

# Moving Images Between Mariupol and Lviv: An Archivist's Perspective

---

*Oleksandr Makhanets*

In February 2023, I received two videos in private messages<sup>1</sup> that touched me as a historian working with moving-image archives. I was already planning this text, and these messages confirmed my fears about the fate of film archives in the occupied territories. The first video depicts the inside of the Mariupol's Ukrainian House Palace of Culture (formerly the Palace of Culture of the Metallurgists), which had been looted. The camera shoots down a corridor and the foot of a staircase, where hundreds of metres of 35mm film are intertwined among scattered objects and garbage, and a large metal container for storing such films is lying next to it. The film strips also wind their way up the stairs. The camera approaches the bundle of films hanging from the railing and captures fragments of footage. The images on the films are difficult to see, but an optical soundtrack can be recognised. The second video was shot on the street nearby, with the camera looking down and capturing a 35mm filmstrip lying between the sidewalk and the lawn (Fig. 12). The cameraman picks up the film and shoots the image on the film up against the light (Fig. 13). This time, the buildings of a factory are clearly visible. The film is smeared with mud. The twisted fragment on the street is maybe 10 or 20 metres long, which means that it is no more than 40 seconds of footage.

---

1 For security reasons, I do not provide details about the origin and authorship of the videos.

*Figure 12: 35mm film stock on the streets of occupied Mariupol*



Still from a video by an anonymised author, 06 February 2023, still from 00:00:12. Image provided courtesy of the anonymous author.

*Figure 13: 35mm film stock on the streets of occupied Mariupol*



Still from a video by an anonymised author, 06 February 2023, still from 00:01:31. Image provided courtesy of the anonymous author.

The first thing I thought when I received these videos was that they were ordinary film copies of replicated feature films that could have been stored in the Palace of

Culture and once screened there. However, almost immediately, the author of the video dispelled my expectations by informing me that the films depict Mariupol and the Ilyich Iron and Steel Works in particular. This means that these are films that were most likely shot by Mariupol amateur filmmakers in 1960–1970, similar to the few copies that were kept in the Mariupol Museum of Local Lore and digitised by the Urban Media Archive (UMA) of the Center for Urban History in 2020–2021.<sup>2</sup> The museum burnt down in April 2022 as a result of constant Russian shelling of the city, and later it was also reported that local collections were stolen and taken to Russia, so it is not known whether anything has survived.<sup>3</sup>

## Film as an Object and Its Biography

In this text, I want to reflect on moving images as material objects in the context of war to draw attention to a different way of thinking about the sensitivity of images and their agency. Analysing the example of archiving and digitising amateur films from Mariupol, I will share my thoughts on the challenges that the archivist faces in the context of war, the new meanings that are imposed on sources of historical knowledge, and the role of the materiality of images. Based on the concept of 'object biography', I argue that images as physical objects are of great importance for their holistic interpretation. Their form is not constant and changes over time, which affects the way we perceive them. As a result of the war, archives and films are at great risk or have been lost entirely. This raises new problems in understanding the relationship between the original and its digital copy and gives the copy a new status if the intangible copy remains the only way to reconstruct the content of the once three-dimensional object. Reflecting on this problem, I propose to look at the digital copy of the lost object as an heir who continues to mediate its biography. Using the term 'object biography', I refer to a concept that has long been established in

- 
- 2 Iryna Sklokina and Viktoriia Grivina, "Un/Archiving Post/Industry", Center for Urban History, <https://www.lvivcenter.org/en/researches/un-archiving-post-industry/> [accessed: 02.03.2023].
  - 3 Kseniia Bilash, "Okupanty znyshchyly kraieznavchyi muzei u Mariupoli. Shcho z eksponativ vdalos vriatuvaty – poky nevidomo" ("The Occupants Destroyed the Local History Museum in Mariupol: It Is Not Yet Known Which of the Exhibits Were Saved"), *LB.ua*, 19 April 2022, [https://lb.ua/culture/2022/04/19/513936\\_okupanti\\_znishchili\\_kraieznavchiy\\_muzei.html](https://lb.ua/culture/2022/04/19/513936_okupanti_znishchili_kraieznavchiy_muzei.html) [accessed: 10.06.2024]; and *Glavkom*, "U Mariupoli rosiiani rozkradaiut muzei ta vyvoziat eksponaty v Rosiiu" ("In Mariupol, Russians Are Robbing Museums and Taking Exhibits to Russia"), 26 April 2022, <https://glavcom.ua/news/u-mariupoli-rosiyani-rozkradayut-muzeji-ta-v-vozyat-eksponaty-v-rosiyu--841089.html> [accessed: 10.06.2024].

