Special – *peer-reviewed*
Edited by Giulia Crisanti, Myriam Mereu, Emiliano Rossi and Paola Zeni
https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.2280-9481/22026

Cinergie – Il cinema e le altre arti. N.28 (2025)
ISSN 2280-9481
https://cinergie.unibo.it/

Reconstructing Histories: Mapping Artists' Film and Video on Channel 4 (1982–1992) through the Archives of LUX, British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection, and REWIND Artists' Video Archive

Nicole Atkinson*

Birkbeck, University of London, and LUX (UK)

Submitted: May 20, 2025 – Accepted: September 7, 2025 – Published: December 22, 2025

Abstract

This paper examines how archival research is integral in order to reconstruct the forgotten history of Channel 4's involvement and support of artists' moving image and independent film and video production in the UK between 1982-1992. As a broadcaster formed and operating under a unique publisher-broadcaster model, the channel does not archive its programming materials, meaning much of this history is left in a state of archival ruination. Examination of collections and counter-archives provides essential and overlooked insights into this largely eradicated history. These archives challenge the conventional hierarchies of institutional memory and highlight the importance of preserving marginalised voices and practices. By examining three pertinent archives containing fragments of the overlooked history of artists' moving image on Channel 4, this paper underscores the methodological challenges of working with the ruination of disparate archives, including issues of access, fragmentation, and the subjectivity of archival curation. It works to propose the need for a pluralistic approach to archival research for neglected broadcast histories.

Keywords: Archiveology; Archives; Artists' film; Channel 4; Moving image.

* nicole_atkinson8@hotmail.co.uk

1 Introduction: Channel 4 as a Bold Experiment

On 2 November 1982, Channel 4 made its first transmission, and thus began a bold experiment in British television. Unlike the existing duopoly of the BBC and ITV at the time, Channel 4 functioned first and foremost as a platform of exhibition, a role solidified through its inception under a publisher-broadcaster model. As a wholly owned subsidiary of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), Channel 4 was introduced after the 1975 Annan report for a fourth television channel was established, calling for responses from organisations and networks on how this channel should operate. The newly formed Independent Filmmakers Association took this as an opportunity to call for greater support for the independent filmmaking community within the UK, writing in their response that "in the UK neither the BBC or ITV have made any measurable contribution to encouraging independent production—indeed they barely seem to recognise its existence" (IFA 1975).[1] The IFA extended their criticisms of the broadcast milieu in Britain at the time, expressing discontent at the unwillingness of the existing broadcasters to express diversity within their creative output. They expressed the need for a channel that not only broadcasts material "made exclusively by the broadcasting organisations" (IFA 1975) but also creates opportunities for independent artists and producers to create works for broadcast television. Heeding the call for more support and exposure that was signalled from the independent film and video sector, the 1980 Broadcasting Act was passed, and as a result, Channel 4 was formed under a publisher model in 1982, funded by advertising and with a remit to encourage "innovation and experimentation" (Channel 4 2025) within the commissioning of its programming. This process of commissioning or buying in programmes worked two-fold, allowing for ensured creative integrity for programme makers through less restrictive processes of production, and guaranteeing full ownership and copyright of finished works to the retrospective production companies and artists.

Hopes for the new channel—and its commitment to artists' moving image and production—were high, with an established Independent Film and Video Department for commissioning artists' moving image and independent film and video productions, headed by Alan Fountain, and later joined by Commissioning Editors Rod Stoneman and Caroline Spry. In 1981–1982, the department's annual budget was £1.5 million, which rose to £10 million in 1990, totalling approximately "£50 million and around a thousand hours of programmes passing through the department" (Stoneman 1992: 127). An inaugural programme slot on Monday evenings at eleven o'clock, playfully titled *The Eleventh Hour* (1989–1990), was, and still is, seen by many as Channel 4's main output for artists' moving image. While the channel was responsible for approximately 260 moving image works[2]—whether through direct commission, purchase, or broadcast—many of these were programmed on the channel in this slot, partly due to scheduling issues and high demand for prime-time transmission slots. However, there is a largely untold story of work being transmitted elsewhere on the channel at the hands of others outside of the Independent Film and Video Department.

One of the first Commissioning Editors hired at Channel 4 was Paul Madden. After previously working in the television archive at the BFI, Madden was hired by the then Channel 4 Chief Executive Jeremy Isaacs in 1981 to oversee the commissioning of Single Documentaries, Media, and Animation. In speaking in 1985 on what he saw as the role of the channel and its relationship to experimentation, he states:

> [...] No single person was charged with encouraging innovation, although the suspicion lingers that the low-budgeted independent film and video sector—notoriously avant-garde by normal television standards—was expected to carry the major burden (Madden 1985: 46).

The published article was a continuation of a paper Madden had written on the role of the commissioning editor in 1984, a paper he had hoped would later inspire change within Channel 4 commissioning policy. On speaking the channel's remit of innovation and experimentation, Madden (1984: 2) makes clear that "enlarging the space for innovation within mainstream programming has lain at the heart of my commissioning deci-

1. Response from the Independent Filmmakers Association to the Committee on The Future of Broadcasting as led by Lord Annan, 1975. From the National Archives of the UK, London, file number HO 245/357.

