ARChives: Exploring the Community Archives of Canadian Artist-run Centres

by

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Abstract

Artist-run centres (ARCs) are important cultural institutions and their archives form a unique record of artist-run culture and contemporary art in Canada. With mandates focusing on supporting new and experimental work, ARCs have not traditionally been records custodians; however the value of their collections and the growing need to preserve and make them accessible is undeniable. Considering the growing obsolescence of analogue media formats, the fragility of digital files, and the size of their collections, ARCs cannot delay planning for the preservation and use of their records or the task will outpace their capacity.

This thesis investigates ARC archives by analyzing interviews with the directors of nine ARCs in Saskatchewan and Alberta, along with their online and physical archives, to identify the collection types, practices, and intentions of this rarely studied group. Applying theory and practice from the community archives literature, this thesis also identifies barriers ARCs face in making their archives accessible and proposes digital and collaborative solutions that fit with the organizational and operational culture of these non-profit, artist-run communities.

Although robust, accessible digital archives are rare among the ARCs in this study, ARC directors express a growing interest in digital preservation and exposing their collections. This interest is attributable to a confluence of organizational age, a critical mass of records, and increasingly accessible technological solutions. Collaborations with established partner institutions, using a postcustodial model, is a solution that addresses many of the challenges ARCs face in managing their archives while staying true to their artist-run roots. These findings are specifically applicable to ARCs, but have implications for the preservation and access of cultural collections from similar community archives.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Shannon Lucky. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, "Digital Documentation and Curatorial Practices of Western Canadian Artist Run Centres", No. 26367, Nov 14, 2011.

Acknowledgements

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List of Abbreviations

AAARC – Alberta Association of Artist-Run Centres. The Alberta-based association of artist-run centres that advocates for ARCs across the province. http://aaarc.ca

ARC – Artist-Run Centre

ARCA – long form acronym is ARCCC-CCCAA, referring to the Artist-Run Centres and Collectives Conference/Conférence des collectifs et des centres d'artistes autogérés, the Canadian national association of artist-run centres. www.arccc-cccaa.org

PARCA – Plain Association of Artist-Run Centres. The Saskatchewan-based association of artist-run centres that advocates for ARCs across the province.

RCAAQ - Regroupement des centres d'artistes autogérés du Québec. The Québec-based association representing artist-run centres and cultural organizations from across the province. www.rcaaq.org

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Chapter One – Introduction

This thesis investigates how artist-run centres (ARCs) can use digital archives to document the history of their community and expose their unique collections to academic and public audiences. A qualitative approach describes how the directors of a selection of ARCs in Saskatchewan and Alberta recognize their organizations as information repositories and the ways they embody this role. It also explores the aspirations that ARC directors have for archival projects and the barriers they encounter in realizing their goals. This thesis contributes a unique perspective to the current literature dealing with community archives and digital preservation. It demonstrates the importance of making ARC collections visible and argues that the use of digital tools can reveal the value of the knowledge that small cultural heritage groups, like ARCs, hold.

The implications of this research for community organizations are potentially far reaching. As the technical barriers to digital archiving rapidly fall away, information seekers increasingly expect that relevant information will be available online. If ARCs and other community organizations are slow or resistant to make information discoverable in a digital environment that information will effectively disappear from the cultural discourse. ARCs are at an extra disadvantage because they have not traditionally been identified as resources for researchers, curators, artists, and the public, despite holding unique and locally important records of art, artists, and institutional and community history. This is detrimental to the understanding of contemporary art and artist-run culture in Canada and it is time for a shift in perspective for the value of these important institutions.

Canadian artist-run centres (ARCs) are critical resources for emerging and experimental artists. For the communities they are situated in, ARCs are points of access to contemporary local, national, and international art. Traditionally engaged with emerging artists, new experimental work, or local contexts, after several decades of activity, ARCs have accumulated significant historical records. Their collections are unique, dealing with both the history of the centre and the work they have shown and produced. Because this kind of experimental work has rarely been published or documented outside of these centres, ARC records are often the only authoritative source for curators, researchers, artists, and the public seeking this information. The director of

PAVED Arts in Saskatoon compares the experimental work that ARCs exhibit to "the history of punk. It's very difficult [to capture]. It's very anecdotal." While some centres have organized and digitized parts of their collections, most have maintained physical collections in file cabinets, basements, and storage units making them effectively inaccessible and vulnerable to damage and loss. For non-profit arts organizations, working within the limitations of grant requirements leaves few resources for archival projects that are both peripheral to the mandate of ARCs and require long-term support to remain useful. The growth of community and independent archives has been documented in the library and archives literature (Bastian and Alexander 2009; Cook 2012; Flinn et al. 2009; Flinn 2007; Ormond-Parker and Sloggett 2011), but, currently little is known about the potential for ARC archives, the value they can bring to information seekers, and what resources are required to make archival projects possible in this specific community. Western Canadian artist-run centers want to be accessible information sources about contemporary art and their own institutional histories but they require a passionate advocate for the project, archival knowledge, and staff and financial resources to do so effectively.

In 2011, the Canada Council for the Arts commissioned a report titled *The Distinct Role of Artist-Run Centres in the Canadian Visual Arts Ecology* (Burgess and De Rosa 2011). The purpose of this report was to document and describe the role of artist-run centres as part of the larger Canadian visual arts ecology. This report highlights how little is known about ARCs and their practices, particularly concerning their archival practices. There are only brief comments about archives and libraries. The most revealing is a footnote where the authors comment that "just over half of survey respondents (55%) said they operate a library or archives. In interviews with ARCs, many indicated the difficulty they have in accessing resources to digitize their archives to make them available online." (Burgess and De Rosa 2011, 39)

Artist Run Centres

Canadian artist-run centres are non-profit organizations managed by artists, generally led by a board of elected volunteer members, which support emerging artists and innovative art practices. This organizational model separates ARCs from commercial galleries that represent artists in order to market their work and large public galleries that tend to exhibit established artists or

historical work. Artist-run centres typically include a gallery or exhibition space but they can also house workshops and instruction space, reading rooms, multimedia labs, or events. However, not all ARCs have a permanent or semi-permanent space. Some ARCs, like TRIBE in Saskatoon, do not have a permanent gallery space, instead organizing programming and events in temporary spaces.

ARCs exhibit contemporary work of all kinds and provide artists with alternative opportunities compared to how work is represented in commercial and large public galleries (Artist-Run Centres and Collectives Conference 2009). For emerging artists, ARCs often serve as a transitional opportunity for moving from their early career or educational institution into commercial or larger public galleries (Fortin 2008). The individual centres may specialize in a particular type of art practice or ideological perspective, such as printmaking or First Nations' art, or they may embrace a more general curatorial mandate (Artist-Run Centres and Collectives Conference 2015). It is not the type of work exhibited, but the organizational and funding structure that defines and separates ARCs from other types of galleries and exhibition spaces.

ARCs subscribe to a non-profit organizational model that is non-commercial with an emphasis on showing new work and providing services and information to the community. The centres do not charge admission fees and, unlike commercial galleries, the marketing and sale of work are not the central purposes of the gallery. As a result of this non-profit organizational model, Canadian ARCs are largely funded through arts organization grants at the federal, provincial, and civic levels. These funding sources have strict limitations on what types of galleries can successfully apply for funding. The Canadian network of ARCs, known as the parallel gallery system, began to form in the early 1970s (Artist-Run Centres and Collectives Conference 2009) growing out of a new funding model introduced by the Canadian federal government through the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA) that remains an important funding resource for these organizations today.

Currently, there are approximately 170 artist-run centres and collectives across Canada which are members of a regional or other artist-run centre association (Artist-Run Centres and Collectives Conference 2009). For the 2013 fiscal year seventy-eight CCA *Assistance to Artist-run Centre* grants were distributed to ARCs in nine provinces and one territory (Canada Council for the Arts

2015). This is in addition to the numerous provincial, territorial, and civic grants that support ARCs across the country. This is a robust and vitally important institutional model in the Canadian visual arts community and it has shown its value through the growth and development of the parallel gallery system in the past four decades.

ARCs have been known to support the early work of artists and curators who go on to become major figures in the Canadian and international art world. ARCs are also the source of important cultural and historical information about the artist-run community. The majority of Canadian contemporary artists, curators, and cultural practitioners, including the country's most recognized talents, have emerged from the ARC community (Artist-Run Centres and Collectives Conference 2009) and there is a great deal of valuable information created in these organizations that should be preserved and made accessible to the public.

Despite their impact and cultural importance, little research has been conducted regarding ARCs in Canada and a comprehensive history of this group has yet to be written. Information about how ARCs operate, how they act as information resources, and what their curatorial processes are remains largely undocumented. Sacco et al. (2006) conducted a broad study of seventeen artist-run centres in Montreal to evaluate their potential to support the development of a cultural community in the city and to aid international diffusion of local artists' work. This study follows the tendency for research about Canadian ARCs to focus on the Quebec arts community, possibly due to the large number of arts organizations located there and the strong public and government support they generally receive. Sacco et al.'s (2006) analysis found that most ARCs in Montreal are run on a not-for-profit managerial model with a volunteer board of directors. The board members are often also involved in artistic programming decisions. Perhaps most interestingly, ARCs in this study were found to not have specifically focused on the development of relationships in the wider community and tended to focus on an established audience of artists, curators and critics. Networking between centres was found to be strong and the sharing of information was common. The internet was the primary resource for sharing information with other ARCs, both within Montreal and in other major Canadian cities. There is little indication that these findings can be directly applied to prairie ARCs because the arts community and government support structure are much different than in Quebec, but it is interesting to note the

tendency of ARCs to look inward to their own community rather than directing resources toward community outreach projects. The existence of a strong network of organizations and their preferential use of the internet suggests that online platforms and tools may be beneficial to this group.

Digital Archives and Canadian ARCs

Many Canadian ARCs currently offer online access to detailed information about some of their past exhibitions (e.g. Stride in Calgary, Western Front and grunt gallery in Vancouver, Urban Shaman in Winnipeg), but there are many who do not (e.g. Les Territoires in Montreal, SNAP Gallery and Latitude 53 in Edmonton, YYZ in Toronto). The type of information available from ARCs that do share archival information online varies greatly from lists of single images and short descriptions of the exhibitions (e.g. Platform Gallery in Winnipeg) to heavily indexed collections that are searchable by artist, exhibition, or image (e.g. Gallery 44 in Toronto). There is little consistency in the type and format of information and documentation represented on these ARC websites and most offer only rudimentary searching options. Over the course of this project I found no available information describing how the ARC resources listed were designed or how their implementation has affected information seekers. There has been little research directly relating to the designing of digital repositories for ARCs; however, Hurtur et al. (2007) did design a content management system (CMS) for the Montreal-based ARC Atelier Circulaire. The design ideology behind this project was to allow all contributors and ARC affiliated artists to upload and manage their own content in the system, avoiding the need to hire a single webmaster to format all online data which, the authors felt, slowed down updates and left artists feeling abstracted from the web presence of their work. The authors focused on the importance of a collaborative and community focused system to mirror the structure of the member organization in this design, although there is no mention of a needs analysis or prototype testing in the report. The prototype is no longer available online.[1]

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[1] Formerly available at http://www.hurtut.net/ichim2007/

There are numerous web tools that have been designed to allow artists to host their own portfolios[2] but these do not meet the same needs as a repository of curatorial information and documentation. While it has become important for artists to maintain their own web presence, it is institutional digital repositories that will serve as stable and authoritative resources for researchers in the future.

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[2] deviantArt, Cargo, Behance, Carbonmade, SquareSpace, Wix, and many more.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

This interdisciplinary study crosses and connects scholarship in the fields of professional archives, community archives, library and archive collections in arts organizations, and digital preservation. Connecting the literature from these areas provides the context that ARCs are moving into as they explore digital archiving and identifies gaps where this project poses new questions and provides new information.

What are Archives?

In the introduction to their book about records management and archival practices, Jeannette Bastian and Ben Alexander (2009) assert that there is no single definition of 'archives', just as there is no single definition of 'community'. Archives mean very different things to different people in different contexts. The word conjures images ranging from climate controlled rooms full of acid-free boxes of artifacts to digital files of backup data. Terry Cook (2012) notes that online everyone is building an archive, non-governmental organizations, lobbying groups, community activists, and ordinary citizens. Cook proposes that, rather than undermining the work of trained archivists, this phenomenon of democratic archiving creates new possibilities for professionals to document society in diverse and inclusive ways that have not been possible in the past.

ARCs tend to embrace an informal definition of archives, often meaning any collection of documents (physical or digital) that are held together by a contextual or thematic thread. Any documents made by, for, or about an ARC or members of their community can potentially be included, and this collection policy can change over time. There is both curiosity and assumptions about the role that 'proper' archival practices can bring to this community. This section looks at archival theory and its implications for ARC archive projects.

There is a well-established tradition of professional archiving that includes multiple branches of theory and practice. The two main approaches to archives are characterized by the work of Jenkinson and Schellenberg. Jenkinson's (1937) definition of archival content is limited to documents that are created or used and retained by their owner, for their own information. His definition values the unselfconscious accumulation of functional records that are not specifically

intended for historical preservation. Jenkinson indicates this creates necessary objectivity and authenticity in a collection. The sum of a collection's parts hold important contextual meaning and the preservation of the entire collection, in its original form, is critical. He was unwaveringly opposed to archivists selecting or discarding records once they have been received into archival custody.

Schellenberg's (1956) definition, written partly as a rebuttal to Jenkinson, is more inclusive in the types of materials that are acceptable, yet concerned with the massive scale of modern document collections. While he, like Jenkinson, embraced the organic accumulation of documents and the value of their contextual meaning, he felt that the scale of accumulation necessitated the selection of documents deemed permanently valuable for archive users. In opposition to Jenkinson, Schellenberg draws a distinction between primary value, related to a record's usefulness to its creator, and secondary value, related to its historic and cultural value for external audiences.

The 1970s saw a radical critique of traditional archiving practices. Cornell University historian and archivist Gould P. Colman wrote that the biggest problem facing archivists is the tendency to collect what is the most accessible, making traditional archives "studied preservation of unrepresentative indicators of culture" (1973, 56). Contemporarily, we can find a diversity of archival practices across institutions, but there is a greater recognition across the community that documents from marginal and unrepresented groups should be sought out despite increased complexity to ensure truly representative collections.

ARCs are largely unaware of this theoretical history, but tend to develop practices in line with the radical, inclusive practices of the 1970s. However, in line with Schellenberg's theory and without the capacity to document and preserve everything related to their organizations, ARCs have tended to focus on the material they think will be most interesting in the future, namely information about artists, show documentation, and print publications. Marcella Bienvenue's description of art publication archives aligns closely with ARC archival practices. Bienvenue (1977) uses the term *archive* to describe both unpublished and published materials, a distinction that typically separates archival and library collections. She describes "artists-publication archive(s)" consisting of "published artist-editions in the form of post-documentation, book-as-

art-object, art magazines, art newspapers, music scores, manifestoes, tapes, posters, post-cards and other ephemera" (Bienvenue 1977, 244). This diversity of formats is also found in ARC collections.