the humanities through the work of archaeologists<sup>4</sup> and anthropologists<sup>5</sup>. This approach is based on the idea that not only people but also things have the ability to act and are important social agents.<sup>6</sup> The key is the ability of objects to transfer meanings that are not fixed at a single moment, but instead, being in time, space, and social context, the meaning of objects is constantly transformed through interaction with people and can be accumulated as the histories of these objects.<sup>7</sup> Another important remark for understanding the agency of things, as Christopher Steiner suggests, is that “they are infinitely malleable to the shifting and contested meanings constructed for them through human agency”.<sup>8</sup> Things are an integral part of social action and, thanks to their meanings and their form, can shape relationships and interactions between people. Thus, each object is interpreted as being in motion and having its own trajectory of life, and the study of their biographies helps reveal hidden connections in the social world.<sup>9</sup>

Attention to things and their materiality has also included the study of photography, which has opened up new perspectives for the consistent analysis of images as three-dimensional objects and their biographies. What is more complicated in this case is that images translate an active content that cannot be separated from the form. A pioneering work in this area was the volume edited by Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, in which the authors examine photography and consider materiality as an integral part of the image.<sup>10</sup> Although my text will focus on the example of moving images, the methodology of Edwards and Hart’s volume is similar, as both photographs and moving images (film) share the same principle of creation. In the introduction to their publication, the authors note that, for a long time, the way of thinking about photography has emphasised the content of the image over the physical form. Thus, images created by the photographic method are often perceived as a medium that is used purely as an illustration, ignoring the form and its functions.

- 
- 4 Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall, “The Cultural Biography of Objects”, *World Archaeology* 31/2, 1999, 169–178, here 169.
  - 5 Igor Kopytoff, “The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process”, in: Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 64–92, here 65–68; and Janet Hoskins, “Agency, Biography and Objects”, in: Christopher Tilley et al. (eds.), *Handbook of Material Culture*, London: SAGE, 74–84.
  - 6 Hoskins, “Agency, Biography and Objects”, 74.
  - 7 Gosden and Marshall, “The Cultural Biography of Objects”, 170; and Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things”, 67.
  - 8 Christopher Steiner, “Rights of Passage: On the Liminal Identity of Art in the Border Zone”, in: Fred. R Myers (ed.), *The Empire of Things: Regimes of Value and Material Culture*, Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2001, 207–231, here 210.
  - 9 Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things”, 67.
  - 10 Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, “Introduction: Photographs as Objects”, in: Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (eds.), *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, London: Routledge, 2004, 1–15, here 1–3.

The intention of the authors is to break with this approach and to draw attention to the material dimension of photographic images and the fact that the meanings produced by form and the meanings derived from content are inseparable in this case. This methodology places photographic images as objects in time and space, in a specific historical context, and studies their existence, how they are used, moved, transformed, and interpreted at a particular moment, and, ultimately, how they act as subjects.<sup>11</sup>

The life of an image is a dynamic process of interacting with discourses and layering different levels of meaning, and from this perspective, museums and archives, where the images may end up, are not neutral places but construct new meanings and evaluations according to their own strategies and political frameworks. Edwards and Hart call museums and archives 'arch-synthetic' objects, where images are subjected to intellectual and physical reordering: "they do more than put objects in their proper place or make place for them. They are active environments for participating in the histories of objects, active environments that ultimately shape histories, through the preserving contexts that they themselves constitute".<sup>12</sup> When it comes to digitising images to create new digital archives and provide access to these materials that have been largely invisible, another problem arises related to the materiality of the object. Its new digital representation, supplemented with metadata, becomes a digital surrogate of the original and is placed in a new digital environment (database) with its own context and order. The alienated copy is a separate entity with a different status, but it also changes the status of the original.<sup>13</sup> Although digitisation is not considered a preservation method in general archival practice due to the impossibility of reproducing all the properties of a physical object, a copy retains its relationship with the original and records its state at a particular point in time. In an attempt to deconstruct the established prejudice against digital versions of material images, Jasmine E. Burns draws attention to the need to give more weight to digital copies, arguing that reproduction does not deprive objects of Walter Benjamin's 'aura' but rather reveals the existence of the original, enhancing its meaning and value.<sup>14</sup> An additional argument for the importance of digital archives is the loss of the original, or its inaccessibility, as will be discussed

---

11 Edwards and Hart, "Introduction", 1–3.

12 Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, "Mixed Box: The Cultural Biography of a Box of 'Ethnographic' Photographs", in: Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (eds.), *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, London: Routledge, 2004, 48–64, here 50.

13 Emanuela Rossi, "The Digital Biography of Things: A Canadian Case Study in Digital Repatriation", in: Simona Pinton and Lauso Zagato (eds.), *Cultural Heritage: Scenarios 2015–2017*, Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2017, 657–669, here 666.