2. As identified in the crucial archival mapping work I have conducted as part of my PhD CDA, *Dissent Interventions: Artists' Film and Video associated with Channel 4 1982-1992*.

sions".[3] Madden's vision was for Channel 4 to fulfil its remit of innovation and experimentation across more than a single department. As Madden suggests—and much like the responsibility to innovate fell on only a handful of commissioning editors—how the history becomes attached to single figures who championed this work further perpetuates the dominant narrative that pervades this broadcast history. Inaugural Channel 4 Chief Executive Officer Jeremy Isaacs underscores the same legacy in his 1989 memoir, *Storm Over 4*. Isaacs (1989: 173) states, "every Monday evening in *The Eleventh Hour*, at eleven pm, Channel 4 showed the stuff with the best claim to meet Parliament's command that we encourage innovation and experiment". Unsurprisingly, the cultural memory of artists' moving image on Channel 4 has been reduced to the same *ghettoisation* that the channel itself afforded to this innovative material towards the latter end of the 1980s.

A combination of Channel 4's unique commissioning policy, the lack of archive because of this, and the "ghettoisation" of moving image on the channel, this history remains entangled, sprawling, and disparate; existing in a vast multitude of archives and collections. Over recent years, there has been a great deal of documentation published, both scholarly and otherwise, on the formation of Channel 4 and its first decade of operations (Hobson 2007; Brown 2022). Ingrained in the wider cultural memory is an understanding of Channel 4's role as a facilitator of innovation and experimentation on British broadcast television, disrupting the duopoly of ITV and BBC. However, what is missing from this dominant narrative is the overlooked and neglected history of Channel 4's role in facilitating and supporting independent film and video culture in the UK. A pioneering new platform for artists and programme-makers, the channel was responsible for the commission, production, and exposure of over 260 moving image works from 1982 to 1992. While the moving image works exist within multiple archives and collections, much of the contextual history behind their production and broadcast has been left within a state of archival ruination, scattered across a multitude of collections. This then begs the question, how can the forgotten history of artists' moving image on Channel 4 be recovered, retrieved, and reclaimed?

This paper adopts a triangulated approach, using Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* (1989: 7), Carolyn Steedman's reflections on the archive (2001: 2), and Catherine Russell's theorisation of *archiveology* (2018: 11) to frame a historiographic approach that concentrates on the fragility and partiality of memory in neglected broadcast histories. Nora's distinction between memory and history positions archives as compensatory *sites of memory*, markers that respond to the erosion of lived communal memory within dominant historical practices (1989). Steedman (2001), in turn, emphasises the emotional and material labour involved in working with archives, arguing that historians engage not only with the material documents themselves, but with the absences, silences, and desires to reconstitute forgotten narratives and voices. Russell (2018) extends these concerns by conceptualising archiveology as a critical language of archival reuse—one that treats the archive not as a sealed repository but as an open, reassembled field of memory, capable of disruption and reinterpretation. Taken together, these three thinkers create a methodology that embraces fragmentation and instability as productive tools, acknowledging the omission of archives, and championing the creation and use of counter-archives that are pertinent in reconstituting forgotten and overlooked histories.

This triangulated approach is particularly appropriate in tracing ephemeral forms of artists' moving image on television, where institutional records, personal recollections, and scattered media traces form a dispersed and uneven historical terrain. In the case of Channel 4's involvement, production, and support of artists' moving image from 1982 to 1992, the history exists across a wide field of counter-archives that are not neutral depositories but actively shape how this history is remembered, within the power structures that frame these collections. Emphasis within this paper is placed on three pertinent archives that each contain, contribute, and challenge the history of artists' film and moving image on Channel 4, questioning how this history has been neglected in orthodox narratives. In surveying the archival ruination of artists' moving image on Channel 4 through these archives, a comprehensive understanding of the broadcaster's role in facilitating moving image culture in the UK comes to light. It is within this triangulation between Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, Steedman's highlighting of archival omission and subjectivity, and Russell's archiveology that the importance of counter-archives in reconstructing forgotten narratives of broadcast television comes to light. The act of archival reconstruction functions as a response to the fading of the lived memory of this pivotal moment in broadcast history and

3. Paper circulated within Channel 4 for institutional consideration in 1984 till "Dangerous Visions", from the personal collection of Paul Madden.

independent film and video production and exhibition in the UK. Reconstituting this history through archival extraction not only solidifies the important narrative of artists' moving image on Channel 4 but also works to offer a new methodology for uncovering forgotten broadcast histories.

2 Archival Excavation as Methodology

In order to understand the need to implement a pluralistic approach when conducting archival excavation, and to further understand how this assists in uncovering forgotten broadcast histories, it is important to situate the archive as an institutionalised site of memory (Nora 1989: 12), one that is bound by the power structures and subjectivity inherent to its construction (Steedman 2018: 68), and that can act as a location for disruption and reinterpretation (Russell 2018: 12). To Nora, and against popular misconception, history is inherently sceptical of memory, with its primary objective being to suppress and obliterate it. He states that "without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep them 'memories' away" (Nora 1989: 12), referring to the objectivity of history and its destruction of the subjectivity of memory. Nora (1989: 22) continues, elaborating on the distinction between history and memory by stating that "memory attaches itself to sites, whereas history attaches itself to events". For Nora, the archive symbolises the fragmentation and institutionalisation of memory, both an attempt at creating history whilst eradicating memory. He stresses the need for *lieux de mémoire* to preserve the memories that have been eradicated from collective consciousness. This is essential in the discussion of artists' moving image on Channel 4, a history that has, up until this point, been largely written out of dominant, mainstream histories. The erasure of this overlooked history is often perpetuated by the archive, framed by its own unique organisational structures that often decontextualise moving image work. Within building a collective *lieu de mémoire* through archival mapping, a comprehensive history is contextualised and formed.