Maintaining ARC archives had required staff to store their operational and documentary records, but also make decisions about what to keep and what to discard. ARCs may also choose to generate records for the express purpose of including them in the archive, such as recording oral histories or creating documents that have no other operational purpose. This is a very different practice from traditional archives that tend to collect and preserve materials created by others.

Community Archives

Like archives, the definition of community archives is fluid and highly contextually dependent. The literature about community archives predominantly concerns projects rooted in communities that are absent from dominant cultural and historical narratives. Ethnic and cultural minorities, Indigenous, LGBTQ, refugee, diaspora, and, more recently, online communities, have all been involved in creating their own archives. While many of the most frequently studied community archives are rooted in immigrant and ethnic minority communities, community archives can be developed within any kind of community. Andrew Flinn (2007, 153) describes community archives as "the grassroots activities of documenting, recording and exploring community heritage in which community participation, control and ownership of the project is essential." For the purposes of this research, I have defined community in relation to ARCs and the artists that sustain them.

It is important to note that much of the writing about community archives discussed in this thesis comes out of a British and Australian context. There are community archives all over the world, but the terminology can differ. In some areas in Canada, community archives refer to archives about local cities or towns that are managed by local authorities (Flinn et al. 2009), not members of a community. For the purposes of this study, I use Flinn's definition that focuses on archives that are the result of active participation and stewardship by the community in question.

The development of community archives are tied to local and community studies – an area of research that relies on the collecting of primary and secondary sources related to a community. These resources can be difficulty to come by and are rarely collected by large institutions. Where communities have been deprived of access to their own stories, they have tended to develop their own collections (Dewe 2002; Flinn et al. 2009). Michelle Caswell (2014), writing about an online community archival repository she co-founded (South Asian American Digital Archive), confirms this development trajectory. Her project was born in direct response to a lack of repositories collecting South Asian American history. Caswell also identifies "a real need for these materials to remain under community control and not be subsumed under larger institutional repositories, where (they) could be undervalued, get lost in the shuffle, or misinterpreted." (2014, under "Background") This is not an uncommon concern from the stewards of community archives and it must be taken seriously when proposing technical or strategic solutions.

Community distrust of professional archives can stem from stereotypes within the archival profession that community archives are less serious, amateur, and of limited use for information seekers. Cook (2012, 23), however, asserts that there is a growing acceptance among archivists that community-based archiving is "often a long-standing and well-established praxis from which we can learn much". He argues for collaborations with community archives, not as a chance to save communities from making mistakes, but an opportunity to draw on community knowledge to expand archival practices and become relevant actors instead of cloistered professionals.

Although community archives are not a new phenomenon in either communities or traditional archival practice, there has been significant growth in their development in recent years, partially in response to the availability of new technologies (Flinn 2007). Use of the internet for communication has influenced the shape of communities and the way they document themselves. Easy access, low costs, and unprecedented accessibility for a range of user skills has led many communities to see the internet, specifically web 2.0 tools, as the best place to collect, store, and share their information (Flinn 2007; Krause and Yakel 2007; Shilton and Srinivasan 2007). This reliance on web tools and platforms, particularly to manage photos, video, and audio recordings,

makes sense. There are many platforms, such as YouTube, Flickr, and SoundCloud, which have become dominant methods for storing and sharing digital information with individuals and groups, often using digital platforms like websites, blogs, and social media. The danger is that these platforms are not designed for long-term preservation and access.

If community archives exist solely online in non-archival formats and these platforms or file formats become obsolete, the potential devastating loss extends far beyond the home community. These resources have an important role to play in expanding the understanding of cultural and national heritage. They must be valued as important cultural resources for researchers and the public. Professional archives and archivists also struggle with managing the scale of what could possibly be collected. "There is simply too much evidence, too much memory, too much identity, to acquire more than a mere fragment of it in our established archives." (Cook 2012, 113)

To meet the needs of both community and professional archives, Flinn (2007) proposes the adoption of a postcustodial, community participation model that would build a relationship between the two groups for their mutual benefit. This model has the community retain the care of their collection while the archive partner provides advice, training, and resources. The archive partner benefits by gaining access to well-managed collections they do not have to take into their custody. One of the tenets of this model is that archives cannot feasibly continue to be physical caretakers of records in an increasingly digital environment (Upward 1996). Custody of digital documents is largely inconsequential if they can be usefully accessed from anywhere.

The postcustodial model is an appropriate framework for many types of community archives because it acknowledges that communities may not want to deposit their collections with a formal institution, and avoids the need for professional archivists to make potentially controversial decisions about what is worth preserving. The postcustodial model may also be more effective for both parties given the digital nature of many of these collections (Flinn 2007). This model has been widely used in Australian institutions where it was thought to be a good solution for dealing with digital records. Professional archives preferred to avoid taking direct custody of community-generated digital records instead providing oversight and guidance but leaving them in situ. This approach leaves the door open for future decisions about the archive.

This model may be particularly relevant for Canadian ARCs as Library and Archives Canada (LAC) moves toward an aspirational "total archives" approach to the creation of a national collaborative stewardship network to represent the nation's documentary heritage in all forms. In 2010, Daniel Caron and Richard Brown gave a keynote address at the Annual Conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists, recognizing that the challenges digital records present cannot be addressed "through independent unilateral actions" (20). They state that LAC is "beginning to understand that the construction and constitution of the civic goods of public memory are a collective, social responsibility requiring broad participation across all sectors " (Caron and Brown 2011, 20). ARC archives could make a unique contribution to this initiative.

Collections from Arts Organizations

Ksenia Cheinman (2014) describes the qualities that define archives and libraries in small, specialized arts organizations, specifically identifying their unique collections that document the work of emerging artists and local events. Despite being housed in typically constrained spaces, small arts organizations tend to have primarily physical collections. Cheinman (2014) posits this is due to a number of factors including an appreciation of the aesthetics of the physical documents. These collections tend to accumulate naturally as a result of the organizations' close ties to their community (Carr 2006) and can include a wide range of record types. Physical documents can take many forms, from print publications to film, video, and audio tapes, but often the majority of collections from arts organizations are paper documents and other ephemera. This type of material is typically distributed directly by the artist or gallery, at an event, or through the mail free of charge. Customarily useful for a limited time period, ephemera usually becomes a souvenir, not a formal reporting of an event. Cooke (2006) describes this distribution method as being "narrowcast", contrasting it with "broadcast" distribution formats like publication.

Jacqueline Cooke (2006, 34) notes that collections of ephemera "are particularly likely to record transient and informal organizations and associated contingent strategies from the unstable and fugitive terrain of "alternative" art activities, which have been a vital part of contemporary practice." This certainly describes the formative years of ARCs, but also remains a relevant assessment today where ARCs are positioned closer to alternative venues for production and

dissemination than not. Despite their longevity and relative stability, these institutions are still characterized by experimental approaches.

Julie Ault (2002, 11) states that "documentation of ephemeral events – protests, meetings, actions, installations, exhibitions, temporary art and items from the paper trails of short-lived groups – are least likely to be found in library collections and rarely circulate after the event." Jaqueline Spence (2005) posits that it is the fleeting nature of these types of collections that make them valuable and worth preserving. Flinn et al. (2009, 79) agree that materials that are destined for temporary use are "in fact absolutely crucial" for community archives.

The difficulty is that libraries have historically found ephemera to be both challenging and undesirable to collect because it is hard to catalogue and fragile in nature. Luis Jacob (2009, 92) argues that there has never been an institution that has taken appropriate care of artists' records, stating that "If it wasn't for the effort of artists across the country, there would be no archives at all", expressing a deep distrust of institutions', the public's, and even arts communities' abilities to appropriately represent the wealth of knowledge created by artists in Canada.

In the early 1980s, Keaveney (1986) conducted a study of the collections of fourteen American fine arts libraries examining the holding on forty artists divided into three categories: very well known, well known, and less well known. The research focused on published monographs and vertical files of ephemera, finding that the collections of ephemera provided better coverage of less well known or emerging artists than monograph collections..

Indeed, academic libraries demonstrate a tendency to focus on well-established and authoritative publications and have minimal vertical file collections, reducing access to materials about less well-known artists. This is compounded by something analogous to the Matthew Effect (Merton 1968) whereby well-known artists have more documentation created about their work, and this documentation is also more likely to be judged as important and preserved to the exclusion of other subjects. This research points to the importance of ARCs maintaining archives of their past shows because there are relatively few accessible and authoritative sources of information about emerging artists. A related finding from this study was that, while there was very little overlap in the publication holdings between libraries, there tended to be duplication of vertical files, where

they were available. The author indicated that a "system of sharing or donations might prove useful to another library" (Keaveney 1986, 106)

Ephemera collections, being particularly susceptible to damage and theft, were a major problem facing art libraries at the time this study was conducted. Keaveney suggests microfilming or videotaping the collection, a project that would be managed in a digital database today. Although this research is nearly three decades old, the basic problems facing the archiving of art ephemera have changed very little. There remains a collections focus on well-known artists and few resources allocated for documenting less well-known works. These gaps in the record could be partially mitigated through better collaboration and information sharing with community archives that hold this unique content.

Digital Preservation

Digital preservation of documents from ARCs and other community archives has value to society greater than the content that is preserved. It is important to articulate this value in order to adequately support the preservation of ARC content. Smith (2007) asks why questions of the societal value of information arise in the wake of explosive digital information growth. To respond to these questions, ARCs and similar communities responsible for the preservation of their own cultural material need to recognize the importance of their contribution and move to ensure its stability and accessibility. As important as information organizations are, they also need to be accountable to the public that they serve and their activities should be directed by the information needs of their users.

Digitization of analogue documents is typically the first thing most people think of when a digital archive project is proposed. In the case of ARCs, organizations that have been in production since the pre-internet era have extensive collections of print, photographs, slides, audio-visual materials, and other ephemera that can be a valuable resource if it is made accessible. Spence (2005) includes the following list of opportunities that a digitization project presents:

- provide indexed and searchable full text;

- save researchers having to transcribe material laboriously;

- be available on demand at the researcher's desktop or laptop, minimizing the need to travel to consult the necessary material;

- enable collaborative research;

- mean that physically disparate material can be brought together in cyberspace as a single cohesive entity;

- allow deeper analysis of the material – including statistical evaluation if the data is in the appropriate form;

- facilitate comparative research; for instance, studying different drafts of manuscripts to conduct textual analysis and to compare contemporaneous accounts easily; and

- allow "slices" of large collections to be isolated and viewed – digital collections can be organized, grouped and displayed by any index criteria, whilst a physical collection can, generally speaking, only be organized in one order.

This list presents a persuasive argument for the value of digitizing physical documents; however, it focuses exclusively on access to archival materials and, in many cases, creating digital surrogates of fragile documents is an important first step in long-term preservation. Any digital community archive will likely incorporate digitized analogue documents with born-digital records. The inclusion of multiple file formats and document types will require careful consideration and planning. Spence also notes that "it is received wisdom in records management circles that it is much easier to preserve electronic records from the point of creation, so it would be sensible for institutions to develop tools that can be used by organizations and individuals to enable basic levels of preservation while their electronic records are still active" (2005, 375).

The American Council of Learned Societies Report (2006) stresses the importance of creating a cyberinfrastructure for the humanities and social sciences. An infrastructure of scholarship was built up over centuries, encompassing "diverse collections of primary sources in libraries, archives, and museums; the bibliographies, searching aids, citation systems, and concordances that make that information retrievable; the standards that are embodied in cataloging and classification systems; the journals and university presses that distribute the information; and the

editors, librarians, archivists, and curators who link the operation of this structure to the scholars who use it" (American Council of Learned Societies 2006, 6). All of these facets have equivalents in the digital world. Digital archives of all sizes, built incrementally over time, will be a crucial part of this research infrastructure and ARCs have an opportunity to be part of it.

Regarding digital archives, preservation is only one aspect of the process of managing digital data for future use. Digital curation encompasses a wide variety of information activities including data curation, electronic records management, and digital asset management. Core concepts for the curation of digital records include engaging record creators and users of digital archives, beginning the management process at the time a record is created, the careful selection of materials for inclusion, development and provision of access, and ensuring the long-term security of digital collections (Yakel 2007, 335). Direct user engagement can help anticipate future use of collections and guide developing digital curatorial practices.

A common refrain from scholars and practitioners working in community archives is that technically sound archive solutions must be balanced with the needs of the community. Michael Christie warns that "Databases are not innocent objects. They carry within them particular culturally and historically contingent assumptions about the nature of the world, and the nature of knowledge; what it is, and how it can be preserved and renewed" (quoted in Ormond-Parker and Sloggett 2011, 197). The users of digital archives, the communities that populate their content, and the people that design and develop them do not tend to overlap. This can cause significant problems for usability and representational fidelity.

Lauren Klein (2013) explains that excitement over the 'epic transformation' of digital archives, characterized by increased quantities and methods of accessing content, is premature because archival silences and gaps in the archival records are not ameliorated by improved database tools. This is why it is crucial that ARCs and other community groups engage in their own archiving practice so researchers, community members, and the public have access to a full spectrum of information and perspectives.

Ian Milligan (2013) identifies one of the dangers ARCs will face if they hesitate to make their collections accessible through digital interfaces. Studying the impact of indexed, searchable

databases of digitized newspapers, Milligan notes that, since these databases for research have been easily available, more dissertation writers use newspapers as primary sources. However, recent dissertations disproportionately reference newspapers that are available through these databases. This has narrowed the types of newspapers that are being used in academic research to a few major, often national titles, ignoring local news sources that have not been digitized. The fate of small local papers could be the fate of ARCs in the age of digital archives for research. If these collections are not easily accessible they will not be used, and their perspectives will not be known.

The promise of the unique contribution ARC archives can make to our understanding of the visual and performing arts in Canada is coupled with the difficulties inherent in studying this phenomenon. While ARCs share some common features, each organization has different goals, practices, histories, and resources. Geographical, thematic, and cultural diversity influences how we can understand these organizations individually and as a group. ARCs have rarely been the subject of study, particularly for information management or cultural heritage researchers, and the paucity of literature about their practices creates an additional challenge. The following chapter identifies how the research design of this thesis meets the challenge of studying a diverse set of ARCs and their archival practices, resulting in credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable findings.

Chapter Three – Research Design and Methods

The following chapter describes how I used qualitative interviews, current and previous versions of websites, social media accounts, digital projects, and ARC physical archives as sources to understand how artist-run centres want to engage with archival work and how digital archival projects can benefit ARCs and users. My approach combines analysis of these multiple sources to reflect the perspectives and intentions of ARCs, extending beyond simple description of the digital archiving work already undertaken to identify gaps between desired outcomes and current status, future goals, and perceived utility of current systems. Beginning with a discussion of my research questions I describe why this approach is most appropriate for this topic. This section is followed by a description of the sampling strategy, data collection methods, and analytical process used to develop my findings. The chapter concludes by addressing the limitations of this approach and constraints of this research design.