14 Jasmine E. Burns, "The Aura of Materiality: Digital Surrogacy and the Preservation of Photographic Archives", *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 36/1, 2017, 1–8, here 6–7.

later in this text. Despite the inability to reproduce physical properties, a copy can be the only substitute for a lost original and will, in fact, be equated to that status in terms of archiving.

### Three Amateur Film Collections from Mariupol

During 2020–2021, the Center for Urban History, together with the University of St. Andrews and in partnership with the Mariupol Museum of Local Lore, the Pokrovsk Historical Museum, and the Donetsk Regional Museum of Local History, implemented the project *Un/Archiving Post/Industry*: “Its aims were to collect surviving industrial heritage collections and create digital archives illustrating the work, leisure, space, and architecture, festivities, and everyday life of industrial cities, plants and factories, and industrial communities at work and at home”.<sup>15</sup> The materials that were collected included photographs, films, and videos that were stored in the collections of local museums and in private family archives.

I will focus on the details of the biography of three collections of moving images from Mariupol that were discovered during the project and included in the UMA of the Center for Urban History in Lviv in the form of digital copies. The UMA is a digital archive that works to digitise, provide access to, and promote visual, audio-visual, and audio sources related to the history of cities in Central and Eastern Europe that are, for various reasons, out of the spotlight of academic discourse.

The first collection is a set of 16mm and 35mm films made by Mariupol amateur filmmakers in the 1960s and 1970s, which was kept at the Mariupol Museum of Local Lore. Three 16mm films were created at the Zhdanovsky Metallurgical Institute film studio, while five 35mm films were created by different authors. These are two issues of *Screen of Pryazovia*, the newsreel of the City Club of Amateur Filmmakers, which includes reports prepared by different studios (Fig. 14). The film *75 Flameful Years* (1972), by the national film studio Flame, is about the connection between the history of Zhdanov (the Soviet-era name of Mariupol) and the Ilyich Iron and Steel Works and its 75-year history. The collection also includes the film *Electroslag Remelting*, by the Zhdanov Heavy Engineering Plant studio, and a film by the correspondent office of the Ministry of Installation and Special Construction Works about the installation of a convector at the Ilyich Plant (Fig. 15). Finally, there is also a box with various fragments of footage, the remains of the editing process that were not used in the films, containing short fragments of city views, the tragically known Mariupol Theatre, and views of the sea.<sup>16</sup>

15 Sklokina and Grivina, “Un/Archiving Post/Industry”.

16 Urban Media Archive, Center for Urban History, “Mariupol Museum of Local History”, <https://uma.lvivcenter.org/en/collections/147/videos> [accessed: 07.03.2023].

Figure 14: Still from the newsreel *Pryazovskyi Ekran* (*Screen of Pryazovia*)



Still from the newsreel *Pryazovskyi Ekran* (*Screen of Pryazovia*), 35mm film, no. 3, 1969, 10:47, still from 00:08. The newsreel was made by the Zhdanov City Club of Amateur Filmmakers and is part of the collection of the Mariupol Museum of Local History. The digital scan of the 35mm film is stored in the Urban Media Archive of the Center for Urban History, <https://uma.lvivcenter.org/en/videos/46886>. Image provided courtesy of the Center for Urban History.

In general, the entire collection tells the story of the city's history with a distinct emphasis on industrial production, which is a significant part of Mariupol's identity. The fact that local amateur filmmakers had access to professional 35mm film and the appropriate equipment during the second half of the 20th century is evidence of serious funding for this activity by the wealthy enterprises of heavy industry and, as a result, the scale of amateur filmmaking and the importance of film production for the city. Even though state support of amateur filmmaking was widespread in Soviet Ukraine, film studios mainly used much cheaper 16mm film stock and equipment. Films by Mariupol amateurs were not marginal at the time, and, being in line with propaganda discourse, their films were screened in cinemas and broadcast on TV; these filmmakers also participated in republican and all-union festivals organised for and by film amateurs to show their films.<sup>17</sup> Although the output of film studios

17 Oleksandr Makhanets, "Amateur Filmmaking in Soviet Ukraine: Collective Practices", *reesources: Rethinking Eastern Europe*, Center for Urban History, 26 March 2024, <https://edu>

in Mariupol was significant, as evidenced by the press and private paper archives of local film amateurs, only a few films were deposited in the collection of the Mariupol Museum of Local History. The reason for this lies in the lack of an archiving policy for amateur films in both the USSR and in independent Ukraine. In 2021, these films were digitised by the Center for Urban History as part of the aforementioned project, and the originals were returned to the museum for safekeeping along with digital copies, which were also digitally included in the UMA collection. After the occupation of the city and reports of a fire in the museum, the collection was likely lost. Thus, all that remains are digital surrogates of the films placed in a new environment with their own organisational structure and a network of connections between other digital objects with which they had not been connected before. They are separate entities that are represented in the virtual world through another institution that is not directly connected to the original material and place of origin. At the same time, copies acquire a new status and testify to the past existence of the originals, although their life as physical objects is over; in an intellectual sense, digital copies can be read as the next stage or continuation of the object's biography.<sup>18</sup>