The importance of context and the preservation of memory when adopting a pluralistic approach to archival histories is echoed within Carolyn Steedman's conceptualisation of the archive as both a material site and an imaginative construct. As Steedman (2001: 68) argues in *Dust*, the archive is not a transparent repository of truth, but a place shaped by absence, fantasy, and the desires of the historian. Her emphasis on the fragmentary nature of historical evidence and the emotional labour of archival work resonates with the challenges of tracing a broadcast history that is often dispersed, under-documented, or institutionally marginalised. Steedman (2001: 68) places emphasis not on what the archive holds but rather on the determination of the historian to unearth the narratives that the archives choose to omit through "selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past". Within this degree of mediation, the archive works to mask as much as it works to reveal the stories of history. Rather than serving as sources of truth, archives are collections of stories, with historians tasked to derive meaning from the material remnants and *dust* of people's lives that are left behind within the archival documents. Just like this dust, the matter of history will never be eradicated, with the archive acting as the custodian of that which persists, likening historical matter to dust—imperishable and indelible. This archival lens is useful within this framework because it works to shed light on the space of lack within the use of a single archive to excavate a complex and overlooked broadcast history. Progressing Steedman's concept of dust leads to an investigation into how we remember broadcast histories and the dominant voices in control of narrating this history, scrutinising how an archive's collection influences the historical narrative through their handling and mediation of materials.

It is useful to underscore these two dominant schools of thought with Catherine Russell's use of the term "archiveology" as described in her text *Archiveology: Walter Benjamin and Archival Film Practices*. Within this third and final theoretical framework, Russell references the coinage of archiveology to Joel Katz's 1991 response to *From the Pole to the Equator* (Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi 1990: 11), but develops this further within a Benjaminian framework, describing film archives not as sealed repositories, but as mutable sites of meaning that can be repurposed and rediscovered to create new meaning. Russell (2018: 12) goes on to define archiveology as "the use of the image archive as a language" that enables history to communicate with the present. Drawing upon the work of Paula Amad to frame archives as incomplete sites for disruption, Russell positions the idea of the counter-archive as a site that resists the fantasy of completion, instead embracing ruptures and the notion of memory as fragmentary. While the official archive seeks to freeze history into a fixed narrative, stabilising dominant cultural memory and the authority of the institution,

the counter-archive, by contrast, works through disruption and re-interpretation. The counter-archive is a refusal of closure that reanimates dormant images, forcing them to speak differently in the present. By privileging overlooked fragments and revealing the archive's own fractures, counter-archival practices expose the archive not as neutral but as a living, contested field that can expose overlooked and forgotten histories. While Russell (2018: 11) speaks directly to artists' repurposing of archival film material within their own works, it is relevant in the broader case of rebuilding and reconstituting overlooked narratives within dominant histories, supporting the use of counter-archives as a way to "construct new ways of accessing and framing histories that might otherwise have been forgotten and neglected". In this framework, the term "archiveology" does more than interrogate archival material; it activates it, transforming collections into a communicative medium that speaks to forgotten histories.

For Nora, Steedman, and Russell, archives are curated collections embedded within their own power structures. Memory and absence are central and become intertwined in the unearthing of forgotten broadcast histories. Using archival excavation as methodology, one that makes the archival labour visible with various archives and collections, precarious and otherwise buried narratives within broadcast histories become activated. Their work supports a historiographic approach that values partial traces and minor narratives, and its use here allows this paper to foreground the gaps, silences, and affective dimensions of archival recovery as central to understanding Channel 4's cultural legacy during this period. It is within the archive's internal narrativising of history that this paper explores the need for a pluralistic approach when conducting archival research to reconstitute the marginalised broadcast histories. Through the excavation of the following three archives and collections, a new historiography of artists' moving image on Channel 4 emerges.

This paper acts as its own *lieu de mémoire*, a site of memory where the legacy of artists' moving image on Channel 4 exists through the collectivisation of materials that exist across patchy, sprawling archival locations. Archival mapping work is essential in consolidating and reconstituting this neglected history.

3 LUX, London

So, where does the story of artists' moving image on Channel 4 begin? Locating the moving image works associated with Channel 4 from 1982 to 1992 is the first step in reconstituting this marginalised history, and to do so, one must turn to established moving image collections. Operating as one of the largest moving image collections in the UK, the collection at LUX (2025) consists of over 6000 works by more than 1500 artists that span over a century. As an amalgamation of former organisations, London Filmmakers Co-op (LFMC) and London Video Arts (LVA), LUX builds on the legacy of collective practice and access that they afforded artists across the UK.[4] LUX operates first and foremost as a distributor, a key source for curators, programmers, and scholars to access and programme moving image material. While its predecessor organisations offered production facilities—including editing suites and filming equipment—LUX's focus on distribution and collection allows it as an organisation to further the support of moving image practice and discourse.