This exploratory study was designed to uncover themes and patterns of archival activities and attitudes in ARCs. Initially, I focused on the websites and online archival projects of ARCs and what they have already done to document and preserve the work they exhibit. However, during the preliminary stages of this research, it became clear that the real issue for this community is defining what the value of archival projects is, investigating how they fit with the mandate of these organizations, and identifying what a successful and sustainable project looks like. The existence of varying uses of websites, social media accounts, and digital archives for preserving information indicates a community trying out a range of solutions to a common problem. The ways ARCs store, describe, and make information available vary both between ARCs and within individual centres. To uncover why ARCs are pursuing digital archival and library projects, how current solutions developed, and what their ultimate goals are, I decided to shift my focus from the current state of digital projects to focus on the interests and intentions of ARC directors. Based on this defined focus, the research questions that informed this thesis, and ultimately the lines of inquiry during interviews, were:

- What kind of information is preserved by ARCs, how is it saved, and what purpose does it serve?

- Under what context is archived information able to be accessed and by whom?

- How does actual archival practice relate to ideal or preferred methods within these organizations?

- What organizational and/or operational factors influence documentation and archival projects?

- What responsibility do ARCs have to preserve and make archival materials accessible?

There has been minimal scholarship outside of the Canadian artist-run community that investigates ARCs. Most analysis and description has been done by ARCs themselves in the form of retrospective publications (Mabie et al. 2000; Coleman et al. 1981; Wood and Mok 2015) and there has been very little research done about ARCs as cultural phenomena or their impact. The variables that influence archival practices at these organizations are unclear so I chose to follow information studies researchers Gorman and Clayton's (2005) recommendation to take an exploratory approach to this little-understood subject. An exploratory, qualitative approach to these research questions is effective because it allows for a deep exploration of the issues at play directed by the subject itself. ARCs are heavily engaged and invested in their local communities and the particularities of these communities have significant influence on their make-up. Taking a qualitative approach that seeks to understand the local context of the study participants and to identify patterns in the activities and approaches of this community, rather than confirming a pre-existing hypothesis, is critical to develop an informed analysis.

Choosing to compare multiple ARCs, instead of conducting a case-study of one archetypical centre, is more appropriate for an exploratory study, especially considering that there is no accepted standard for ARCs. The dearth of research about these organizations means that there are no existing criteria that can be used to identify an exemplary ARC to represent the group. To address this gap in the research literature, I included nine centres across Saskatchewan and Alberta in my analysis to identify patterns and outliers in this community. This research design choice opened the opportunity to include multiple perspectives and examples of ARCs and to

generalize my findings rather than focusing exclusively on one centre and its unique context. By describing and comparing multiple approaches this thesis is able to provide a comprehensive and robust description of archival practices in ARCs and identify patterns shared by these diverse organizations.

As the primary investigation method for this study, I chose semi-structured interviews with ARC directors as the best way to understand the current practices and goals of these largely undocumented organizations. Semi-structured interviews provide rich and nuanced data, partially guided by the participant, and can uncover new facets of the research questions or areas of inquiry. Understanding the holistic context of ARC organizational culture is important to understand their archival practices. Relying solely on a quantitative analysis of online projects or documents would not have provided sufficient insight into the complex scenarios that impact how information is handled in these organizations and how decisions are made.

Sampling

My sample set of nine ARCs was drawn from centres in Western Canada that align with the artist-run centre definition detailed later in this section, and their directors' ability to speak to the research questions. The ARCs that participated in this study come from diverse contexts in four cities across two provinces. Each centre has a unique mandate (detailed in appendix A) that ranges from supporting a method of art production, such as printmaking, to a thematic or community focus, such as Aboriginal art and artists. The director of Harcourt House in Edmonton notes that:

> it is hard to speak for all artist-run centres, because they each have their own individual mandates and their own specific things they focus on. Broadly, (ARCs) are intermediary opportunities for people to engage with art and artists and also for artists to be more involved in the work that they are putting out there.

The ARCs represented in this study are also invested in digital and physical archival projects to varying degrees. The diversity that these centres represent provide nine distinct and complex scenarios, each with their own history and local concerns, but still able to provide a useful comparison based on organizational size, general mandate, leadership, and funding model.

Although the Canadian parallel gallery system has some shared funding opportunities and requirements through the Canada Council for the Arts, regional differences are pronounced with Québec historically dominating the research and discourse about artist-run culture in Canada. I am interested in looking at ARCs that are part of the parallel gallery system but situated in less high-profile cultural centres in Canada. It is a conscious decision to expand the diversity of ARCs included in this study rather than focusing on a small number of well-documented projects in Montréal (Blessi et al. 2011). My intention was to look at all manner of ARCs (not only those engaging in ambitious archival projects) to uncover the diversity of practices within this community while keeping the sample limited to a representative but manageable size for comparison. For these reasons the centres selected for this research are limited to ARCs located in Alberta and Saskatchewan that are members of either The Alberta Association of Artist-Run Centres (AAARC) or the Plains Artist-Run Centre Association (PARCA) – two of the nine regional ARC associations that form the national association, ARCA: the Artist-Run Centres and Collectives Conference/Conférence des collectifs et des centres d'artistes autogérés (ARCCC-CCCAA, commonly shortened to ARCA). I chose these two regional associations because of my personal experience with the cultural community and because of geographic convenience for in-person data collection, although I had no pre-existing relationship with the ARCs or their directors.

Membership in these two associations, however, is not sufficient for inclusion in this study. While the focus of this study is ARCs in Western Canada, there are multiple interpretations of what kinds of organizations can fall into this category. "Artist-run centre" is not an official designation and use of the term can vary within and across communities. For the purposes of this study I looked at two resources to determine my working definition of an artist-run centre: the directory of artist-run centres published by the Regroupement des centres d'artistes autogérés du Québec (RCAAQ) (2010) and the inclusion criteria for the Canada Council Assistance to Artist-Run Centres and Networking Assistance for Artist-Run Centres grants (Canada Council for the Arts 2014).

The RCAAQ publishes a directory of artist-run centres that serves as a resource for Canadian artists and cultural organizations. It comprises a directory listing of all artist-run organizations in

Canada, divided by province, and includes contact information, mission statements, institutional priorities, submission timelines, and facility details for each. This directory is an authoritative, community created directory of ARCs and the 2010 edition provides the long list of organizations in Alberta and Saskatchewan for this study. In 2015 this directory was revised and published as an online resource by ARCA, but there are no substantive changes that contradicted my original sampling strategy.

There is a great deal of diversity in the organizations that the RCAAQ and ARCA list in the directory which includes festivals and floating galleries with no permanent space. There are also organizations who self-define as ARCs but do not fit the criteria defined for this project. To constrain my sample to ARCs that are diverse but still shared enough organizational, historical, and operational similarities to be usefully compared, I also looked to the Canada Council Assistance to Artist-Run Centres and Networking Assistance for Artist-Run Centres grant requirements and, specifically, ARCs that have received these grants in the past (Canada Council for the Arts 2015). Eligibility for these grants stipulates that ARCs must:

- be incorporated, non-profit, and registered in Canada

- be directed by a board composed of a majority of practicing visual artists

- have a principal mandate to encourage research, production, presentation, promotion, and dissemination of new works in contemporary visual arts

- maintain a permanent space or office accessible to the public

- have maintained an annual program of artistic activities, accessible to the public, for a minimum of three years in a row

- pay professional artists' fees to artists participating in your organization's programming activities (fees must meet or exceed the national standards) (Canada Council for the Arts 2014)

Narrowing my sampling strategy to include the Canada Council eligibility criteria allowed me to focus on organizations that are officially recognized as artist-run centres by one of the major funding bodies for these groups and by the artist-run community itself. I struggled with the inclusion and exclusion criteria because of the need to find a balance between limiting the

sample to ARCs that can be usefully compared while leaving it open enough for differences to surface. Delimiting my sample within this nebulous community was necessary to focus the scope of the study and identify potential participants.

Based on the RCAAQ directory and the Canada Council grant requirements I created a list of ARCs in Saskatchewan and Alberta that would be considered appropriate for this project. ARCs included in this project had to meet three criteria: they must be members of PARCA or AAARC (regional artist-run centre associations), be included in the RCAAQ directory, and have been awarded a Canada Council artist-run centre grant at least once since 1998, the year of the earliest records available through the Canada Council website. This identified twelve possible organizations to interview in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Ultimately, I contacted all twelve organizations and was able to interview the directors from nine, in addition to one pilot study at Latitude 53.

The ARCs interviewed for this project are:

Alberta	Calgary	Stride Art Gallery Association
		The New Gallery
		Untitled Art Society
	Edmonton	Latitude 53 Contemporary Visual Culture *pilot study*
		Society of Northern Alberta Print Artists (SNAP)
		Harcourt House
Saskatchewan	Regina	Neutral Ground
		Sâkêwêwak Artists' Collective Inc.
	Saskatoon	AKA Artist-Run
		PAVED Arts

Table 1: Artist-run centres included in study

Data Sources

Data gathered from the nine ARCs interviewed helped me to understand the current state of digital and physical archiving practices in these organizations. Drawing from all available sources of information from each ARC is an excellent opportunity to engage holistically with the phenomena under investigation. However, this method leaves the door open to collecting overwhelming amounts of data. To make the management of data reasonable for a project of this scale, a data collection strategy is necessary as it is not feasible to study all possible sources of evidence from each ARC in depth. The selection of data sources is determined by the research questions and constrained by the time available at each location with a focus on consistent and replicable data collection and analysis. The following sources were used to gather data for this project.

Pilot Study

In the initial stages of this project, I conducted a pilot study with the director of Edmonton's Latitude 53 ARC to determine if there was interest in this community to engage in documentation and archival projects. This semi-structured interview identified some challenges common to many archival projects including sustained funding, lack of archival expertise, copyright, and conflicts with the primary mandate of ARCs. It also helped to identify other ARC directors in the community, refine my definition of ARCs and, ultimately, the selection criteria for the study. The data collected during this pilot interview was not used in the final analysis but it did inform the design and direction of the other interviews. The pilot study proved useful to familiarize myself with the current funding climate and particular terminology used by this community. It also helped clarify the need to approach the topic of digital archiving with a broader definition than strictly traditional ideas of what comprises an archive and to look beyond existing projects to organizational intentions and interests.

Disadvantages of pilot studies were noted including the danger of making inaccurate predictions based on one set of responses. In fact, Latitude 53 was the least engaged in archival projects across my final data set and expressed a low level of interest in providing archival content to their users. This finding helped subvert any expectations I held that all organizations would want to preserve and access historical information wherever possible. It led to a broader area of

inquiry and a more exploratory approach to the subject than originally reflected in the first draft of interview questions.

Websites and Digital Projects

Once the sample set of ARCs was confirmed and the interviews were scheduled, I looked at the website, social media accounts, and web projects of each ARC prior to meeting the director to understand how their online presence works to preserve and present information from a user's perspective. A functional description and initial impressions were recorded in researcher memos and contributed to my analysis. This research is focused on the attitudes and goals ARC directors have toward archiving, not strictly describing what they are currently doing, but the projects they have undertaken are important manifestations of their priorities, interests, capacity, and ability to maintain resources over the long term. I also used the Wayback Machine (Internet Archive 2016) to navigate earlier versions of the ARC websites and to locate previous web and digital archival projects that are no longer visible or have since been taken offline. Knowing about each centre's existing online resources led to valuable discussions about how websites and web-based projects developed, how they connect with physical resources and organizational culture, and where current practices are meeting or falling short of desired outcomes.

Interviews

Qualitative research is built from the perceptions and beliefs of the study participants which made the interview process the primary data source for this study. Focusing on interviews places primary value on personal experience and language as data. Face-to-face interviews are valuable in situations, like this thesis, where research is focused on gaining insight and understanding from the participants' experience and perspectives (Gillham 2000, 11; Ritchie and Lewis 2003, 138). To this end, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the directors from the nine ARCs to learn about their interest in archiving information about their organization and its programming output. Questions addressed both practical and theoretical aspects of digital archiving in this community including the systems and technologies currently used, goals for archival projects, the audience for this information, and ideal outcomes.

Initial questions were exploratory in nature, identifying the participants' roles, responsibilities, and interests, and their initial impressions of archival projects. The lines of inquiry were based

on the research questions, detailed earlier in this chapter, and the findings from the pilot study, but were not used proscriptively. Each interview was allowed to follow its own flow but ultimately addressed the same topics. The final version of my interview lines of questioning can be found in appendix B.

The ARCs selected in my sampling strategy were contacted directly by email or telephone to describe the purpose of the project, answer questions, and arrange interview times. All nine of the ARC directors I was able to contact agreed to participate in the study. I did not receive a reply to my requests for an interview from two of the ARCs identified in my sampling strategy – Tribe Inc. in Saskatoon and TRUCK Contemporary Art in Calgary. As a result, they are not represented in my data presentation and analysis. The interviews took place in person, at the individual ARC spaces, between May and December 2014. It was important to interview the ARC directors in their gallery spaces because I wanted to understand the physical and technical resources and constraints they are working with. In many of the interviews, I was invited to come and see the physical archives, often consisting of boxes or file cabinets of documents and publications in storage spaces and basements. While I was not able to spend significant time looking at the collections of documents, being able to see the state of the physical archives, their accessibility, organization, and size, was tremendously useful to illustrate what the ARC directors said about it. Talking with the directors in person, in the gallery spaces, also afforded the opportunity to visualize and talk about how the spaces and resources available to them might be used to further their archival goals. The interviews were audio recorded then transcribed and annotated soon after they took place. The transcripts and my researcher memos describing the digital projects and physical ARC spaces and collections were analyzed as data was collected, each location informing my approach to the next ARC location.

As required for research with human subjects in Canada, this study underwent research ethics approval through the University of Alberta research ethics board. All data collection complied with the University of Alberta Standards for Protection of Human Research Participants (University of Alberta Research Ethics Office 2011). It was not deemed necessary or effective to anonymize the responses because of the small number of ARCs that could take part in this study and their nature as public, non-profit, government-funded organizations. The interview

participants were aware that their responses represented their role as the director of their organization and that the name of their ARC would be used. The directors of the ARCs in this study are easily identifiable as public figures in their positions, however, this study will not refer to them directly by name, instead referring to their title and the name of the ARC for clarity.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data collected from the nine ARCs, I identify patterns across this sample and highlight remarkable outliers to draw conclusions about Western Canadian ARCs' approaches to archiving. This methodology is inductive, using constant comparison, and iterative cycles of data collection and analysis to determine my next steps. This constant comparative approach, borrowed from grounded theory (Charmaz 2006), is used throughout data collection and analysis, with the ARC websites informing lines of inquiry in the interviews and our conversations then leading back to both present and past iterations of their websites. The interview transcripts and notes taken during and immediately after the interviews are read in-depth and coded to identify concepts and patterns. Data from each ARC was collected and interrogated using the overarching themes that emerged during the analysis process.