The second collection of moving images comes from the private archive of Heorhii Kotelnykov, and its peculiarity lies in the fact that his films were shot in the 1950s with an experimental self-made camera and 35mm photographic film (Fig. 16). At that time, compact, small-gauge cameras were not widespread in the Soviet Union, so building the camera on his own was one of the achievable solutions if he wanted to make films. The idea of Kotelnykov's self-made camera was borrowed from the construction of a cinematograph that he once encountered at a flea market in Mariupol. The construction of the device was similar to those from the dawn of cinema in the late 19th century; it combined both a projector and a camera and looked like a wooden box with a lens and hand crank. The only film stock available at that time was photographic film, so he adapted it and invented his own format, which involved shooting in four rows with a frame size of 4.5mm by 6mm (Fig. 17). If shooting with a speed of 16 frames per second, up to 80 seconds of footage could be shot on a standard roll of film.

---

.lvivcenter.org/en/modules/amateur-filmmaking-in-soviet-ukraine-collective-practices [accessed: 10.06.2024]; and Maria Vinogradova, "Socialistická Filmová Tvorba vs. Gosplan: Budování Infrastruktury Sovětského Amatérského Filmu" ("Socialist Movie Making vs. Gosplan: Establishing an Infrastructure for the Soviet Amateur Cinema"), *Illuminace (Illumination)* 28/2, 2016, 9–27, here 20.

18 Rossi, "The Digital Biography of Things", 668.

Figure 15: Still from the film *Montazh konvertora na kombinati im. Illicha (Installation of a Convector at the Ilyich Plant)*



Still from the film *Montazh konvertora na kombinati im. Illicha (Installation of a Convector at the Ilyich Plant)*, dir. J. Kunts, 35mm film, 1977, 10:00, still from 00:08. The film was produced by the Correspondent Office of the Central Bureau of Scientific and Technical Information of the Ukrainian Professional Technical Construction Institute of the Ministry of Installation and Special Construction Works of the USSR and is part of the collection of the Mariupol Museum of Local History. The digital scan of the 35mm film is stored in the Urban Media Archive of the Center for Urban History, <https://uma.lvivcenter.org/en/videos/46886>. Image provided courtesy of the Center for Urban History.

Figure 16: Heorhii Kotelnykov's self-made camera



Image by author, August 2022.

In 2021, the filmmaker contributed three films he made on this camera for digitisation and, since they were nonstandard, it was necessary to find an approach to digitise them. This method can be called digital reconstruction, as each of the thousands of frames was scanned manually and then animated using software. Kotelnykov, in his 80s, saw his mother and friends from his youth in film for the first time since the time of his experiments. Still, in addition to its family value, his invention has a broader cultural significance for the Mariupol community and society at large, as it is a testimony to the technical creativity and pioneering practices of private amateur filmmaking, as well as to human interaction with visual media.

Kotelnykov's camera was showcased at the exhibition *Society with a Movie Camera*, which I curated at the Center for Urban History in Lviv in the autumn of 2021, and met the beginning of a new phase of the war there – unlike its inventor and his films, which ended up in blockaded Mariupol. During the tragic events of the city's occupation, the apparatus and the digitised copies of the films became, for me as their custodian, a kind of mediator of anxiety for their owners and reminded me of specific acquaintances who were out of reach and in extreme danger. More than six months passed before I found out that Kotelnykov had managed to evacuate and was in Ukraine in a relatively safe place. We managed to talk on the phone several times, and he was as happy as ever to receive attention for his invention and offered

to continue to store the camera at the Center for Urban History but regretted that he had to leave the films at home in Mariupol. Later, I received a message with a photo of a destroyed house – windowless and burnt – saying that this was the house where Kotelnykov had lived. It is not known if his films survived the fire and are still intact; if so, they are probably in the ruins of the house, and the images on the celluloid base – sensitive to temperature and humidity – would be decaying faster than usual.