As many of the 260 moving image works associated with Channel 4 during this decade were created utilising the facilities at London Filmmakers Co-op and London Video Arts, the LUX collection has inherited a large portion of this material, which it keeps in distribution. In the debate around archives and their ability—or lack thereof—to preserve memory, LUX's role in the history of artists' moving image on Channel 4 is slightly complex. While LUX serves predominantly as a distributor, it does embody a historical moment of independent film and video production in the UK through its inheritance of the former London Filmmakers Co-op and London Video Arts collection. Reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's (1931: 19) musings on collections and inheritance as "the soundest way of acquiring a collection", the works from the respective former organisations embody important historical context within their very materiality. Several of the artists associated with this history credit the use of facilities at the London Filmmakers Co-op and London Video Arts within the closing credits of their works, making an obvious nod to the embodied historical context within the work. In this

4. The London Filmmakers Co-op and London Video Arts existed as two separate entities assisting in the production, distribution, and collecting of respective film and video works in Britain. In 1997, the two were brought together by funding cuts to establish the Lux Centre. The Lux Centre was forced to a close in 2001 but re-opened as LUX in 2002. Since 2016, LUX has been located in Waterlow Park, London.

respect, the works encapsulate the original "studio/home context" (Breakell 2024: 34) that acts as a form of mnemonic device that Nora refers to, a driving force that roots the works within the collection to a historical period of independent production, innovation, and creative ingenuity.

However, with reference to the specific relationship between artists' moving image and Channel 4, viewing LUX alone fails to contribute to a deeper contextual understanding of this entangled and ignored broadcast history. LUX's role as a distributor means works are viewed predominantly for their artistic merit and adaptability for film seasons, programmes, and exhibitions, available to view and subsequently be hired dependent on the "use and interpretation by the creator, by custodians and by viewers of all kinds" (Breakell 2024: 34). For a small fee, curators and programmers alike can hire out works, enveloping them into thematic strands and film programmes, re-contextualising and de-contextualising the work based on the desires of the user of the archive. Because of this, LUX catalogues its works based on artist or theme, as opposed to any connection or relevance to a specific historical broadcast narrative.

The LUX collection exists as a corpus of work ranging in formats: 16mm, Betamax tape, video, or digital file. Because of the precarity of the moving image work, viewing is typically relegated to their online player, allowing those with access to view works digitally and online. In this discussion of the materiality of the work and how the collection is accessed, it is useful to draw upon Elodie A. Roy's argument of the disintegrating film archive and how digitising film prints can, in fact, alter both the physical and historical imprints that lie on the surface of the material. Roy underscores that the physical decay of film stock—including videotapes—enhances the imprinted memory of the document. This decay signifies that the moving image material was once a living document, and any change in its photochemical state contributes to a transformation that influences how the archive is consumed (Roy 2024: 147). Roy uses the example of experimental and avant-garde film, specifically the artist's tendency to draw upon the film's own materiality within the work itself, which Roy (2024: 150) deems the "visual and aural parasites" that the audience is deliberately made aware of by the artist. She associates the life of a film work with its materiality, the celluloid print or videotape, and how each degradation or imprint onto the material over time further adds to the life and memory of the work. This particularly resonates when discussing accessing archival materials at LUX through the digital player, and it works on two levels. Not only is the intricate physical materiality of the work lost through the digital encounter, but viewing work associated with television histories digitally in this way instantly creates a division between the work and its original broadcast context. Within the LUX player, users are presented with an isolated viewing experience, free from any advert breaks, programme framing, or mediation from the Channel 4 commissioning editors. Viewers and users of the digital player are immediately detached from this history, with digitisation causing a separation between the work's imprint on broadcast history and connection to Channel 4, the viewer's material encounter with the archive reduced to the click of a computer mouse.

A prominent example from the LUX collection that illuminates the silences within the collection's connection to forgotten narratives is the work of video artist Akiko Hada. LUX holds several of Hada's works that were broadcast on Channel 4; *James Bonk in Matt Blackfinger* (Hada 1988), *Art Moderna Cha Cha Cha* (Hada 1989), and *The Fall of a Queen* (Hada 1991). It is only after carrying out an interview with Hada that it becomes clear that there exist two versions of *Art Moderna Cha Cha Cha*, with the one in the LUX collection being different to the version that was transmitted on Channel 4. The work is a 6-minute video art piece featuring two art historians discussing, in Spanglish, the work of contemporary artists, including a lesson in forging Van Gogh works by the late British forger, Tom Keating. Hada created each artwork as an obvious replica of the original, from *Fountain* (Duchamp 1917) to a blue canvas replicating the infamous paintings of artist Yves Klein. The version of Hada's film that was broadcast on Channel 4 included additional subtitles under each piece that are not present in the version held at LUX. In interviewing Hada (2025), she shared the reasoning that this version was made specifically for broadcast, stating:

> It was not made by these artists, we made them, but we still had to clear the rights, and half of the estates refused to be involved in something like this so we had to cut them out. The others also insisted that it doesn't look like it was made by the real artists. That's why we had to add 'made by Akiko Hada in the style of' captions, we had to make it clear. But I guess for the television audience, I guess most of them might not have that much knowledge about art history.