Community archives (discussed in Chapter 2) – contrasted with traditional or institutional archives – informed the working definition of archives and archival practices in this study. Using Flinn's definition of community archives as "collections of materials gathered primarily by members of a given community and over whose use community members exercise some level of control" (Stevens et al. 2010). I work with a broad and malleable definition that leaves room for the range of interpretations and constructions that exist within these diverse organizations. My training as a librarian and digital humanist, not a trained archivist, helped me to avoid using archival jargon and imposing professional standards on my interview participants and the observed practices. I consciously avoided using information management and library jargon during the interviews and analysis of the data, instead, focusing on descriptions drawn directly from the language of the participants.

Methodological Limitations

The sampling strategy and geographical limitations were one of the most difficult aspects of this research design. Limiting the location of the ARCs in this study to Alberta and Saskatchewan does not describe the situation facing all ARCs and cannot communicate the diversity of approaches taken across the parallel gallery system. While I was able to conduct interviews at all ARCs who responded to my request, I was unable to contact two ARCs (one each in Saskatoon and Calgary) which left my ideal sample incomplete. Despite this gap, and the small number of ARCs in Alberta and Saskatchewan, the centres studied do provide a clear understanding of the practices at each centres, and patterns of common practice that emerge from this diverse group.

The quality of data collected from research interviews is heavily dependent on the skills of the interviewer; their ability to establish rapport with the interviewee, listen, probe sensitively, and ask well-structured questions (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). The validity of interview data can be compromised if the interviewer comes to the interview unprepared, asks leading questions, or treats their preconceived notions as facts. For this study I was careful to conduct a pilot study to test and refine my questions and I journaled about my expectations to make myself aware of my underlying assumptions so I could better confront and compensate for them during the interview and analysis process.

The quality of data collected through face-to-face interviews is vulnerable to many of the same disadvantages that other qualitative methods face – namely access to participants, study effect, participant bias, and observer bias (Fidel 1984). I did not have significant difficulty accessing participants other than the two ARCs that I was not able to contact. The participants I did connect with were enthusiastic and forthcoming about their ARCs and archival activities.

The study effect argues that the act of studying a phenomenon can alter it. For example, focusing the interviews on archival practices may cause the participants to think about them differently. It is impossible to eliminate the study effect on the interview participants but I was careful to include questions about other aspects of information practice at the ARCs. I also used the online presence of the organizations to triangulate what the directors said with what their actual practice has been in the past.

Participant bias was not a major factor in this project because the ARC directors interviewed were engaged with the topic and, for the most part, found the discussion to be interesting and thought provoking for their own work. Several participants expressed curiosity about what other ARCs were doing and interest in learning about the findings of this research, but I delayed sharing additional information about the ARC community and my preliminary findings until after the interview was complete to avoid leading the discussion or colouring their responses.

While participant bias was not a significant problem, observer bias can be a more difficult challenge to mitigate. The danger of my personal knowledge and interest in ARCs and archives has the potential to bias my data collection and analysis. However, this knowledge can also provide theoretical sensitivity to identify significant ideas or patterns in the data (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Throughout the research process, I was conscious not to let my knowledge of traditional information management and archival practices heavily influence my analysis of the ARC projects. Continuous self-reflection in memo writing identified and addressed the impact my assumptions may have had on this study. For example, I have a personal interest in how digital archives can support researchers, but that may not be the interest or goal of the ARC community. I was careful to note moments where ARC directors expressed ambivalence about the value of documenting and preserving the information they create and sought to understand and appreciate their reasons.

A strong qualitative research design must be credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and, despite the stated methodological limitations, this project meets these criteria. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility is one of the most important factors in determining the validity of qualitative research. Shenton (2004) identifies 14 ways that researchers can foster confidence in their methods ensuring confirmability. Following most of his recommendations, I utilized well-established interview and data analysis methods, developed familiarity with the culture of my participants prior to contacting them, and utilized multiple data collections methods to triangulate my analysis. I was able to use my different data sources to collaborate or dispute statements made in the interviews. This study also made use of site triangulation by comparing multiple organizations to identify credible patterns in the data. Participants were encouraged to give open and honest answers by giving them the option to

decline questions and stressing that I was not looking for particular answers, but instead was interested in learning about what ARCs do and what their opinions as directors are. Peer scrutiny and feedback from my committee and at conferences, my own reflective commentary, and frequent member checks with the participants to ensure I accurately represent their voices in the data collection were all integral to ensuring the confirmability of the findings of this study.

While qualitative research is applicable to a specific group of participants and findings are not transferrable in the same way as positivist research methods, both Stake (2005) and Denscombe (2003) argue that unique examples are still part of a collective and that transferability should not be rejected out of hand. To encourage useful transferability I have provided extensive contextual details about ARCs and their organizational model. For example, ARCs are a relatively new area of research and, while these findings may not be directly transferable to other contexts, they may serve as a starting point for broader-ranging research on the parallel gallery system as an information network. My hope is that other researchers are able to identify commonalities between ARCs and other organizations that share similar traits and can confidently extend my findings to other areas.

Shenton (2004) notes that dependability is closely linked with confirmability in qualitative research, because the context of a study with real-world participants will never be the same twice. His recommendations to address issues with dependability are to report research processes in repeatable detail, rendering the research design a "prototype model". He recommends that the research report includes detailed discussion of the "research design and its implementation", "operational detail of data gathering", and "reflective appraisal of the project" (Shenton 2004, 71-72), which I have done in the writing of this thesis.

Finally, confirmability can be achieved by ensuring, as much as possible, that findings reflect the study participants and not the opinions of the researcher. Shenton (2004) emphasizes data triangulation, which I have highlighted in my research design, and the importance of noting my biases as the researcher regarding both the methodology chosen and subject being studied. I have sought to do this throughout the research process and have written about recognizing my biases in this section. Once again, Shenton also recommends reflective commentary on the part of the

researcher, which I have done in the form of memo writing and revising my notes frequently, and detailed methodological description, which I have done in the writing of this chapter.

Chapter Four – Data Presentation & Analysis

In the artist-run centre community, the definition of archives is loosely applied to different kinds of resources ranging from print collections to websites listing past exhibitions. Projects that are described as an archive or library are diverse and serve a multitude of purposes for ARC staff, members, and the public. While not all ARCs maintain traditional archives, all of the centres interviewed have kept information or documents from their past and have thought about the value of documenting, preserving, and making their work accessible for future use.

At the centres I spoke with, four main collection types can be identified: institutional documentation, exhibition history, ARC publications, and other print collections like commercial monographs and periodicals. Patterns of challenges and issues emerged during the analysis and are categorized as funding, staff, understanding archival content, copyright, formats and platforms, and collection visibility. Understanding the current status of ARC information management practices can inform the development of sustainable and useable archives for these unique collections. The following chapter describes the value of ARC archives, their audience and collections, and challenges ARCs face in pursuing archival projects**.**

What is the value of an ARC archive?

In his article about the culture of art communities in Canada, Luis Jacob (2009, 87) poses two pointed questions: "When was the last time you found a piece of writing dealing with the relationship between a current production in this city and what has gone on before it? When was the last time you were able to attend a retrospective exhibition on the work of a Toronto artist?" Jacob laments the lack of historic context in the Canadian art community and infers an absence of language to make the community and its work, in a sense, real. He continues, "Exhibition would follow exhibition, artist would follow artist, decade would follow decade – and quickly each of these would sink into our collective amnesia, into the black hole of cultural disregard." (Jacob 2009, 87) A possible correction to the problems Jacob identifies is both a will and a way to value, document, and provides access to the knowledge generated by art communities. The archives of ARCs are a fertile place to begin.

For the ARCs in this study, developing their own archives is a recent phenomenon. Providing access to historical information has not been part of their mandates or core activities, but centres are increasingly interested in using the materials they have saved and opening up their collections to artists, curators, researchers, and the public. This interest in archives is growing with the recognition of the potential benefits for ARCs and their audiences. Archives are projects that serve the arts community but also benefit ARCs by positioning them as unique and important cultural centres. The executive director of PAVED Arts in Saskatoon describes the utility of their archive as "a little bit for artists' research, a little bit for promotion, [and] a little bit for explaining our capacity" – a concise description of the multiple purposes archives can serve for ARCs. Unfortunately, consistent archiving practice is challenging for this community. Representative of the ARCs in this study, the director of Untitled Art Society "think[s] archiving is very interesting and useful for a lot of people, but … it's not a day-to-day practice."

While archiving is challenging, the work can directly benefit ARCs. Illustrating capacity and impact is important for ARCs because they are largely dependent on arts grants to fund their operations and special projects. This funding model necessitates reporting to granting agencies and demonstrating value has become increasingly important. ARC directors and boards need to find ways to quantify and illustrate the value that centres create in their communities and beyond. Finnell (2013) is a proponent of archiving as a way to both preserve the collective memory of a community while also documenting the cultural impact of that community. Archives are a way organizations can show their accountability, track their milestones, and demonstrate the cumulative value of their work for artists and communities. The director of Stride in Calgary describes how they use past exhibition records to illustrate their success:

> It's an important thread through Canadian contemporary art – the role that artist-run centers have played. [For example,] when artists who are now internationally known have represent[ed] Canada at an international level and started in artist-run centers. That's a story line that a lot of people can understand to be the success of the center. We like to be able to use that information to share with potential artists and stakeholders and funders to say that we are an important organization. This is a timeline of proof of our success, of what can happen.

Documenting exhibitions that typically run for weeks in ARC gallery spaces extends the life of the work and makes it accessible to people outside of the city it is shown in. Most ARCs now use online resources, like their websites and social media accounts, as the primary place for sharing information about the work they show including promotional materials and documentation. This increased exposure benefits artists by growing their online presence and linking their work and reputation to an established or innovative artist-run centre. ARCs support new work by introducing their audience to it – both in person and online – and making records of past shows available online extends this opportunity beyond the few weeks when local people are able to experience it in person. This is not the primary goal of ARCs, but it is a highly beneficial service they can provide to artists by documenting and preserving their exhibition history in an authoritative and central place.

Beyond the administrative and promotional value of archives, building an archive is also an identity building practice. It is a way for ARCs to both understand and communicate their history. The directory of The New Gallery interprets archives as a place for "ideas and work [to] come out of [and] to be a catalyst for a larger discussion around why we keep these things […] Just looking back towards your history and being able to make work in the here and now that still acknowledges your past." Exploring and making decisions about what to include, how to describe it, and how to present it to users, in person or online, is a meaning-making process. It is both a way of understanding the history of an organization while also constructing what that history will look like to archive users. Therefore, embarking on creating an archive is something that organizations should do with intent and forethought.

The danger in delaying the development of digital archives for ARC collections is that these organizations, as they stand, cannot hope to usefully preserve the amount of information they have created, are creating, and will create in the near future. If ARCs continue to manage their documents in the same ways they always have they will miss the opportunities that current technological developments have made possible. If ARCs do not start planning now for the future of their digital and physical document management, their histories will be lost.

Audience

Most artist-run centres have kept records or documentation of their activities with the idea that they would be useful for purposes beyond official reporting, but the audience for this information is not well understood. According to their directors, ARC audiences are predominantly motivated to interact with the current exhibit or event and do not typically think of ARCs as a source for research or historical information. Specific requests for information or materials happen infrequently at some ARCs and not at all at others. The director at Stride says "our core audience and our original supporters are artists. We do try and create something for them to come in and see our archive and our resources that they might not otherwise be able to access… It is also key for the research component of a lot of the [local] faculties of fine art," allowing them to access locally relevant resources not available elsewhere. Neutral Ground has had a similar experience providing information to local faculty members, artists, and curators from other galleries although infrequently. When infrequent requests are received, ARCs often struggle to accommodate them. The director of AKA describes receiving "an email from someone in BC asking about a show that was just a couple of years ago. It's really a shame that knowledge is there, but it's also gone." For the most part, ARC directors do not imagine that their collections would have broad appeal for a wide, generalist audience. However, they do think that there is value for artists, curators, art historians, and researchers.

The demographic that most commonly contacts ARCs for information are artists and curators. Requests usually come from people who have a history with the centre because knowledge of the collections is limited to those who have direct experience with it. Artists might be looking for documentation of their own work shown in the gallery, curators may be interested in how a particular show was installed in the space, or writers could be looking for information to produce new critical writing. For example, The New Gallery had a local curator contact their centre looking for information about the artist Jeff Viner. The director was able to provide the curator with their artist file on Viner and a copy of *Scotch & Cigars; The Work of Jeff Viner, 1955-1988* that the gallery had published for an exhibition in 2000. It was the curator's pre-existing relationship with The New Gallery and knowledge of the show from over a decade earlier that led to the request being made, not the existence of an accessible archival record.

For people outside the immediate ARC community there are opportunities to access many of these collections but most are not widely promoted or are not easily discoverable by the public. The New Gallery's John Snow House archive, a Calgary heritage house that serves as the home for The New Galley artists-in-residence and the physical archive of the ARC, requires an appointment to visit. The director of Harcourt House describes their library of catalogues and critical writings as rich but "in no way organized […] it's actually in a room where we hold meetings. It's difficult, there's nowhere to sit and look through the materials." Neutral Ground has a complete digitized record of their historical material but no public interface for searching it. The digitized files are stored on hard drives and used by the ARC staff for reference and responding to inquiries from artists and the public. For all of the ARCs in this project most monograph and periodical collections are in storage or an out-of-the-way area of the gallery, although theoretically accessible if information seekers know to ask.

ARCs have not historically been a destination for people seeking information about contemporary Canadian art, artists, or arts communities. Providing research resources has not been part of the mandates of ARCs (see appendix A) and, anecdotally, ARCs have not received many requests for information from people outside of their communities. The director at Harcourt House in Edmonton comments that they rarely receive requests for information, "sometimes we'll get requests for information about a specific show, but not very often." People may find ARC websites or online projects through an independent internet search, but an ARC's web presence is not primarily designed to serve as an archival resource. The physical spaces ARCs inhabit are often open gallery floor plans and not ideal for displaying a lot of print materials or providing space for researchers to work in. Creating a useable archive is not an easy extension of ARC work, but there are benefits for both users and ARC staff to be gained.

The following section outlines the types of materials and information that the ARCs I interviewed create, collect, and save, and how these collections fit or resist inclusions into an archival project.

ARC Collections

The focused nature of ARC mandates and the small scale of publishing production coming out of these centres mean that ARC archival collections are often unique, representing individual documents and a collective history that is not available elsewhere. If centres do not maintain their own records and keep materials like critical writing, visual documentation, independently published monographs and periodicals, and artist projects preserved and available, it is likely that the information will be lost or forgotten. Although each centre has a unique collection, I have identified four general types of documentation kept by ARCs: exhibition history and artist files, institutional or administrative documents, ARC publications, and external publications. All four collection types were found as physical, digitized, and born digital content.

Exhibition History & Ephemera

Documentation about the exhibitions, events, and artwork produced in artist-run centres is the most common type of collection found in this study. These collections can take on many forms, even within one centre, but are typically based on the artist file format. Artist files are collections of all of the materials that are used to create an exhibition or generated during the course of an exhibition. They typically include the artist's proposal package, the contract between the artist and ARC, documentation of the artwork installed in the gallery space (digital, print or slide photography, video, layout sketches), the artist's statement and CV, promotional materials from the ARC (postcard invitations, press releases), original critical writing about the show (often contracted by the ARC), media coverage (newspaper or magazine clippings), and other ephemera relevant to the exhibitions. The contents can vary depending on the makeup of the show and the staff working at the ARC at the time the file was created. At the New Gallery, their director indicates that, in their artist files, they include "their CV, their proposal, digital images of their artwork, as well as … if we get something in the mail that catches our eye as being relevant we'll tuck that into the folder as well so it can help create a bit of a network."