*Figure 17: A fragment of original film stock shot with Heorhii Kotelnykov's camera*

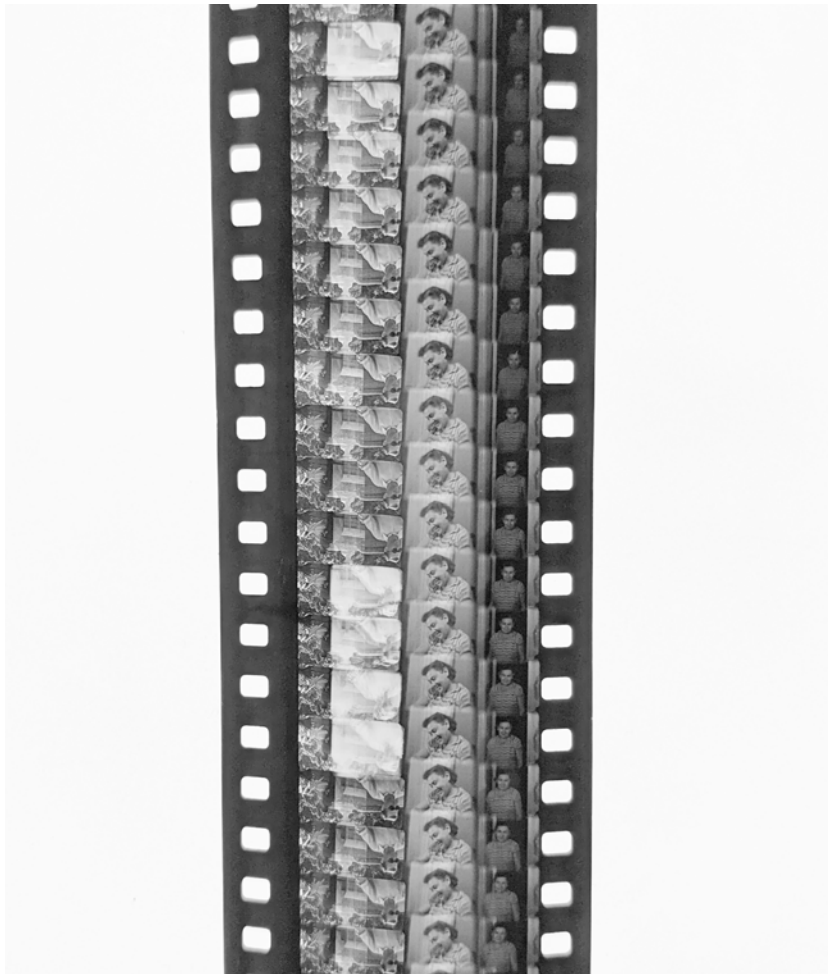


Image by author, July 2021.

The third collection, which was digitised and donated to the UMA, is also private and consists of 27 reels of 8mm home movies that document the life of a family from Mariupol in the 1970s and 1980s (Figs. 18 and 19). It also connects with specific people under threat. For security reasons, I am not naming the filmmaker who granted the films to the archive, as he remains in the occupied city. Fortunately, we eventually received confirmation that he managed to survive the most acute moment of the occupation in the spring of 2022. Unlike the previous ones, this collection has definitely survived, but now it is divided by the front line. Its digitisation took place in two stages: after the first portion of 15 reels was ready, it was returned to Mariupol and the next portion of 12 reels was sent to Lviv, where they remain to this day, without the possibility of returning and reuniting with the other films. Only digital copies were returned to the owner thanks to the available internet connection.

*Figure 18: A man with a movie camera at a May 1st demonstration*



Image by an anonymised author, 8mm film, Mariupol, 1974, still from 00:06:43. The original is part of a private collection and the digital scan of the 8mm film is in the Urban Media Archive of the Center for Urban History. Image provided courtesy of the Center for Urban History.

Figure 19: Mariupol Port, viewed from a ship



Image by an anonymised author, 8mm film, Mariupol, 1974, still from 00:03:07. The original is part of a private collection and the digital scan of the 8mm film is in the Urban Media Archive of the Center for Urban History. Image provided courtesy of the Center for Urban History.

As is typical of the home movie genre, the 8mm films document special moments in family life: celebrations, weddings, carefree walks around the city, children, vacations on the sunny beaches of Mariupol, and travel, among other things. They show the best periods of life in the brightest colours and, despite their undeniable conventionality, these images are real, following the notion by Jonas Mekas. In his film *Outtakes from the Life of a Happy Man* he says, “these are not memories, this is all real what you see, every image, every detail, everything is real”.<sup>19</sup> They are more real than ever before because, viewing them now, it is impossible to escape the thought that in the future the lives of the specific people imprinted on the film will be destroyed by war. These home movies are sensitive because of their private nature, but they become sensitive in a new way and acquire new meanings because of their physical contact with the tragedy of war, which is both common and personal at the same time.

19 NOWNESS, “Outtakes from the Life of a Happy Man’ (Excerpt) by Jonas Mekas”, YouTube video, 3:53, here 0:53–01:08, 22 January 2013, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGUT\\_4F2SRM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGUT_4F2SRM) [accessed: 10.06.2024].