LUX fails to mention or reference the differing versions of the work on their catalogue listing for *Art Moderna*

Cha Cha Cha, therefore omitting the broader relationship between artists' moving image practice and broadcast television. While there is a sustained argument that LUX's commitment to preserving moving images works means they have a responsibility to preserve the original version that serves the artists' vision, it demonstrates the failure of LUX to archive overlooked narratives and memories attributed to the history of individual works such as this. The connection between artist moving image works and their contextual histories is lost within LUX in favour of preserving the artistic integrity of their makers. It is within other methods of historical excavation, such as oral history collecting in this case, that activate the silences within the overlooked histories of artists' moving image practice on Channel 4. As an artist who has been largely overlooked within the mainstream history of artists' moving image practices on broadcast television, Hada is a particularly interesting example of the lack that comes to light within archival research practices. Aside from the references made to Channel 4 production funding in the credits of her works, researchers would be presumptively unaware of the context of Hada's work or role within this history, just through viewing her work via the LUX collection. It is within a pluralistic approach to archival research that overlooked voices embedded in the history of artists' moving image on Channel 4 come to light.

Between its corpus of moving image work and embodiment of the history of independent film and video culture in Britain, LUX is an important entity within the scattered archive of Channel 4. However, the simplistic archival categorisation, lack of contextual ephemera, and the affected materiality of the work through predominantly digital encounters leave much of the history of artists' moving image on Channel 4 left to archival ruination. Considering Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire*, the LUX collection—comprising almost exclusively the artists' moving image works themselves—can be understood as a constructed site of memory, one that seeks to preserve a history that has otherwise slipped from lived cultural consciousness. Yet, in the absence of paper-based ephemera or contextual documentation—those traces of everyday bureaucratic and institutional life that Carolyn Steedman, in *Dust*, identifies as the often-invisible residue of historical processes—the archive is rendered fragmentary. Without these discursive remnants, the LUX collection alone cannot adequately convey the curatorial intentions, institutional frameworks, or broadcast contexts necessary for a full understanding of the history of artists' moving image on Channel 4. Instead, what remains is a partial and dislocated memory, preserved in material form but stripped of the supporting textures that enable deeper historical interpretation.

4 The British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection, Central St Martins, University of the Arts, London

In engaging with the silence that permeates the LUX collection as per Steedman's *Dust*, it is necessary to turn elsewhere in the efforts of reconstituting the forgotten history of artists' moving image on Channel 4. A significant archival depository that contains fragments of the history of artists' moving image on Channel 4 is the British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London. The collection was established in 2000 by David Curtis, former film officer for Arts Council England. Upon leaving his former role, he was offered a research position at Central Saint Martins by filmmaker Malcolm Le Grice, including the opportunity to archive and preserve the materials associated with Curtis's time at the Arts Council. From 1982 to 1992, the Arts Council England contributed to artists' moving image on Channel 4 through joint commissioning schemes and grants, including *The Dazzling Image I* (1990-1990), *The Dazzling Image II* (1992-1992), and *Animate! Award* (1990-2004), a scheme awarding funding and transmission for finished work for new and upcoming animators in Britain.

Starting as a repository for materials from Arts Council England and their contribution to the production of artists' film and moving image, the archive currently holds almost 5,500 moving image materials, 322 film and video posters, over 2.500 images, and hundreds of publications and books. Curtis's role at Central Saint Martins offered a unique opportunity to preserve the materials associated with artists' moving image on Channel 4, contributing to a largely forgotten narrative. In a similar vein to that of LUX and their history with organisations such as London Filmmakers Co-op and London Video Arts, Curtis' relationship with artists' film—and specifically Channel 4—offers subjectivity to the collection that intensifies its position in contributing to the creation of a *lieu de mémoire* of artists' moving image and Channel 4. Unlike the institutional history carried

throughout LUX, the British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection speaks to Steedman's concept of archives as collections of stories, materials, and traces of past lives, thereby highlighting the anecdotal and subjective within these collections. Containing more than just moving image materials, the archive consists of publications, images, correspondence, programme notes, and other paper-based ephemera, some of which brandish handwritten comments which contribute to this concept of subjectivity that runs throughout not only this archive, but this history as a whole.

It is crucial to consider Curtis's role in the creation of the archive and how his involvement in facilitating independent film and video production is inscribed within the archive itself. The British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection functions as more than a repository of materials; it operates as a *lieu de mémoire* in Nora's sense—a site where cultural memory is symbolically anchored in response to the erosion of lived experience. Rather than a neutral assemblage of moving image artefacts, the collection embodies the memory of Curtis and the network of artists and institutions he was connected to. From handwritten notes and ink marks on programme drafts to detailed correspondence with Channel 4 commissioners, Curtis's presence within this history exists in the archive, both physically and symbolically. The archive is transformed into a constructed memory site, where the archival material simultaneously documents and commemorates the legacy of artists' moving image on Channel 4. As such, Curtis's role is not only historical but memorial: embedded within the affective and symbolic layers of the archive itself.