Most ARCs do not have a template or policy dictating what should be included making the process of collecting these files creative and somewhat serendipitous. A condensed version of this information is usually included on the centre's website, typically consisting of the artist's

name, date of the show, images of the work, the artist's statement, and critical writing commissioned or produced by the ARC.

Most centres collect similar information about each show they present but the nature of the work can demand different types of documentation on a case by case basis. The materials in these files are not available elsewhere and are unique in the context of their relationship to the ARC and the instance of the show in that space. For example, while I was conducting the interview at The New Gallery a show by Benjamin Bellas and Steven Beckly[3] was up. One of Bellas' pieces titled *An Individual Places a Holstein Cowhide Weekender Bag Containing Hospital Gowns, Bone Marrow Biopsy Kits, a Microscope, Blank Glass Slides, Red and Blue Stain, Tweezers, a Pipette, Cotton Swabs, a Test Tube, Optical Paper, and a set of 50 Research-Grade Human Pathology Slides by the Door*, consisting of the objects described in the title, was stolen. The artist decided to replace the original objects with the official police report laid on the ground in the same location the bag had been. This intervention is unique to the exhibition of the work at the New Gallery and is documented by the ARC in their official records and catalogue of the show (The New Gallery 2014). This is a dramatic example of unique documentation of a show but representative of the notable and original records held by ARCs.

Artist file records are organized chronologically and most frequently accessed by the date of the show. The records are not typically annotated nor do they have additional metadata added so retrieval of information typically relies on knowing when the show occurred. Retrieving a file with only an artist's name, exhibition title, or description of the work is much more difficult and relies heavily on the memory of the ARC staff to locate the file in the chronological sequence. This problem is often replicated online where ARCs organize their exhibit information chronologically without additional ways of searching. The director of the Untitled Art Society notes that "our archive could be more accessible in terms of what's on the website at the moment. I think it's difficult to navigate in terms of wanting to find an artist or wanting to see [work on a theme]… It's basically set up like a blog."

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[3] Soft Movements in the Same Direction, Steven Beckly and Benjamin Bellas at The New Gallery, April 11 – May 17, 2014. www.thenewgallery.org/soft-movements/ (retrieved June 1, 2016)

The creation of artist files, digital and material, was not initiated for the purpose of forming a historical archive for the public. ARCs regularly use artist files for their own grant writing and reporting purposes, but these detailed records have additional value. When ARCs receive requests from people looking for information about a specific artist or exhibition, artist files usually contain the information they are looking for. For the most part, ARCs have been diligent in recording and storing information about their exhibitions but few have made this information easily accessible to their members or the public. Most early artist files are kept in binders or vertical files of paper documents and slides. For many centres, this information is ready and waiting to be used. The danger is that, without a plan for preservation and access, these unique and valuable records could be lost.

Institutional Documentation

Institutional documentation relates to the administrative activities of centres including policy documents, board meeting minutes, financial records, and any other records pertaining to the management, staff, space, or organizational history of the centre. Not all ARCs retain this kind of information in a historical archive reflecting the history and culture of the centre, but all ARCs must keep some records for at least seven years for legal oversight and reporting. The New Gallery donated "some of our, what some people might call, our more boring files [early institutional documents] to the Glenbow" to save space and ensure it would be preserved appropriately. This collection includes meeting minutes, correspondence from board members, property and facility records, grant and budget information, incorporation documents, and bylaws. The Glenbow has partially digitized the collection and made it 'browsable' using an online finding aid (Glenbow 2009). The New Gallery is the only centre that has made the decision to make this information accessible as an archival collection, but ARCs are public institutions and their organizational and financial documents are part of the public record. The director of PAVED notes the potential value of these, sometimes neglected, documents stating "that's something artist-run centers have never been as good at documenting – just our own history of who's served, who's been on the Board, because those names become interesting down the road… People can request them [board minutes and financial documents] if they have a reason, but we're not publishing our monthly Board minutes on our website or our monthly financial. That doesn't go up there, but they are a very important part of what we are collecting."

There are no privacy or legal impediments to including them in a public archive, but this openness can make it difficult to decide what should be kept past legally required timeline, and what should be discarded.

This type of information is not what I anticipated when I began this research but its value is made clear by directors who spoke about the people who had been involved with the ARCs as directors or board members in the past and their attempts to compile a narrative or community history of their centre. Artist-run centres are not only important because of the artwork they show, but also for the work that they do and the people who are involved in forming local art communities. The history of how the organization and the community that supports is was founded, grew, and changed over time is reflected in the day-to-day functioning of the centres and the documents generated by this operational work.

ARC publications

The majority of the ARCs in this study, with the exception of Sâkêwêwak, have collections of exhibition catalogues and publications from both their own centre and peer organizations. These catalogues and critical publications are important because they allow the information that ARCs have produced to continue to be accessible and available beyond the life of the exhibition or event they are published for. They create a record of artistic output and conversation in Canada and extend the discussion beyond the close communities that are actively engaged with local ARCs. Formal archives are the exception in this community and formalizing and sharing intellectual output in print keeps this information alive and accessible. If ARCs, libraries, and other public institutions do not keep these publications in circulation they cease to be available anywhere other than private collections and in boxes in ARC storage spaces. Despite the perceived resilience of print, these often single-run, grassroots-distributed publications are ephemeral in many ways.

Artist-Run Publishing

Print publishing is vital to this community and is a part of the production cycle for the majority of the artist-run centres interviewed. The director at The New Gallery explains that "people say print is dead, but not for artist-run books. It's more active that ever; artist-run publications and

publishers are more active than ever." Print is valued for its perceived resilience, status as an official record, and ability to be easily shared. Although digital publishing is easily accessible and requires less financial investment, an entirely digital publishing model is not a desirable solution for this community. The director at Stride commented that "I think we'll never stray away from a physical form [of publishing] because of the genre that we're in." Although print publishing is costly, being able to hold the product of intellectual work in your hands is important and a well-produced print publication demands a certain amount of attention from peers that other media does not.

ARC publishing is not driven by the economics of selling copies but it is a valued part of ARC activities. For example, The New Gallery has a publishing schedule built into their strategic plan and they continue to prioritize this kind of intellectual output despite a dramatic reduction in funding for publications. In 2014, The New Gallery began producing a zine-inspired, print-on-demand series of critical texts where copies are made on an office printer and staple bound. These publications respond to the most recent exhibition and consist of essays, installation photos, and conversations with the artists.

SOFT MOVEMENTS IN THE SAME DIRECTION / STEVEN BECKLY / BENJAMIN BELLAS

Soft Movements in the Same Direction

$5. 33 pages. 8.5" x 5.5". Black and white. 2014. Also available as a free PDF.

Produced in conjunction with the exhibition *Soft Movements in the Same Direction* by Benjamin Bellas and Steven Beckly, this catalogue features writing by Lindsay Sorell and a conversation with the artists.

THE TRAVELLING LIGHT / JILLIAN FLECK / TOMAS JONSSON / KEGAN McFADDEN / EHRYN TORRELL / NICOLE KELLY WESTMAN

The Travelling Light

$5. 29 pages. 8.5" x 5.5". Black and white. 2014. Also available as a free PDF.

Produced in conjunction with the group show *The Travelling Light* by Jillian Fleck, Tomas Jonsson, Kegan McFadden, Ehryn Torrell, and Nicole Kelly Westman, this catalogue features an essay by Steven Cottingham and documentation of the exhibition.

Figure 1: The New Gallery zine-Inspired publications. Screenshot from www.thenewgallery.org/shop/

The publications are created by the programming coordinator during the run of the show at the centre and then launched at the opening of the following exhibition. The gallery charges $5 for each print copy and offers them as a free PDF download on their website. It is not a lucrative

project, and it is not intended to be a revenue-generating activity. Instead the goal is to further the impact of temporary exhibitions and extend conversations about the artists and their work.

The coordinator at Harcourt House argues that publications are "really important for critical dialogue. Certainly even [for] things like panel discussions… If you can't go, [the information] is gone. I find that publications are a good way of keeping that information [alive]." Local ARC communities tend to be small so recording and formalizing these ideas is a critical process ensuring that a dialogue does not fade out, but can build over time. Local perspectives are a unique aspect of ARC publications and directors in Alberta note recent growth in self-publishing in their community focused on local artists and issues. The director of SNAP Gallery has "noticed a big upswing in [local publishing]… There has been a lot of dialogue in Edmonton about 'is Edmonton ignored by the rest of the [country] because we don't have [mainstream] curators and writers who are writing about work here?" Publications have been the best way to give ideas, often not expressed in other venues, a life beyond the events around which dialogues happen. Publications like The New Gallery series, mentioned earlier in this chapter, are a response to the desire for ARC publishing in an economic environment that is increasingly difficult to navigate.

Print publications are frequently funded by one-time project grants, but cuts to Canadian federal government grants for artist-run centres have changed the publishing landscape for ARCs. However, there is a recent resurgence in organizing to support ARC publishing within this community. In October 2015 members of the community met in Vancouver to strategize ways to find support for arts publishing and connect audiences to this content (Artist-Run Centres and Collectives Conference 2016). Emerging practices in digital and print publishing are beginning to shift the absolute importance of traditional outputs and earlier distribution practices that relied on sharing print materials through a reciprocal postal exchange.

Canadian Catalogue Exchange

Collections of catalogues and critical publications at ARCs are often the direct result of the informal Canadian catalogue exchange. This mailed publication exchange is a holdover practice from a popular Canada Council for the Arts grant to support arts publications that was cancelled several years ago. Recipients of this grant were required to send complimentary copies of their

publication to one hundred arts and cultural institutions as part of the fulfillment criteria. This was an opportunity to increase the exposure of their artistic and critical output within a relevant community and encourage critical discourse across the country. Even when the grant was active, the Canada Council did not provide an official list for grant recipients. ARCs had to compile and maintain their own mailing lists which included other ARCs, galleries, and museums. Of the ARC directors interviewed for this study, the director of Neutral Ground in Regina is the most familiar with the practice and its roots:

> I think everybody has just kind of kept up with it [the Canadian catalogue exchange] and said, "Well, we have several boxes of these catalogs. We're going to distribute them to all of the other Artist-Run Centers and galleries." Then, we get a letter from them saying, "Behold, here are three or four books that we've done over the year and we would appreciate it if you put us on your mailing list too. … If you haven't been on staff at a gallery prior to [when the grant was cancelled], you probably wouldn't know that this was a requirement that technically doesn't have any authority anymore.

This practice persists today, but it is not a formalized exchange network. Mailing lists are maintained as a voluntary community practice rather than a necessity of meeting grant requirements. The typical high turnover rate of centre staff has obvious impacts on this practice and the mail exchange mirrors social networks of centres and the individuals working in the community. Of the nine ARC directors I interviewed, only five knew about the catalogue exchange and the long-term director of Neutral Ground was the only one who was familiar with the details of the history of the practice. I am curious to know if new organizations are joining this mail exchange and if ARCs led by people entirely new to the community are participating. Does the exchange of publications create sub-communities, including and excluding some ARCs?

External Publications

Some ARCs also have collections of commercially published monographs and periodicals that are distinct from the catalogues and critical texts described in the previous section. The New Gallery, Stride, Neutral Ground, AKA, and Society of Northern Alberta Print Artists (SNAP) Gallery have collections of books and magazines that are not produced by artist-run centres, either combined with their catalogue collection or separated. Frequently, these collections have

accrued over time with no collection policy guiding their accession. AKA in Saskatoon has an extensive collection of books in storage that were donated to the centre but do not align with their conceptual focus or mandate.

Consisting of art magazine subscriptions, some purchased titles, and donations by centre members or libraries deaccessioning art books, they are intended for use by centre members and gallery visitors. These ARCs have external publication collections, but the materials are often not able to be presented in a space where the public can discover the collection or be able to easily access it. Usually, these collections of books and magazines are in closed storage or shelved in an inconspicuous space. Stride provides a searchable OpenBiblio digital catalogue of their collection of books through their website but they do not have space to shelve all of the texts. Requested materials are retrieved from organized storage bins in the centre's basement by ARC staff.

Figure 2: Stride Gallery OpenBiblio Library Search Interface. Screenshot from
http://stride.ab.ca/stride_library/opac/

The desire to make external publications relevant and accessible is noted, but space is often a limitation and developing the infrastructure for typical library services such as search, discovery, and loaning materials is untenable for most small organizations. ARCs with external publication collections should consider their relevance and usefulness for ARC audiences and have a connection to the mandate of the ARC. External publications from large publishing companies are more likely to be included in local public and academic libraries that can provide access to

things like art textbooks, mass market periodicals, and reference books. ARCs, therefore, do not need to be the source of all information about visual and performing arts for their communities.

Challenges

For the directors of artist-run centres, archiving their history is desirable but rarely a priority. The director of Sâkêwêwak feels a responsibility for the archive, but struggles to realize it noting that "as director, is it really my job to be going over such things [the physical archives], but it is my job, I think, to make it available." As ARCs become established and accrue multiple decades of work to reflect upon an interest in digital archiving is growing. However, interested ARCs face a number of significant challenges in developing and sustaining a successful archive.

Funding

Often the immediate barrier to starting a new nonessential project (such as an archive) is funding. The director at AKA notes that "there's not a lot of funding to support archiving in artist-run centres. Because of that, we don't have the digital archive." A 2011 report to the Canada Council for the Arts identifies several areas where access to grants could support ARC activities. Noting digitizing archives as a particular challenge, the report authors state that one unidentified ARC "is using its archives to create new opportunities and new work, but funding online archives is a significant challenge" (Burgess and De Rosa 2011, 51). For centres that do not currently have any archival system in place – like UAS, Sâkêwêwak, and PAVED – the prospect of beginning a project from the ground up can be daunting. The costs of launching an archival project go beyond purchasing digitization equipment or paying for a digitization service. Digital archives require design, programming, website hosting, data storage, and staff hours for record description and data entry. All of these costs can be substantial. Once a project is running, there will always be costs associated with maintaining and adding to the collection.

For most expenses, ARCs rely on operational grants that meet the current needs of the centre but do not extend far beyond those defined expenses. Granting agencies set the requirements ARCs must meet to qualify for funding; focus is on current programming and engaging with the public, typically not on archival or heritage projects. The director of Stride comments that "we have so

much pressure from the granters to be working on other aspects of the organization. [Archives are] the bottom of their priority list and unfortunately, because of that, it's not the top of ours." Many arts grants are distributed only for specific projects and there are few funding opportunities for digital archive initiatives that require a substantial investment up front followed by regular funding for maintenance and collection development. The director of PAVED describes the problems they have faced acquiring appropriate funding to manage their archival video collection:

> I don't want a onetime grant, a chunk of money to figure out, because we already did that. We went through with an archives grant, a heritage grant to digitize those works. Now, all of those works have been digitized, which preserves them for one level of migration, so they can be accessed on this hard drive, but the hard drive isn't organized with files in terms of, 'here's this work, here's all the needed data that goes with that work'... It was a stop-gap measure to save these pieces from being lost forever but now we need someone to actually work with all the video files on that hard drive.