## When Films Meet the War

Each image has its own material form of embodiment and, as an ageing object, it is sensitive to environment and time, as well as to the social context and discourses that determine its value. With its own trajectory of life, the image is in motion, creating a network of connections and meanings that are constantly transformed throughout its existence.<sup>20</sup> However, in the ordinary state of things and the peaceful flow of life, many of these processes are so stretched out over time that plenty of connections between physical objects of archival value and other actors remain rather weak, invisible, or insignificant. The stability of materials under conditions of sustainable preservation dilutes the intensity of interconnections, just as lack of disturbance slows down the discursive changes through which we assign meanings to these materials. In contrast, war activates the acceleration of many physical and intellectual processes in specific places, or in relation to specific places. Because of the Russo–Ukrainian War, we can see an exceptional concentration of transformations of meaning – in our case, of film archives from Mariupol.

First of all, two of the collections mentioned above were likely irretrievably lost due to bombings and fires. The videos I received in February 2023 show that the number of lost moving-image archives in Mariupol is much higher than I had imagined, and that looting and vandalism are also the reasons for this. The digital copies of the lost films kept by the Center for Urban History in Lviv, alienated from their material carriers, are perhaps the only way to see what was once captured on film – the past of the now destroyed city. This loss makes the copy more valuable, as it is the only way to transfer the images to the future. The ‘digital copy of the film’ becomes the ‘digital copy of the lost film’. Thus, the fact that a digital copy created for access and representation acquires the status of an original communicates the absence of the original source and its physical death, if we follow the metaphor of biography. Or, in other words, the digital copy inherits the biography of the original, along with the fact of loss, and continues to mediate it.

The digitised film archives from Mariupol are even more important in the context that these are not the only losses of the historical heritage of the city and its community; the films I mention are a small sample of what has been lost compared to the scale of what has been stolen and destroyed in the fires. The war turns archives into ashes and debris, leaving no choice and no possibility to sort out what is important for archiving and preserves the history of the city and what is secondary and worth less attention. Artefacts’ processes of decay, which could typically last for centuries, are accelerated to mere months or days. In this situation, everything that remains becomes incredibly valuable. Both the object and its contents are direct traces and evidence of the city’s tragedy and the gap that tears its past and future apart.

---

20 Gosden and Marshall, “The Cultural Biography of Objects”, 169.

Researchers will approach the preserved artefacts like archaeologists to reconstruct and imagine what happened from the remaining pieces. The alienated digital images will become documents of the existence of the celluloid films that depicted the city; at the same time, they will testify to what happened to the physical media.

The fact that the loss of the original materials and the digital copies' acquisition of a new status results in a shift of power over the object is problematic. As long as the Mariupol Museum of Local Lore remains in an uncertain status with no physical access to the city, the UMA of the Center for Urban History becomes the actual place of storage for the films and takes on custodial responsibility, which is inseparable from power over these objects. The UMA's digital environment subordinates materials to its own order and discourse, which can have an active impact on the meaning and interpretation of films.<sup>21</sup> Now they are inscribed into the wider historical narrative with a specific focus on the history of cities along with other collections, but detached from the local context. They are visible for certain audiences familiar with the centre but may be unseen by those belonging to other networks connected with Mariupol. To be able to comprehend all these implicit layers of biography of historical sources that ended up in the 'arch-synthetic' collection requires material literacy and media literacy, as well as an understanding of the context.

Despite the limitations and problematics of interpretation that arise when a digital surrogate of the original image appears in a virtual environment, this also has advantages. Modern digital infrastructure not only subordinates but also makes the object more autonomous and accessible to the source community. The community of Mariupol residents suffered greatly and incurred great human losses, and those who managed to survive and evacuate became scattered across Ukraine and the world. Others remain under threat in the occupied city. The digital environment has become an opportunity for them to reconnect, create their own virtual spaces, and regain their agency despite the distance and tragic experience. Historical heritage plays a key role in this, as can be seen in the following online projects that appeared in 2022: The History of Mariupol was created in response to the destruction of the Mariupol Museum of Local History and collects all materials related to the history of the city,<sup>22</sup> and Mariupol Memory Park is a space for reflection and an archive that collects memories, artefacts, and testimonies about the destroyed city, without any hierarchical order.<sup>23</sup> Both projects use digitised materials stored at the Center for

21 Edwards and Hart, "Mixed Box", 50.

22 Istorija Mariupolia (The History of Mariupol), <https://mariupol.dev-for-web.com.ua/> [accessed: 06.03.2023].

23 Mariupolskyi park pamyati (Mariupol Memory Park), <https://www.mariupolmemorypark.space/> [accessed: 06.03.2023]; and Ksenia Rybak, "Ruiny navchyly mene chomus pro mene samu'. Mariupolskyi park pamyati – avtonomnyi anarchiv" ("The Ruins Taught Me Something about Myself: "Mariupol Memory Park is an Autonomous Anarchive") *Commons*, 04 Decem-

Urban History. Digital objects, which are evidence of the materiality of the heritage of Mariupol citizens, allow the community to reconnect with their historical past.