Encountering the archive offers a deeper material connection to this history, from initial entry into the collection to viewing moving image materials within the collection. To access materials within the collection, an appointment must be made between the researcher and the current archivist and research fellow, Steven Ball, to visit the collection. When requesting access, the user must inquire into what materials or area of focus they are interested in. This interaction offers a unique opportunity to access materials that may otherwise be overlooked by the researcher, and thus inevitably shape and influence the researcher's material encounters with the archive. With regards to Steedman's *Dust*, the invisible archival labour that shapes the collection's narrative becomes visible, highlighting the significance of the role of the archivist, and shaping the material encounter and understanding of the researcher and user of the archive. To a degree, the researcher is given privileged access to parts of the archive that they may have previously overlooked. The silences within archival excavation become smaller through interactions such as these, stressing the importance of what archival scholar Sue Breakell deems "a triangulated and dynamic relationship [...] Between user—or viewer-participant—creator and the archive itself" (Breakell 2024: 34). It is within the privileged access facilitated by the relationship of archive user and archivist such as these that the neglected archival histories really come to the fore.

It is not only through encounters with the archivist that one experiences heightened material engagement—one that contributes to filling the silence of artists' moving image and Channel 4 that permeates broadcast histories—but within the moving image materials themselves and how they are viewed at the collection. The collection holds several of the 260 moving image works associated with Channel 4, most notably the aforementioned *The Dazzling Image II* series (1992–1992). A joint funding scheme by the BFI, Arts Council England, and Channel 4, the programme funded emerging and new filmmakers to experiment with video and film formats. Each programme was introduced by a well-known personality with a connection to the theme of each programme, from the likes of Derek Jarman,[5] Ken Livingstone,[6] and Benjamin Zephaniah.[7] Foregrounding a moment when television became a site for experimental visual language, the series allowed artists to explore queer histories, challenge representations of the body, and subvert political and religious narratives. From bold formal experimentation to the subversion of mainstream genres, these moving image works demonstrated the power of broadcast television as a space for artistic intervention. Viewing the work in the British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection, the archive user is invited to sit at a television monitor, inserting the off-recording VHS tapes into the player, and watching the whole packaged programme, including title sequence and advert breaks. A more authentic material encounter than that which is offered at LUX, the British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection replicates a viewing experience that echoes the original transmission of the work on broadcast television. Instead of viewing works digitally through an online platform, archive users come close

5. Aired on 20 July 1992.

6. Aired on 8 June 1992.

7. Aired on 26 June 1992.

to experiencing the work as intended on Channel 4, viewing the work in its packaged programme slot, broken up with adverts, and replicating the original transmission. Viewing the works in this manner also gives the archive user or researcher key insight into the multitude of ways in which moving image was handled by the broadcaster, through the framing of the works and the contextualisation of the pieces through the inclusion of a presenter. Additionally, it speaks to the culture of artists' moving image production at the time, the relationship between the medium and the broader cultural memory through featuring prominent British figures to present, including the then Labour MP Ken Livingstone. While it is of course important for the works themselves to be preserved as is carried out by the work of LUX, it is archival practice such as this that speaks to the ways counter-archives reframe histories that may otherwise be overlooked (Russell 2018: 13).

The British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection is not simply a repository of documents but a curatorial site where memory is actively shaped and mediated through the materials it holds and the heightened engagement of the archive with the user through interaction with the archivist. Its significance lies in how it functions as a *lieu de mémoire* in Nora's sense: a constructed space that compensates for the fading of lived, institutional memory surrounding Channel 4's support of artists' moving image through the collection of Curtis' personal effects relating to artists' moving image on Channel 4. The presence of handwritten annotations, correspondence, programme drafts, and Arts Council England documentation situates the archive as a site of authorial inscription, where remnants of partial, affective traces of this contested and overlooked broadcast history are found. As Steedman reminds us, what is found in the archive is always shaped by what is missing. The British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection thus becomes vital not only for its content, but for how it makes visible the silences, selections, and subjectivities that structure the archival record of this cultural moment. It is an essential counter-archival depository that contributes to unearthing the unwritten history of artists' moving image on Channel 4.

5 REWIND Artists' Video, Duncan Jordanstone College of Art

The final archive that contains key fragments of the neglected history of artists' moving image on Channel 4 is the REWIND Artists' Video, based at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, University of Dundee. Established in 2004, REWIND was formed under the receipt of an Arts and Humanities Research Council grant by video artist and academic Stephen Partridge. The collection, focusing predominantly on video art created, produced, and exhibited throughout the 1970s and 1980s, was conceived out of a lack of attention to artists' video work in the UK. While it serves as an important historical resource, it is essential to acknowledge, as with the LUX and British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection, the subjective curatorial choices that shape what is preserved and what is excluded—highlighting Steedman's assertion that archival work is always entangled with absence, desire, and interpretive labour. The artists included within REWIND are emblematic of Partridge's own contribution to this history as a video artist, being mainly artists and practitioners who worked alongside Partridge, including those associated with his former production company, Fields and Frames Productions.