Spence (2005) confirms that this is a common problem faced by digitization projects in other fields as well. Where acquiring funding for a digitization project can be challenging, confirming long-term funding for preservation activities can seem impossible. Beagrie (2003) substantiates this claim in a report for the National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program of the Library of Congress, stating that "Digital preservation is poorly funded in relation to the scale of the challenge. Institutions have received little or no additional core funding to address digital preservation; as a result; they must rely on short-term external project funding or reallocate internal resources." (under "National Initiatives and Funding") For these reasons, despite enthusiasm for these kinds of projects, archival initiatives tend to have trouble with sustainability. ARCs that start out with a one-time project grant must think about how they will sustain an archive in the long-term, securing continuous funding and staff support.

A recurring theme in this research was the use of summer students, often funded by the Young Canada Work grant that subsidizes wages for temporary student and recent graduate workers in the arts and culture sector (Government of Canada 2013). These grants are well suited for ARCs and provide the opportunity to have some increased capacity for projects like digital archives for several months, but this funding has restrictions on the type of workers who can be hired and the

period of employment. Stride has used summer students frequently that, their director notes, "have facilitated research on how to approach starting to archive our files… I don't think any of the library would be where it's at without those [Young Canada Works] funds." Hiring students for time-consuming work, like sorting through physical records and scanning documents, is a good way to get necessary preparatory work for a digital archive done, but creates a new set of problems for knowledge transfer.

Staffing & Temporary Workers

Typical for a non-profit organization, ARCs tend to have limited staff resources and high rates of turnover (Nonprofit HR 2015, 17). Full-time staff are usually limited to between one and three positions with board members, casual workers, and volunteers filling in the gaps. For ARCs in this study that have archives, it was often a passionate advocate for the project who drove the project and made it a reality. At The New Gallery, their current director describes how:

> The original board members and staff members that worked on [the digital archive] are no longer a part of the organization. There's that loss of institutional knowledge and gap that we just haven't been able to… I can access it and [see that] it's still on our server. I know it's there … [but] obviously it's useless if it's not connected to the website and people aren't able to use it. I just wouldn't want all of that hard work and everything to be wasted

This is typical of community archives which tend to reflect the values and motivations of a small number of key players (Flinn et al. 2009). Although they might receive help from volunteers or other community members, the health of an archival project often falls to the vision and commitment of one or two people. Relying on an individual to sustain a project over the long-term can have significant consequences. Being solely responsible for a large and complex project can easily lead to burn out. Because ARCs have a very small staff and frequent turnover there is rarely capacity for succession planning, negatively impacting knowledge transfer to new personnel. Non-essential projects like archives that require knowledge and investment to sustain can stagnate or be abandoned when their champion leaves. Flinn, Stevens, and Shepard (2009) argue for a structure that can sustain organizations beyond the involvement of key participants, but identify the period after a passionate advocate leaves as being "one of the most dangerous times for the long-term sustainability of a community archive" (80). Challenges stemming from

high staff turnover are exacerbated by ARCs' necessary reliance on temporary workers and volunteers.

Temporary workers are missing a deep understanding of the history and culture of the ARC and will not have the contextual knowledge to make informed and nuanced decisions about selecting and describing materials. They can understand the purpose of the project and be well trained for technical tasks, but understanding context, community history that can aid identification and interpretation, and quirks of individual records can only come with exposure to both the collection and the culture of the ARC. A common refrain in interviews is voiced by the director of Harcourt House who does not "think that it would be easy to retrieve information from the archive if you didn't know where to look… if I have to find something that we did three years ago, where do I look? How do I figure this out?" Unless you know what you are looking for, it is hard to find anything in these collections and even items known to exist can be a challenge to locate. For archives that do not have a finding aid or digital search tool, each information request must be filtered through the knowledge and memory of the people administering the archive. This becomes a major problem when those people do not have a deep understanding of either the collection or the history of the ARC and what can be expected to be found in those records.

Where temporary workers lack knowledge of the centre and the collection as it stands, they can rapidly form an understanding of it while doing a digitization project. They may be hired for a summer or semester and quickly build both technical skills and deep knowledge of the collection but, when the grant runs out and that individual leaves, the capacity that was developed in them is lost. This is a challenge for ARCs where permanent staff do not have the capacity to focus on a time-consuming project alongside their regular work. While the knowledge gained from handling each document is great, the time this process demands makes it untenable for ARC directors or other permanent staff. In a statement that could be used to describe any of the ARCs in this study, the director of Stride notes that they "rely very heavily on temporary employees for the success of that function [library and archive] of the gallery." Unless ARCs are able to hire a permanent position to focus on an archive or build this work into an existing role the reliance on temporary workers, and the challenges that go along with it, will persist.

Neutral Ground in Regina found a way to circumvent this problem by having a temporary worker execute a mass digitization project, later hiring him as a permanent staff member. Neutral Ground is in the unique position of having a director who has led the organization for over twenty years, yet her memory of what the archive contains is surpassed by what the new staff member learned digitizing all of the materials item by item. She notes that "it's strategic to try to find people that can develop that kind of institutional memory. [The staff member has] actually gone back into the archives longer than I have been here. He knows, 'No we don't have anything' or 'yes, I've seen that'". The Neutral Ground digitized collection does not have a searchable interface, making this staff member's knowledge an important part of the information retrieval process. This staff member is able to fill information requests and rediscover records that had been forgotten with an efficiency and accuracy no one else can. This solution is working well for them while the staff member is there, but when he chooses to leave it will reduce the usefulness of those digital records.

Other ARC archives are the result of dedicated volunteers. The same problems that plague the use of temporary staff can be extended to volunteers. The tension between needing people to carry out this work and not being able to retain them on a long-term basis is problematic, but all too common. When a centre is fortunate to have a volunteer who has the skills and time to dedicate to an archival project it can be a fruitful partnership. Notably, VIVO Media Arts Centre in Vancouver has named their Crista Dahl Media Library & Archive after the archive's most active volunteer. Dahl has been involved with VIVO since its inception and developed the cataloguing system used for their print and tape archive (VIVO Media Arts Centre 2016).

It can be challenging to find temporary staff, summer students, or volunteers who have a background in libraries or archives. Recruiting skilled workers who are willing to take an unpaid or short-term position is difficult and the ARC directors in this study have not considered seeking out trained archivists for positions in their centres. The director of The New Gallery thinks "it would be wonderful if we could hire a staff [member] that was an archivist or librarian, or maybe a part-time archivist and librarian" but realizes it may be hard to attract skills staff on their budget. Skilled volunteers are also an option, but they note that "it's difficult to ask people

to volunteer their time, if they are specialists, to do something like that because I think people should be paid for what they do."

Reluctance to engage with traditional archivists can also be attributed in part to the priorities ARCs have for the form their projects will take. For example, Stride in Calgary prioritises the interests and expertise of people who want to work on their archive over past practices or traditionalist approaches to the work. Stride's director sees the archive as a creative project in and of itself with more benefit gained by providing meaningful and inspiring work for archive volunteers than in making a technically perfect but creatively unexamined system. Because it can be difficult to attract dedicated volunteers, Stride wants to attract people to their project who will be personally invested in the overall health of the archive. They anticipate it will be more successful if they allow volunteers to explore their own interests through the project. I find this to be a compelling approach to solving the problem of attracting volunteers who will become invested in the project enough to support it over time and might result in a uniquely appropriate manifestation of a digital archive for their community. There is a risk, however, that trusting an archive project to the interests of a passionate but untrained individual could result in the expenditure of resources on what becomes a pet project.

While I have argued that high staff turnover and lack of knowledge transfer is detrimental to ARCs and the long-term sustainability of digital archives, a contrary perspective on this finding was identified during my analysis. The coordinator of Harcourt House in Edmonton identified the practice of having a small staff with a high turnover rate as both a challenge to knowledge transfer and an opportunity in disguise. She notes that a high staff turnover "is interesting, because of the lack of institutional memory, it offers a great ability to be innovative." Finnell (2013, 55) mentions that changing membership in communities can "provide an infusion of fresh ideas" but also "destabilize the collective memory of the community over time." This idea was obliquely referenced in three additional interviews, although as a compromise rather than an equal benefit. Needing to reinvent the way things are done when knowledge of past practices are lost can accelerate the development of new ideas and ways of working in ways that larger, bureaucratic organizations are not usually able to change. Experimentation, DIY ethic, and non-

traditional methods have always typified artist-run culture and a complete break from previous ways of working is not always seen as negative or disruptive.

What is in the archive?

Having a permanent person responsible for the archive would address a related challenge – knowing what the archive includes and what is missing. The intrinsic value of archives is deeply felt by ARC directors, but this impression is often coupled with questions about what they actually contain. The director of Stride recognizes that they cannot possibly make use of every record and are instead "trying to strike a balance between not overdoing it, but also not losing it." Other ARCs, like PAVED in Saskatoon, have nearly complete paper records going back to the 1970s that no one has seriously looked at since they were created.

Uncertainty about what exactly is kept in file cabinets and boxes was a common theme. Participants know that artist files, contracts, promotional material, and ARC publications likely had been kept, but the completeness of the record and consistency in collecting and organizing vary. While some centres with permanent spaces, like Neutral Ground, have been able to keep continuous records in one place, many others have identifiable gaps in their collection. The director at Sâkêwêwak describes how "if we go down [to the basement] we would find a lot of the major projects that were accomplished either in artist residencies or contracted work and such [but] I think there would be a few blank spots, especially during particular years." This is a common refrain from directors who have inherited large collections of unsorted or undescribed physical records. In some cases, materials have been lost during moves, damaged in storage, or culled due to space constraints, and many ARCs, including UAS, Sâkêwêwak, Stride, and AKA, now have identifiable gaps in their collections.

While materials known to be missing are frustrating, the overwhelming nature of large collections that have been passively accruing for decades generates another set of problems. The mass of materials in different formats makes it difficult to know not only what is there, but also what is missing. Sometimes the best case scenario for collections that have not been used has been benign neglect. For example, without a long-term plan or purpose for keeping documentation, AKA Artist Run has kept physical documents in file boxes in an approximation of chronological order, undisturbed and unfiltered. Now, as they begin to look at the collection as

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a whole, undated documents can be placed in a relative timeline with some confidence. The contextual clues from the way documents were stored at the time of their creation help to create a narrative about the history of the ARC and what was thought to be important enough to save.

When ARCs seek to create an archive dating to the founding of the organization, the completeness of the documentary record and the story it tells is defined by what the archive contains and what it is missing. As documentation and operational practices shift from being paper-based to largely online, ARC leaders are discovering that developing digital archives that can grow with their organization is more complex than scanning stored documents.

Copyright and Implied Permissions

The content that ARC directors in this study think will be of greatest interest to users is documents from past shows; however, this content raises questions about usage rights and copyright. Information that was created or commissioned by the ARC for an exhibit, including curatorial essays and promotional materials belong to the centre, but can ARCs share images of the artists' work or their application information? Clarity around what can, and cannot, be included in a publically accessible archive large depends on the contracts that ARCs sign with exhibiting artists.

Concern about copyright varies widely across the ARCs interviewed for this study. Many of the directors I spoke to indicated that the use of visual documentation of artistic works for non-commercial purposes is included in their standard artist contracts. The director of Neutral Ground explains that, beginning in 1994-1995, she has written documentation usage permissions "into the contracts with artists. We have the right to document, in consultation with the artist, by video or photography, any of the work. The artist agrees that we will keep an archive of it and make it available for educational purposes and not for sale." While there are benefits for artists to be included in ARC archives, contracts that allow for non-commercial reuse of images do not explicitly allow for permanent placement in a publically accessible archive. Other ARCs, like SNAP in Edmonton, did not have this language built into their artist contracts and their director reports that "this is a bit of a sticky issue in that, if we wanted to digitize the whole collection, we would have to go back and seek permission from all of the artists who historically have donated

[work to the archive] in order to reproduce the image of their work online… We've certainly been getting that permission with new acquisitions, I would say in the last three or four years, but previous to that we would need to go back and track down those artists and seek permission… I would say that we're ethically obligated to get permission."

It is likely that the practices of keeping artist contracts and including clauses about the use of documentation have changed since the founding of many centres, as it has at SNAP. While ARC directors universally indicated that artists represented in their collection would not mind if their information was shared with other members of the community or researchers, the scale it is shared on may prove to be problematic. Past practices of receiving information requests directly meant that ARC staff controlled what was shared, and with whom. If entire collections are made open and available online, this could potentially change the way artists represented in the collection feel about their work being shared by the ARC.

Copyright issues are further complicated by the type of work being documented, and changing attitudes towards performance, reproduction, and authenticity in the art world. It may be more problematic for artists to grant permission to reproduce their work, based on the nature of the medium they work in. High-resolution digital images, available online, could be reproduced or used without their consent. The proliferation of social media platforms that rely on the sharing of images, such as Instagram and Tumblr, has made it easy to reproduce images from anywhere online, often without attribution. The posting and re-posting of images without attribution quickly strips them of their original context and meaning and make it extremely difficult to locate the original source.

The director of Neutral Ground in Regina discussed a change she has noticed with performance artists who are beginning to request that their performances not be video recorded for both aesthetic and theoretical reasons. She describes how "some performers [at the ARC] have particularly asked us not to document them. It's a groundswell of consensus coming from live performers that they don't want to have that done because it's not necessarily being done in good way." The nature of much performance art is that the viewer experiences the work in person, in real time. Some artists eschew video or photo recordings of their work as inadequate representations of the experiential nature of the piece. Quite literally, you had to be there. Others

do not want a poor recording or bad angle of the performance to represent their work or for the presence of a videographer to distract from the live event. For artists whose work closely resembles, or is identical to, digital documentation formats (such as digital video artists), the line between sharing documentation that a show occurred at an ARC and reproducing the work in its entirety is blurred.

As ARCs move forward in developing digital archives, they will have to carefully consider how they will handle documentation that does not have usage rights clearly identified in contractual agreements. The history of artist-run communities and community archives will also mean they will want to consider community norms and the cultural impact of sharing historical documentation online. In the future, ARCs may wish to revise the language in their artist contracts to explicitly allow for the inclusion, or exclusion, of particular documents from their archive at the time a show is planned.

Multiple Formats and Storage Options

The records that most ARCs maintain can be found distributed between file boxes, bookshelves, hard drives, cloud storage, and websites in a multitude of physical and digital formats. The complexity of creating a useable archive is compounded when ARCs must reconcile their historical, largely physical, documents with more recent born-digital information. As document formats have shifted and diversified over time, the current state of ARC collections precludes a simple solution for a uniform digital archive experience.