The events of the war define new discourses that emerge about Ukrainian history in general and about Mariupol specifically. The tragedy of the occupation, the siege of the city, and the defence of Azovstal have gained an important symbolic place in the war's chronology and have become directly associated with the city, while detailed and prolonged media coverage has made millions of people indirect witnesses to the events. This process affects the epistemological optics with which we analyse the archives of moving images from Mariupol, not only in terms of the physical objects threatened but also in terms of how we interpret their content. Additionally, an important role is played by the effect of the photographic nature of the images; their indexicality, which may make films (especially home movies) seem unquestionably truthful; and the characteristics of the amateur footage, which enhances realism due to its ease and imperfection.<sup>24</sup> The content of the films from Mariupol became sensitive because they connect with the past and, to see it from today's perspective, one needs to look back and overcome the metaphorical gap: the tragic events of the war. Looking back and looking at the past in the films, everything takes on new meaning; all the connections coincide at one point. The linear chronology leads everything and everyone depicted to a tragedy that can no longer be erased from the history of the city and its community. Those who we see in films are not nameless figures or walk-ons from the past but living people who ended up in the epicentre of the war. These connections remain invisible if we take the historical sources out of their context and the physical films out of the specific time and space where they are located. Such a biased perspective on archival sources is ahistorical and historical at the same time. On the one hand, reading the source in this way considers the events that happened in the 'future', but, on the other hand, it pays attention to the entire biographies of the films as objects, rather than just being fixed to the moment of their creation. The comprehensiveness of the tragedy makes the films ambiguous; they are documents about the events that were captured by the camera, but also objects that are victims of war and serve as evidence of war.

---

ber 2022, <https://commons.com.ua/ru/mariupolskij-park-pamyati-avtonomnij-anarhiv/> [accessed: 06.03.2023].

24 Péter Forgács, "Wittgenstein Tractatus: Personal Reflections on Home Movies", in: Karen I. Ishizuka and Patricia R. Zimmerman (eds.), *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, 47–56, here 51.

## Conclusions

The approach to the analysis of moving images as physical objects opens up a new perspective on their role and meaning, which is especially relevant today, in the digital age, when the computer screen flattens the three-dimensional materiality of images that are physical objects. The context of war, due to the intensity of physical and discursive processes, as well as inaccessibility, uncertainty, and loss, allows us to see at an accelerated speed what an image as an object goes through during its biography (decay, ageing, gaining new value). It also draws attention to another kind of sensitivity of images – their physical vulnerability – and thus to the fact that as the material condition and location of an image changes, perceptions of it change, which is no less important than the content depicted.

The films from the Mariupol Museum of Local Lore and the private collection of Heorhiis Kotelnikov have been lost. One private collection of home movies that was digitised has survived, but it is divided: part of it is in the possession of the owner, while the other part remains in Lviv. All the digital copies of the above-mentioned collections are preserved in the UMA of the Center for Urban History. Notwithstanding that there are many limitations associated with the digital archiving of analogue media and that digital copies cannot replace the originals and reproduce all their physical properties, now the copies of the lost films have gained the status of the original. By using the object biography metaphor, we can say that the copy inherits the biography of the original and continues it, accumulating new facts, including the fact of loss. From this perspective the war becomes a significant and inseparable event that may affect the perception of the source itself.

At the same time, thanks to online access and the autonomy of digital files, the source community and the owners of the films have been able to reconnect with the city and its history in a virtual space. This is especially important when a significant part of the historical heritage and objects that carry the memory of the private or common past have been lost or are inaccessible. Preserved films, even in digital form, gain more weight and serve as tools for the agency of Mariupol's people.

For the archivists who work with these Mariupol collections, war conditions impose a special moral responsibility and obligation regarding the preservation, use, and interpretation of these films. Moving images that were moved from Mariupol to Lviv have become a moving trigger. The direct relation to the tragedy of Mariupol makes the content of the films sensitive. Although they were created decades ago, they depict events from the recent past and living people who are direct victims of the war and who are currently in danger. Their city and lives were destroyed. The films mediate this connection, adding a new layer of meanings to them, making them both evidence and victims of the war.

