parts of our audiovisual history under 12 different themes, in 12 programmes. But every programme [also] went behind the scenes of the Archive and showed the work we did and explained why we're there, what our mission was. We thought it was a fairly successful series. It got two runs on national television and later on we released it on video and it went into schools. Each episode was 25-minutes long and fitted perfectly into a class period. We pitched it to that kind of level so it was very accessible and it was hosted by a well-known Australian personality: actor Bill Hunter.

How did [the series] come about? When [the National Film and Sound Archive] became a separate institution [in 1984], we had a big opening party and a launch by the Prime Minister. It was a big deal. And so we invited the television network to actually cover the event, which they did. They showed up with their cameras, and we had invited a well-known Australian actor, Max Gillies, [who was] very good at impersonating public personalities. The Prime Minister at that time was Bob Hawke, and Max Gillies did a masterful impression of Bob Hawke. We had them both in the same programme - and they both knew what was going to happen. [The Prime Minister] got up and made his formal speech and that was all fine, we all clapped and so on. And a bit later, Max Gillies gets up and does his impersonation of Bob Hawke giving his speech - and it was fantastic.

Now this made a wonderful television special, as it turned out all. So the network said, what about something else? What about a series about the Archive? I didn't [immediately know how that might work], so the producer said to me, "Can you just write something and give us an idea?" So I thought [I would] just map out the general plan of a [sample] episode - which I did, although I'd never written a [television] script in my life. I wrote 3 pages and gave it to him: he said, "Yeah, that's fine. I can see all the pictures and sounds coming to life." So from that point

on, we developed a series. There were a number of historians who were engaged to write the scripts, and I ended up being the script editor. I'd never done that before - but it was great fun.

Eventually the camera crew travelled all over Australia to shoot material in locations that had been important in particular films, and things like that. Then the series went to air. So I was actually involved in the production all the way through. I learnt a lot about [television] production of course, which was just very useful in itself. And I think we came up with quite a useful and entertaining series. Any archive can do this if you can get a television network interested, because the work we do is intrinsically fascinating and you only have to bring it out and show it. It made our collection visible and accessible, in little grabs, to the general public. And we need to appeal to the general public.

Okay, what would you do? Public screenings, of course - properly curated screenings of films is fundamental for an archive. Showing a film and giving a context to it; not just showing it cold. That's something commercial exhibitors simply don't do. It's the job of an archive to do it. Providing access to what you do legitimizes your existence: you can say, we're doing all these work, this is the end result, this is why we exist and we're proud of it.

In my teaching in various courses around the world, one of the places I teach is in [the Selznick School of Film Preservation] at George Eastman House in Rochester [USA]. Every year is we have a role play about publicity, because my thesis is that - just like raising money or talking to politicians - every archivist should be able to speak to the media themselves. Not some specialist or personality, but YOU. We divide up into groups, and [each group] pretends it is some mythical archive. The first exercise is to write a press release. We start off with some [source] information, and the basic assumption is the mythical archive has found a film, restored it and is having a big public premiere of the new restored version, which is [going to be] a big deal.

[The first task is to] write a press release about it. How do you write a press release? What are the rules? We talk about that. So they go and write their press releases. The following morning, we role-play television interviews. Each group chooses two people to represent their archive - to be the director, head of preservation, whatever - and we have a pretend television interview. I'm the interviewer. And we tape it so we can critique it afterwards. We then [role play] the television interview. Now, there are rules about how you do interviews, about how you prepare for them, and that's part of the exercise. After we finish and we look at the interviews, the rest of the class look at what was done. We say what went right, what went wrong, what did they do, what shouldn't they have done.

The real point is - all of us are media talent. We might think that the person best able to speak for an archive is always the director or always the public relations person or something like that. But it's not true. Because if we believe in what we're doing, we can all speak with conviction and passion about it, and radio and television are emotive mediums. It's the emotion that comes across much more than the facts. So if we as people are talking about what we're doing, we communicate what we really believe about our work. Even if our words are stumbling, and not very smooth and so on, it doesn't matter. We still communicate it. We should all be able to do that. There's nothing very clever or hard about it. The basic points are very easy to learn. We should all be able to articulate ourselves in that way. {People may say} that, no, you are not good at that, it has to be a professional person. That's not true. If I can do it, you all can. So we don't all have to be shrinking violets. We should all stand up for what we do.

Bee Thiam:

In the same token, I think it is always heart warming for us to meet people who are interested in our work - the librarians, archivists, and filmmakers. So please feel free to drop off your contacts so that we can be in touch for future events, so that we can come together again and

see what we can do for our committee. Thank you for being here with us. This event today, *In Conversation with Ray Edmondson*, is proudly supported by two very great partners that we have, one being the National Library Board, and the other who has been doing this documentation, the National archives of Singapore. We would also like to present a token of appreciation to Ray. We've come to the end of this session and we would like to invite our partners for tea outside. Thank you very much.