The earliest ARC records identified in this study are print documents which are limited in number and easily digitized and stored. ARCs are still actively producing print publications and documents but, increasingly, exhibition documentation, promotional materials, media coverage, and other important information is now born digital. Artist-run organizations are typically early adopters of technology and much of the material that ARCs now want to preserve is found on social media feeds, blogs, and websites. These platforms are excellent for short term accessibility and visibility, but their fleeting nature and the continual production of new content poses serious challenges to long-term preservation and access.

The type of information that could be archived proliferates as ARCs expand their communications into digital platforms like email newsletters, blogs, and social media feeds. In the past, advertising for an exhibition would consist of printing leaflets and posters that could easily be slipped into an artist file folder. Now communication happens continuously throughout the lifecycle of an exhibition on multiple platforms, but less often in print. Much of the information created for exhibitions is now born digital and exists solely on ARC websites, blogs, and social media. The director of Sâkêwêwak describes how they "really rely on social media, web-based [platforms]. Facebook is very handy, especially when we are limited by particular [constraints]… I can always pull something up from our Facebook account and all of the images [are] logged there. That's really all I have got [for a record of shows and events]."

This approach can improve the ability to retrieve information in the short term by leveraging global online search tools built into web platforms, but the long-term prospects for the survival and access to this information is questionable. Born digital records tend to have a short lifespan because they are both easier to delete than print materials and can be considered to be essentially ephemeral in nature (Spence 2005). What will happen if these platforms disappear or if moving content from one digital platform to another is not possible? ARCs need to decide how important this born-digital information is and how they can preserve it for future use. While this section is focused on managing born-digital and digitized content, this does not mean that print or other physical records are inconsequential aspects of developing an archive. ARCs will continue to have a mix of formats to deal with and make decisions about. Monographs, print publications, artwork multiples like SNAP Gallery's printmaker series, and other items that do not have digital surrogates require decisions about if and how they might be included in a digital archive.

Digital Files

All of the ARCs in this study keep digital information on multiple platforms, in multiple file formats, for multiple audiences. Web sites, blogs, and social media are for information relevant to the public and local digital files are for internal use, although there is often some overlap in

their content. For example, Neutral Ground has digitized their entire physical archives on external hard drives, but also describes their website as a largely comprehensive archive of their past exhibitions, stating that they have "maintained [our website] as an archive as well [as their digitized print records]… There is a record of every exhibition (since 2000) including all the correct dates and spelling". Digital files stored on local computers do not have the same kind of precarious existence that documentation on social media or websites does, but an offline storage system is not without its own challenges.

The security and fidelity of ARCs' digital information are undermined when ARCs have not defined a document management strategy or scheduled backup process. In the ARC community, born digital and digitized files are often viewed and managed in the same way that print collections have been. Digital files are seen as being robust, easily transferable, searchable, and less prone to damage than boxes of paper files. Unfortunately, this has not been the case for all of the centres in this study. Digital files that are stored only on local computers or hard drives are vulnerable to loss, damage, and theft. The New Gallery had computers stolen from their space during a robbery and lost some irreplaceable information. Digital information can also be inadvertently lost when computers are upgraded and hardware is replaced. Neutral Ground has experienced "people los[ing] things on their hard drive. Documenting a whole show and then losing it. By the time you realize, the show is down." If digital documents are not well organized, described, and stored in a known location it is entirely possible that files can be unknowingly discarded or deleted. It can be much easier to get rid of a computer that is full of relevant but hidden files than it is to toss out several boxes of paper documents. The shadow side of digital files saving storage space, when compared to physical documents, is that they are easier to overlook or forget about.

Any digital archive or collection of files is vulnerable to changing formats and file standards. Digital collections require regular maintenance and upgrades as technology changes (Houghton 2016). Although having the ability to self-manage digital files provides greater opportunity to ensure they will be accessible and usable over the long term, keeping these files safe requires active intervention or costly automated maintenance systems. Brogan (2009) points out that even well-funded corporate institutions that are legally compelled to keep records struggle with their

digital information preservation. With few successful models or easy solutions, ARCs have evolved their own strategies. As part of a records management strategy, the director at SNAP explains that they "do a back-up and keep an external hard drive off-site." However, there is more to ensuring adequate preservation than keeping up to date backups. Digital documents must be checked regularly to ensure that files have not become corrupted and drives have not failed. In addition to creating and updating backups of files, ARCs also need to think about how they will maintain fixity of digital files with checksums and a regular maintenance schedule.

Websites and Social Media Content

Several of the ARCs in this study describe their website or social media accounts as being their digital archive. PAVED Arts (www.pavedarts.ca), Untitled Art Society (www.uascalgary.org), and Neutral Ground (www.neutralground.sk.ca) all rely on their website as an accurate list of past shows including names, dates, descriptions, and images. Sâkêwêwak relies heavily on their Facebook account (www.facebook.com/Sakewewak) to capture their work. Even ARCs who do keep offline archives acknowledge that their websites are often the easiest place to find information. The director of PAVED notes that "the better our website documents work and provide information [over the] long term, the easier it is for us to get back to the information that we need as opposed to trying to figure out what box it is in... If that information is available (on our website) that's the easiest, most effective way for us to do it."

ARCs are using free online platforms like Tumblr, Facebook, Instagram, and WordPress sites as well as digital library tools like OpenBiblio and Collective Access to make their show documentation available and discoverable. As the necessary technology becomes affordable and accessible, ARCs have built digital record creation into their regular workflows. The widespread use of free web-based platforms like WordPress, YouTube, and Tumblr have dramatically reduced the barrier to entry for organizations who want to share information online. There are many reasons why ARCs would choose these tools. Primarily, they are low-cost or free, important for non-profits and underscored by the director of Untitled Art Society who notes that "A lot of [our digital tools] are open source, free software. That's what we have to do [financially]." Other benefits of free online tools is that they usually do not require specialized programming skills to create or maintain, and they demand minimal training to learn. The

challenge is that content created specifically for the web tends to be highly time dependent and ephemeral in the nature of its function for ARCs. The brief lifespan of the primary function of this content makes a plan for preservation all the more important.

Despite the lowered barrier to entry not all ARCs see web platforms as ideal solutions. Several of the directors interviewed expressed some concerns about the long-term support for preservation and access to the digital information they had created or stored online. Stride uses OpenBiblio, an open source library cataloguing system, but their director expresses "a small fear that OpenBiblio is no longer a thing… That struggle between the physical form and the digital form [of the collection], and neither are actually that safe or guaranteed [to last]." While most of the directors were cautiously optimistic that relying on popular tools like WordPress and Dropbox would ensure long-term access, these tools are typically selected out of necessity, not because they are the best digital archiving platform for their needs. To guard against loss, the director at AKA has sought to keep their integrated systems as simple as possible, indicating that "I like to use very minimal amounts of [technology] because things die so often that I just try to stick to what I'm accustomed to using." It would be an understatement to say that platforms like WordPress are not what professional archivists would use for an archive. Despite these perceived deficiencies, free user-friendly tools provide an accessible option for ARCs and other non-profit organizations, affording them an opportunity to store and share digital records online within their regular operational constraints.

Visibility & Accessibility

For the current state of ARC archives, search and retrieval functions rely mainly on web search engines and the knowledge of ARC staff. This section describes the challenges that relying on search engines like Google, or the knowledge ARC staff present for information retrieval and what ARCs should consider when designing searchable archives.

There are many options for ARCs looking to safely store their digital records, but it is in the process of making that information available where new technologies can be the most useful. All of the ARCs I interviewed keep materials of some kind whether they are artist files, exhibit documentation, publications, critical writings, or documents and ephemera about the centre. It is easy to be overwhelmed with questions about the utility and accessibility of years of these

records that have not been consciously created or organized for archival purposes. Even with little to no metadata or advanced search functions, simply having a listing of past exhibits or critical writing on an indexed website makes that work visible to the world. The executive director of PAVED in Saskatoon points out that if ARCs do not have a plan for using the information they save, "it'll just be this continuation of creating documentation [that] will be meaningless without a means to access it later." Using web publishing tools allow ARCs to save time creating, sharing, and managing information in one location and many ARCs consider their website or social media accounts to be their archive.

For ARCs that use their website as their digital archive, Google is a good basic tool for searching but it does not provide the type of in-depth discovery and analysis that a well-designed digital archive can. Web search engines display results based on opaque relevancy ranking systems and the scale of information available on the internet makes it unlikely that a small ARC website will land on the first pages of results. Relying on search engines to direct users to ARC content will very likely bury their information under more influential mainstream cultural institutions and commercial websites. For researchers looking for information, unless they know to go directly to the ARCs website to browse, they are unlikely to find these important primary source collections.

Simply finding ARC digital archives is one aspect of visibility and discovery, but search and retrieval inside ARC archives is a critical but complex problem. The diversity of the types of materials ARCs have does not lend itself to a simple, standard metadata description framework. The way documents can be described and searched is broad, complicated by the challenge of using text to search for images using descriptors more complex than names, dates, locations, or formats. The director from Harcourt House describes their digital records as "not super organized, but it's not the most brutal thing to look through, if you know what year you are looking for." This assessment can be applied to all of the ARCs interviewed, their records are organized, to a point, but retrieval based on more than a date or artist name is challenging. Archive users, or ARC staff and curators, may want to find information about a theme that is not easily captured by titles or file names. For example, a curator interested in the history of a

particular ARC exhibiting Canadian Indigenous artists cannot easily identify that information unless digital records have been tagged with that descriptor.

Currently, none of the ARCs interviewed receive a significant number of requests for information or documentation from their archives or records. However, when requests are received, they often struggle to facilitate those that go beyond easily identifiable, known items such as the installation documentation photos of a recent exhibit. The director of PAVED describes how:

> We struggle filling requests for information. We haven't been able to facilitate those requests to the level I'd like to because it's the challenge of how the data is managed… We did have a request, I remember one in the fall. Somebody was researching an artist and said, 'I think they were part of a show at your gallery in the mid-'90s. Do you have a program from it?' 'Maybe… but I can't tell you where.'

The challenge of searching and retrieving information, in both physical and digital collections, came up in all nine interviews. The director at The New Gallery sees websites and social media as 'auto-archiving' systems that save time and effort, but notes that "compared to something like a database … there's pretty limited search functions… It works, but I don't know [that] scrolling infinitely… I don't know how useful that will be."

All of the ARCs in this study have materials that they are happy to share, but finding information is often very difficult. Currently, retrieval of information is heavily reliant on the knowledge of ARC staff to know what is in their documentation and where to find it, whether it is on a computer, website, or in a file cabinet. Because retrieval relies so heavily on the tacit knowledge of the staff and the organization and accessibility of physical and digital files, this is not a practice that can withstand high staff turnover rates and the resulting fractured institutional memory. The director of Harcourt House illustrates this problem by noting that, at her ARC, information retrieval is highly dependent on how much information the person making the request can provide, "if they ask for 'some show that happened three or four years ago', we couldn't necessarily find it… [often this is due to] lack of extra staff at ARCs… we just don't have the time [to search]." Current ARC document management practices cannot accommodate growth in the number of users of the collections. This kind of retrieval is only useful when it is a

known item that is being sought. It does not leave room for easy browsing or serendipitous discovery. A search and retrieval system is needed that can support an increase in requests for information and the ability to discover information that is not already known to the user. The challenge of understanding the nature of the collection and being able to use it is compounded as these collections grow in complexity and size. A plan for searching and retrieval is needed that will not be reliant on the knowledge of individuals.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

The archival projects of the ARCs in this study are largely incomplete or inaccessible, or have fallen short of their intended purpose. While the previous chapter has identified the factors holding back the development of ARC archives, investment in physical and digital archives and projects reflecting on the history of artist-run centres is growing within this community. During our interview, the director of Neutral Ground, a board member of the Artist-Run Centre Association of Canada (ARCA), identified a growing interest in archival projects at ARCs across Canada in the past few years, noting that:

> I think there's great interest [in ARC archives], but it does tend to stall because there isn't a funding program for it and the human resources contingent is a little bit overburdened at the moment. Although the will is there, or the will would be there to do it, it's quite daunting. A lot of Artist-Run Centers have very well-organized files, almost as if they're waiting for the day, waiting for someone who is going to be able to actually get to it.

At a time when artist-run centres are facing constricting resources and changing expectations from funding bodies, what is causing this shift from internal record-keeping to useable, creative, public archives?

Timing

It is difficult to identify a single driving factor influencing the interest in archives because ARCs are highly diverse in their mandates, practices, and operational needs. One commonality that many of these organizations share, however, is timing. Most of the first generation of Canadian ARCs are now reaching their thirty and forty year milestones. The director at SNAP has noticed that "we're getting to an interesting point where [ARCs] are getting to have a bit of history, right? We're all getting to be about 30 to 40 years old now and realizing that we have this archive of information of art and culture in Alberta and it's pretty important for it to be preserved. Whereas that might not have been as important 10 years ago when we were only 20. We're just getting to that mid-life crisis phase right now." The sense of history and a critical mass of the work they have produced is beginning to demand attention. The 30th anniversary of Neutral Ground in Regina was marked with a large-scale digitization project of their entire exhibition

history from the 1980s to the present. It was the first major consolidation and reflection on the centre's body of work and resulted in a better understanding of the collection and history of the ARC as well as the preservation of the physical materials.

Critical Mass

Paper records accumulate, taking up physical space in galleries and offices. Three or five years can be safely stored in a file cabinet, but 40 years of records are harder to manage. ARCs like Harcourt House have struggled to manage their physical collections and limited space has meant they are not often used. Their director laments that "unfortunately, we never accessed [the records]… When they're in a box in a storage cupboard, no one looks at them." Young organizations can run on institutional memory and the experience of long-term staff members, but as the histories of these centres and the number of people involved grow new information practices are needed. It becomes unsustainable to rely on the recollections of staff and board members to know what information is stored in ARC records and to be able to locate it on demand. An organized archival system would not only make it possible to locate known information, like an artist statement from a particular show, but it would also allow newer ARC staff and curators to discover things about the history of the centre and the work that has been shown there.

The preservation of the history of these centres and the work of emerging and experimental artists they show is becoming a real concern as record keeping has almost entirely shifted from print and slide images to digital formats. As organizations shift to digital record keeping, there is no clear consensus on the best way to maintain analog records and integrate that information with born digital documents. This dilemma is pressuring ARC leaders to make decisions about what to do with all of the stuff that has been kept. Security of print, slides, video and audio tape, and other ephemera becomes a pressing issue as the materials degrade or become damaged while being stored in damp or flood-prone buildings. The director of Stride in Calgary has been dealing with the repercussions of water damage to their physical collections, sustained when the basement of their gallery was partially flooded during the extensive flooding the city experienced in the summer of 2013.

> We've been just biting away at it [the physical records]. Right before the flood hit, we were about to have someone start to really concentrate on getting the physical files digitized to get on the website, of the exhibition history specifically. Then that turned into 'let's save the physical files' because otherwise we won't have them at all.