## Bibliography

- Bilash, Kseniia, “Okupanty znyshchly kraieznavchyi muzei u Mariupoli. Shcho z ekspozitiv vdalos vriativaty – poky nevidomo” (“The Occupants Destroyed the Local History Museum in Mariupol: It Is Not Yet Known Which of the Exhibits Were Saved”), *LB.ua*, 19 April 2022, [https://lb.ua/culture/2022/04/19/513936\\_okupanti\\_znishchili\\_kraieznavchiy\\_muzey.html](https://lb.ua/culture/2022/04/19/513936_okupanti_znishchili_kraieznavchiy_muzey.html) [accessed: 10.06.2024].
- Burns, Jasmine E., “The Aura of Materiality: Digital Surrogacy and the Preservation of Photographic Archives”, *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 36/1, 2017, 1–8.
- Edwards, Elizabeth, and Janice Hart, “Introduction: Photographs as Objects”, in: Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (eds.), *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, London: Routledge, 2004, 1–15.
- Edwards, Elizabeth, and Janice Hart, “Mixed Box: The Cultural Biography of a Box of ‘Ethnographic’ Photographs”, in: Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (eds.), *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, London: Routledge, 2004, 48–64.
- Forgács, Péter, “Wittgenstein Tractatus: Personal Reflections on Home Movies”, in: Karen I. Ishizuka and Patricia R. Zimmerman (eds.), *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, 47–56.
- Glavkom, “U Mariupoli rosiiany rozkradaiut muzei ta vyvoziat ekspozaty v Rosiiu” (“In Mariupol, Russians Are Robbing Museums and Taking Exhibits to Russia”), 26 April 2022, <https://glavcom.ua/news/u-mariupoli-rosiyani-rozkradayut-muzeji-ta-vivozyat-ekspozaty-v-rosiyu--841089.html> [accessed: 10.06.2024].
- Gosden, Chris, and Yvonne Marshall, “The Cultural Biography of Objects”, *World Archaeology* 31/2, 1999, 169–178.
- Hoskins, Janet, “Agency, Biography and Objects”, in: Christopher Tilley et al. (eds.), *Handbook of Material Culture*, London: SAGE, 74–84.
- Istoria Mariupolia (The History of Mariupol), <https://mariupol.dev-for-web.com.ua/> [accessed: 06.03.2023].
- Kopytoff, Igor, “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process”, in: Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 64–92.
- Makhanets, Oleksandr, “Amateur Filmmaking in Soviet Ukraine: Collective Practices”, *reesources: Rethinking Eastern Europe, Center for Urban History*, 26 March 2024, <https://edu.lvivcenter.org/en/modules/amateur-filmmaking-in-soviet-ukraine-collective-practices/> [accessed: 10.06.2024].
- Mariupolskyi park pamyati (Mariupol Memory Park), official website, <https://www.mariupolmemorypark.space/> [accessed: 06.03.2023].

- NOWNESS, “‘Outtakes from the Life of a Happy Man’ (Excerpt) by Jonas Mekas”, YouTube video, 3:53, 22 January 2013, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGUt\\_4F2SRM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGUt_4F2SRM) [accessed: 10.06.2024].
- Rossi, Emanuela, “The Digital Biography of Things: A Canadian Case Study in Digital Repatriation”, in: Simona Pinton and Lauso Zagato (eds.), *Cultural Heritage: Scenarios 2015–2017*, Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2017, 657–669.
- Rybak, Ksenia, “Ruiny navchyly mene chomus pro mene samu’. Mariupolskyi park pamyati – avtonomnyi anarhiv” (“The Ruins Taught Me Something about Myself: ‘Mariupol Memory Park is an Autonomous Anarchiv’”) *Commons*, 04 December 2022, <https://commons.com.ua/ru/mariupolskij-park-pamyati-avtonomnij-anarhiv/> [accessed: 06.03.2023].
- Sklokina, Iryna, and Viktoriia Grivina, “Un/Archiving Post/Industry”, Center for Urban History, <https://www.lvivcenter.org/en/researches/un-archiving-post-industry/> [accessed: 02.03.2023].
- Steiner, Christopher, “Rights of Passage: On the Liminal Identity of Art in the Border Zone”, in: Fred. R Myers (ed.), *The Empire of Things: Regimes of Value and Material Culture*, Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2001, 207–231.
- Urban Media Archive, Center for Urban History, “Mariupol Museum of Local History”, <https://uma.lvivcenter.org/en/collections/147/videos> [accessed: 07.03.2023].
- Vinogradova, Maria, “Socialistická Filmová Tvorba vs. Gosplan: Budování Infrastruktury Sovětského Amatérského Filmu” (“Socialist Movie Making vs. Gosplan: Establishing an Infrastructure for the Soviet Amateur Cinema”), *Illuminace (Illumination)* 28/2, 2016, 9–27.