Like LUX, the moving image materials held within the collection are accessible digitally. Through a quick email exchange with archivist Adam Lockhart, the user can access the digitised moving image works through a password-protected Vimeo channel, including the largely forgotten Channel 4 series *Dadarama* (1985–1985). Viewing these works digitally raises the previous issue of digitising and its effects on erasing historical materiality by separating the work from its broadcast context. However, what is most remarkable within REWIND is the well-established digital collection of paper-based ephemera and documents. Including interviews, press packets, contracts, production documents, and advertising material, REWIND embodies a comprehensive view into artists' video practices, with all documents available as downloadable PDFs. It is within this extensive collection of ephemera that the moving image materials in the collection are contextualised, the silences behind their broadcast histories filled by documentation about the work's production and transmission. Through exploring the extent of the collection, a wider material history of artists' moving image on Channel 4 comes to light. One piece that is particularly effective in capturing the history of artists' moving image on broadcast television is a Channel 4 technician's report for the transmission of *EETC* (David Larcher 1986). The document details the technical exemptions required for the broadcast of the work, with the Channel 4 technician describing the work as "arty play, full of poor-quality film, effects & experimental techniques"

(REWIND Artists' Video Archive 1986). Technical exemption required, with a second unnamed technician expressing his confusion at the piece by simply noting "What!!" (REWIND Artists' Video Archive 1986). This archival material holds significant relevance as it not only reflects Channel 4's approach and understanding of artists' moving image but also serves as an example of a particularly enriching material encounter within the archive. It encapsulates the distinctive broadcast history of these moving image works and further intertwines the moving image material with this complex historical narrative, whilst simultaneously celebrating archival ephemera for their ability to enrich this overlooked historiography.

REWIND's focus on collecting and preserving video art speaks directly to Russell's theory of archiveology, not only within its role as a counter-archive, but within the work in the collection itself. The scratch video works of the duos Duvet Brothers and Gorilla Tapes repurpose archival footage from mainstream media, using news reportage to critique the dominant political ideology of the time. In particular, the video work *Blue Monday* (Duvet Brothers 1984) includes a montage of edited news footage of Thatcherite Britain, criticising the austerity of the 1980s Conservative British government. Preserving works that challenge dominant narratives such as this positions the REWIND collection as a counter-archive of overlooked cultural memory that serves as essential in not only reconstituting the forgotten history of artists' moving image on broadcast television but also speaks to present-day political counter movements.

The *Dadarama* series is a further key example of the importance of REWIND for its role in reconstituting the relationship between artists' moving image and Channel 4. A relatively ignored and unwritten output of experimental work on Channel 4, *Dadarama* was an early example of innovation of Channel 4 that did not fall into the aforesaid ghettoisation that framed much of the moving image on the channel. REWIND contains a multitude of documents of the series—inherited from producer Anna Ridley—including a press release from 1985 detailing Ridley's intent for the series. Ridley (1985: 1) states:

> Artists of different persuasions were invited to make works for broadcast, using the context of television and the medium of video. Several important conditions were negotiated and accepted by the commissioning editor, Paul Madden. Namely: that the artists could determine the form and duration of the work... The work was to appear in its own right and not be framed within a programme... I have endeavoured for a nearly decade to bring this idea to fruition. It took the advent of Channel 4 to make this possible.

By uncovering essential contextual information such as this, a detailed understanding of Channel 4's role in facilitating artists' work begins to unfold. Capturing memories such as this allows for a rewriting and reconstituting of this forgotten broadcast history. Due to the extent of the collection of paper-based and personal artist materials, REWIND is situated as an integral collection in the archival framework of artists' moving image of Channel 4. Moreover, following Nora's theorisation of *lieu de mémoire*, REWIND should be considered as not simply an archive, but as a constructed site of memory and counter-archive. In the archive's holdings of paper-based ephemera sourced directly from artists who worked with Partridge, REWIND responds to the fading of lived, communal recollection by materialising and symbolising a particular narrative of artists' video history. The collection not only documents but commemorates, with many of the included artists reflecting Partridge's personal networks and collaborations, particularly those connected to his former production company, Fields and Frames Productions. Like Curtis, Partridge's role in facilitating this history is embedded within the REWIND collection, with the collection working to fill the silences within the history of artists' moving image on Channel 4.

6 Conclusion

In tracing the history of artists' moving image on Channel 4 from 1982 to 1992 through the archives of LUX, the British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection, and REWIND, this paper has shown how fragmented, partial, and affectively charged the process of reconstructing neglected broadcast histories can be. When viewed together, these archives play a vital role in safeguarding this overlooked history through their respective paper-based ephemera and moving image collections. The history may be rooted within the archive shelves at LUX because of the distributor's ties to former organisations, London Filmmakers Co-op and London Video Arts, but the story neither starts nor finishes here. LUX's position within the broader history of independent visual

culture establishes the collection as a key resource of moving image material, a collection of artists' works that were once essentially "homeless" because of Channel 4's publisher-broadcaster model, with no resource for archiving. Viewing the LUX collection in tandem with archives such as the British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection and REWIND, forgotten memory is injected into the overlooked history of artists' moving image on Channel 4 through anecdotal memory, manifested both physically through material collections and via the mnemonic connection of the archivist and founder of the collection.

These archives, far from offering a comprehensive or neutral record when viewed in isolation, function as what Nora terms *lieu de mémoire*—symbolic sites that preserve cultural memory in the face of its evaporation. Each collection reflects the curatorial, institutional, and personal perspectives of those who have shaped it, foregrounding the fabrication of the archive itself and the power structures that support it. Drawing on Carolyn Steedman's insights into archival desire and absence, the act of research becomes one of navigating silence, loss, and marginalisation as much as documentation. Each of the three collections examined operates as a form of counter-archive as per Russell's archiveology, sites of cultural memory that work to disrupt dominant narratives. It is, however, important to note that these archives are not conclusive sites to locate the forgotten history of artists' moving image on Channel 4, but when taken in tandem with other methodologies such as oral history gathering, counter-archives speak to the overlooked narratives that challenge the dominant history of artists' moving image on Channel 4. Ultimately, the story of artists' moving image on Channel 4 is not fully contained within any one archive; rather, it emerges in the overlaps, contradictions, and gaps between them. This work demonstrates the value of a multi-archival approach not only in recovering overlooked histories but also in critically interrogating the processes through which those histories are remembered, preserved, and told.

References

A.L. Rees (1999). *A History of Experimental Film and Video*. London: BFI Publishing.

Benjamin, Walter (1931 [2022]). *Unpacking My Library*. London: ERIS Gems.

Breakell, Sue (2024). "The true object of study: the material body of the analogue archive." In *The Materiality of the Archive*, edited by Wendy Russell and Sue Breakell, 33–47. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429262487-4

Brown, Maggie (2022). *A Licence to be Different: The Story of Channel 4*. London: British Film Institute.

Channel 4 (2025). "Our remit explained." https://www.channel4.com/corporate/about-4/what-we-do/our-remit (last accessed 14-08-2025).

Cubbitt, Sean and Stephen Partridge (2012). *REWIND: British Artists' Video in the 1970s and 1980s*. Hertfordshire: John Libbey Publishing Ltd.

Ridley, Anna (1985). *Dadarama*.

Danino, Nina and Michael Mazière (2003). *The Undercut Reader: Critical Writings on Artists' Film and Video*. London: Wallflower Press.

Channel 4 (1986). *Technician's report for the broadcast of David Larcher's 'EETC', 24th July and 24th September 1986*. REWIND Artists' Video Archive, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, University of Dundee. https://rewind.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/146/2018/05/DL019.pdf.

Ellis, John (1982). *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video*. London: Routledge.

Hada, Akiko (2025). *Echoes from the Static: Voices from Channel 4 artists' film and video*. Zine published for Echoes from the Static film season in London, 23rd April 2025 to 21st May 2025, curated by Nicole Atkinson.

Hanhardt, John (1986). *Video Culture: A Critical Investigation*. New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press.

Hobson, Dorothy (2007). *Channel 4: The Early Years and the Jeremy Isaacs Legacy*. London: I.B. Tauris. https://doi.org/10.5040/9780755696666

Isaacs, Jeremy (1989). *Storm Over 4: A Personal Account*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Knight, Julia (1996). *Diverse Practices: A Critical Reader on British Video Art*. Luton: University of Luton Press.

LUX (2025). "*Our History*." https://lux.org.uk/about/our-history/ (last accessed 14-08-2025).

Madden, Paul (1985). "C4 Channel without a Cause." *Stills*, 45–47.

Mulvey, Laura and Sexton, Jamie (2007). *Experimental British Television*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Nora, Pierre (1989). "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*." *Representations* 26: 7–24. https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520

Personal collection of Paul Madden, "Dangerous Visions", Paper circulated within Channel 4 for institutional consideration, 1984.

Ridley, Anna (1985). *Press Release* for Riverside Studios exhibition of "Dadarama" & "Ian Breakwell's Diaries" 5–16 March 1985. REWIND Artists' Video Archive, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, University of Dundee. https://rewind.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/146/2018/05/DCUN001-8.pdf.

Roy, Elodie A. (2024). "Archival endings: erosion and erasure in the film archive." In *The Materiality of the Archive*, edited by Wendy Russell and Sue Breakell, 143–156. London: Routledge.

Russell, Catherine (2018). *Archiveology: Walter Benjamin and Archival Film Practices*. Durham: Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822372004

Steedman, Carolyn (2001). *Dust*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Stoneman, Rod (1992). "Sins of Commission." *Screen* 33(2): 127–144. https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/33.2.127

The Dazzling Image I, commissioned by the Independent Film and Video Department for Channel 4, 1990.

The Dazzling Image II, commissioned by the Independent Film and Video Department for Channel 4, 1992.

The Eleventh Hour, commissioned by the Independent Film and Video Department for Channel 4, 1982-1989.

The National Archives of the UK, London, HO 245/357, Response from the Independent Filmmakers Association to the Committee on The Future of Broadcasting as led by Lord Annan, 1975.

Webber, Mark (2016). *Shoot Shoot Shoot: The First Decade of the London Film-Makers Co-operative 1966-76*. London: LUX Publishing.

Nicole Atkinson – Birkbeck, University of London, and LUX (UK)
✉ nicole_atkinson8@hotmail.co.uk
Nicole Atkinson (she/her) is in her final year of her AHRC/CHASE funded PhD Collaborative Doctoral Award at Birkbeck, University of London, and LUX. Her research explores the corpus of moving image and artists' films and videos affiliated with Channel 4 between the years of 1982–1992. Through researching the commissioning of artists' film and moving image and enriching this largely ignored history, this practice-based project aims to animate the archival material and moving image works through curatorial practice. She recently curated a 5-week film season of moving image archive material, titled "Echoes from the Static".