Digital records may not be any more secure as file formats and platforms change, files become corrupted, and hard drives, disks, and digital storage are not permanent storage solutions. Perhaps even more dangerous, records that are out of sight are also out of mind. Old computers, hard drives, and online storage services can be accidentally discarded if no one knows the value of the information they contain. Balancing between two eras of information practice is a tenuous place to be and few organizations have a long-term plan for digital or physical preservation in place. The pressure of preserving and using a significantly sized multimedia collection and the practical need to make sure the information is safe and accessible in the future is a major driving factor for ARCs looking to invest in long-term archival projects. Now is the time to take steps to preserve this information before the physical and digital records are damaged, lost, or forgotten.

Dealing with large amounts of materials in person comes with physical constraints like appropriate storage, searching, retrieval, and having space for people to come and use the physical archive. Aging technology creates challenges playing back increasingly fragile or unstable media like video and film. The increase in availability of digital tools, open source projects, and the dropping prices of digitization hardware are making digital archival projects attainable for small-scale organizations like ARCs. As digital content management systems become more affordable and user-friendly ARCs can take on digitization projects, create their exhibit documentation and publications as born-digital material, and make that information available online for everyone in a searchable format with little financial investment.

Organizational Culture Shifts

The move to invest in archives is not only a scramble to deal with physical and digital collections, it is also related to the organizational and curatorial direction ARCs are taking. From their inception, ARCs have predominantly focused on new and emerging work. This focus on the new and next can feel at odds with preserving the past. These seemingly opposing goals become increasingly superficial as ARCs mature and find value in reflecting on their past in the service

of creating new work. While preserving a historical record has rarely been part of the mandate of these organizations, not one organization I spoke to has discarded all, or much, of their past documentation. My findings align with the recent work of Johanna Plant who concludes that ARCs feel that their collections are valuable, even if that value cannot be fully articulated or explored. She sees "a lingering tension around these archives... becom[ing] trapped in a state of permanent possibility – recognized as valuable, but limited by mandates, and, in many cases, funding." (Plant 2015, 10)

There is an abiding sense that this information is unique, locally relevant, and potentially useful, and that it is their responsibility to do something with it. The importance of this information to the ARC directors comes through clearly when they talk about their place in cities and communities. The director of AKA identifies a growing organizational focus on local contexts and communities; how the work they produce and exhibit reflects and responds to things happening in their community. The director is "thinking a lot about what our neighborhood is and who our audience is, and who we're engaging with." This idea is appearing in the programming, critical writing, and activities of ARCs across the country. For example, also at AKA, the director describes how a new collaborative curatorial project "is really exciting for us because Dana Claxton is going to show with us. She had her first solo show with us in partnership with Tribe [a Saskatoon-based ARC]. It's really a celebration of Dana's career but also our history together, our history in the community, this ongoing dialogue." In practice, community collaboration has often been practiced by ARCs resulting in rich, unique records of local artists, events, and places. If the desire is to intellectually embed ARCs in the historical and political context of their cities and communities, accessible archives are a practical and utilitarian project.

Uncertainty and Anxiety about Archival Skills

Overarching the challenges outlined in chapter four is a perceived lack of archival expertise within ARCs. Although artist-run culture is known for its ingenuity and openness to experimentation, the ARCs in this study expressed uncertainty about how to approach an archival project. Concerns about capacity, technical skills, and a general lack of direction

regarding purpose and audience for an archive all contribute to this uncertainty. The directors of two ARCs who have inherited substantial digital archival projects (Stride and The New Gallery) expressed uncertainty about how to best use and grow their archives. The director of The New Gallery acknowledges that "the burden [of the archive] is really on the [small] staff. That it is something we should do, but I feel like it's difficult if you don't have that [archival] background. I feel like it's something that's very skilled and specialized." The New Gallery archive has not been attended to since the member who founded it left and the current staff do not know how to add information to the system. The is no longer a link to The New Gallery digital archive available through their website, but it has been preserved with the hopes it can be resurrected. I found this hesitation and uncertainty surprising in a group that is accustomed to doing highly diverse technical and creative work including documenting shows, writing grants, physical installation, artist contracts, budgeting, communications, and media. There is something about the challenge creating an archive presents that is significantly daunting.

Hesitation to dive into developing an archive is understandable when the costs can be high. ARC directors want some reassurance that the projects they invest in will be successful and that they are on the right track as they proceed. Among the ARCs interviewed there is an understanding that although scanning, uploading files, and creating keywords is not difficult, it is a specialized activity with an art to doing it correctly. The director at Stride describes "feel[ing] like we don't have that expertise so we do what we can with what we have. We research things as best we can, but to even just have a bit more reassurance in the decisions we've made and how we approach things would be nice."

During our conversations, interviewees would often begin to examine their documentation practices and come up with ideas for changing and building on the way they do things. This is a capable and creative group, but they lack many of the resources necessary to feel confident pursuing an ambitious project like a public facing archive. Investing in a long-term digital archives project may not be practical or desirable for all ARCs, even where directors feel their records are of value. In response, some ARCs have chosen to donate materials to local arts, culture, and educational institutions to ensure their preservation and relieve themselves of having to care for potentially vulnerable materials. The New Gallery and Neutral Ground donated early

administrative documents to the Glenbow Museum Archive and the University of Regina Archives and Special Collections respectively. PAVED arts donated their archives of The Photographer's Gallery, one of the original centres that merged to form the current organization, to the city's public Mendel Art Gallery to preserve the physical collection because, the director notes, "we don't have the proper storage facilities."

While the majority of the ARCs I talked to are currently engaged in (or planning) some type of archival project, not all centres are invested in the formalized documentation of their operational work or the art they exhibit. As discussed earlier in this chapter, creating a space for interaction and exploration of the history of an organization like an ARC is more important than developing a digital resource strictly following traditional archival standards. The needs of the community and how a resource would be used should be carefully considered. In this study, Sâkêwêwak is an example of an ARC whose director values community engagement with the work they present above all else. Sâkêwêwak is deeply embedded in the Aboriginal and artist-run community in Regina and is known for holding popular annual events and performances. Their director describes a recent panel discussion "titled Labels and Reflection of Identity, [it was] a shame that it wasn't recorded, but you should be here. That's the point. I think there is nothing wrong with carrying that [idea] around. Especially [prioritizing] the oral communication that's central to Indigenous culture."

In a related move, Sâkêwêwak has shifted away from heavily investing in print promotional materials and documentation of shows and events in favour of relying on strong connections and communications through the Indigenous arts community of Regina. The purpose of the work Sâkêwêwak does is to engage the viewer directly with the art and events they support and for the audience to be present. A focus on oral communications, central to Indigenous culture and traditions, is central to the culture of the ARC as well. A traditional archive of scanned documents or digitized audio recordings of the Sâkêwêwak Storytellers festival kept on a website would not be an appropriate or useful solution for this ARCs community, but there is value in marking and celebrating the history and longevity of the organization. Quoted in chapter four, Sâkêwêwak's director described how he uses social media as the primary documentary tool for things that happen at the ARC because his community uses these platforms and this is where

relevant conversations are happening. All the more reason to embrace alternative models of digital archiving and find ways to work with current practices to ensure long-term preservation and access.

Can ARCs Go It Alone?

Flinn et al.(2009) note the necessary trade-off community archives face if their sustainability is reliant on public funding. Accepting resources from larger institutions usually means ceding a certain amount of autonomy and independence. There are proponents of digital archives who presume that the best solution for ARCs and similar small cultural institutions is to prepare their digital files to be transferred to larger heritage institutions for preservation and wider exposure (Spence 2005). This strategy entails managing digital documents from the moment of creation, using standard methods of metadata description and file types. This would give organizations the opportunity to generate the content they wish to preserve, but relieve them of the resource-heavy burden of preservation. We have seen a similar strategy from ARCs dealing with analogue documents, described earlier in chapter four, when Neutral Ground, The New Gallery, and PAVED donated records to large institutional archives. These ARCs thought their documents were worth preserving but did not have the capacity or interest to do it themselves.

Shifting the burden of preservation to a large institution certainly has benefits for ARCs who can focus on the work of supporting new art and artists, in-line with their mandates. It saves them from having to invest time and money into their own system, they do not have to develop deep expertise in this area, and they can rely on their large institutional partner to keep their information safe while exposing it to a large audience.

Based on the findings from this research, I hesitate to assume that this is a solution that ARC directors would wholeheartedly embrace. While they do face all of the challenges detailed in chapter four – challenges that could be at least partially ameliorated by transferring their files to be managed elsewhere – there is a real interest in maintaining control of these collections in the place they were created. At the end of each of the interviews I asked the director what their ideal archive would look like for their centre. I also proposed the idea of an integrated archive that would house information from the entire parallel system. This idea was not met with enthusiasm.

The director of PAVED would prefer that ARCs "create their own [archive]… not create their own [from scratch] but use [a common standard] rather than create a mega [archive]… I'd rather there be a [central] site that drives me to the PAVED system as opposed to PAVED transfer[ring] everything into a much bigger site, creating duplication of what we hope to have [keep] independently." ARC directors overwhelmingly wanted to maintain control of their collection, how they would be described, and the web interface that would be used to interact with them. A satisfactory solution, proposed by three of the directors, was a portal site that would describe and link out to the individual digital archives but not a fully integrated collection with a shared interface.

There is a danger to the integrity of ARC collections if they are transferred out of the care of the community that created them. Cooke (2006) states that, individually, the ephemera and other records that make up an ARC archive are fragmentary and incoherent as a resources. It is the context of how the collection came to be that gives it a cohesive meaning and narrative. This is not to say that collections cannot be successfully recontextualized in ways that improve access, retrieval, and preservation. Instead, it must be done mindfully and with the input of the community it came out of.

Partnership with a large digital heritage archive does not need to be an all-or-nothing proposition. While ARC directors are hesitant to hand over all of their records to an outside entity, they are also looking for confirmation that the archival work they do is appropriate and will make their collection useful and sustainable. Flinn's (2007) proposed postcustodial model discussed in chapter 2 could be a solution if ARCs are able to form a trusting and mutually beneficial partnership with an institutional archive. There is some precedence for collaboration with archival institutions in this community. Alternatively, if partnerships are not possible, a standard for digitization and description that is achievable with ARCs resources and skills could be an excellent compromise. There are many opportunities to learn from community archives projects that seek to balance the rich documentary record and contextual information of communities with the stability and reach of institutional or national frameworks. ARCs could use this standard to undertake their own digitization projects and, if there is cause or interest in the

future, they could either turn over the long-term preservation of their collections to a partner institution, or share a copy of the collection with other institutions and digital scholars.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to identify what roles artist-run centres in Saskatchewan and Alberta wish to play as information resources. It investigates how developing digital archives can help ARCs fulfil these roles and identifies the challenges they encounter in doing archival work. The findings from this research are specifically applicable to ARCs and the Canadian parallel gallery system, but can have implications for other community and arts organizations seeking to define their own histories. A study of this nature draws on community archives, digital archives, and the history of artist-run centres in Canada. ARCs are a relatively new and largely unstudied group, particularly from an information management and archival perspective, which necessitates a qualitative approach to understand the complex issues at play.

In this chapter, I will return to the research questions first identified in chapter three and connect them to my findings. I will share the implications of my findings including some thoughts about digital community archives and the factors that are likely to lead to successful digital archival projects for non-profit organizations.

Summary of Findings

ARCs are diverse organizations, embedded in their communities with their own distinct mandates, but there is a growing shared interest in archives within the ARC community. As ARCs reach significant milestones they are faced with a decision regarding how to deal with decades of stored documents and information. Accumulating physical collections take up space, and require care and organization so they are not damaged or lost. Throughout the history of most ARCs, documents and information have been saved in file cabinets, boxes, binders, and on hard drives, but they have not been saved with a clear purpose in mind. Most ARCs are now faced with the task of deciding what to do with it. Now is the time for ARCs to consider what the purpose of their collections is, who the audience for these materials is, what format best suits them, what their operational resources can support, and how they want to continue to build their collections in the future.

Although ARCs exhibit some of the newest and most experimental artwork in Canada, their web presence is lacking in modern searching, metadata, and retrieval tools. There is little documentation of the work in situ in ARC spaces and, with the exception of Stride, few ARCs share all of the information that is collected and created each time an exhibition is mounted. None of the ARCs in this study has made recent organizational documents available. It appears that ARC websites serve a primarily promotional purpose, sharing information about current shows while also retaining information about previous exhibits.

This is beginning to change, however, as ARCs begin working with their archives. Successful initiatives like grunt gallery's *Activating the Archives* (ATA) project, launched in 2010, have served as inspiration to directors at other centres. This project began as an invitation to researchers and the public to explore and develop the material in their archive. The result was six thematic website projects and an interactive Activation Map that allows users to remix and play with the online archive. Beyond these concrete outcomes, Glenn Alteen, the producer and founding director of grunt, identifies many of the same themes emerging from this study. Through the process of digitizing the physical documents and working with curators, artists, and art historians, he discovered overlooked documents and made new thematic connections (Brown 2015). Alteen also notes that the work in the archive is from a time when the profile of contemporary art in Vancouver was lower and media coverage of shows was small. He anticipates that ATA will bring more attention to projects than the original events had and reveal the curatorial concerns and landmark events that have made grunt the cultural centre it is today. Beyond the digitization, organization, and marketing of the grunt collection, ATA has become a model for community engagement, bringing new audiences to the archival resources using live events, online promotion, focused sub-collections, and study guides for educators[4].

Based on the findings from this study, ARCs in Saskatchewan and Alberta are thinking critically about what form their archival collections should take, who might use them, and how they can leverage the resources at their disposal to make something worthwhile and sustainable. The difficulty is that building archives and thinking about preserving the past is not the primary

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[4] http://grunt.ca/category/education/activating-the-archive-study-guides/

mandate of these organizations. As a matter of course, they are focused on supporting contemporary art practice and the development of new work, but mandates can change and ARC directors are beginning to see how digital archives can be beneficial for their organizations and their communities.
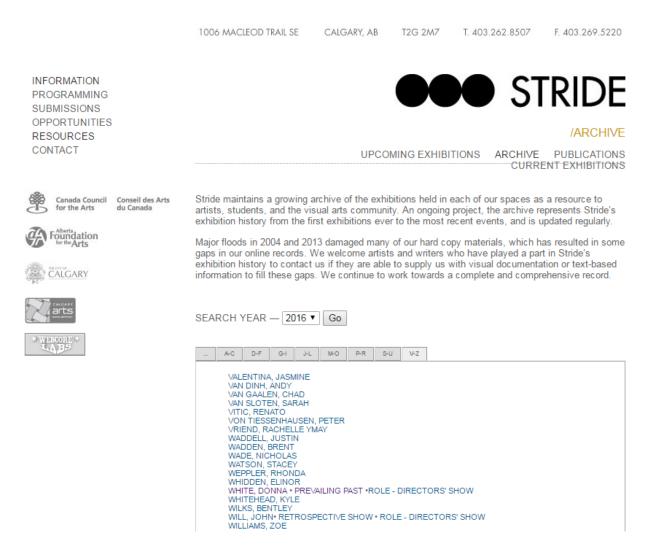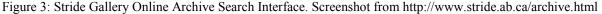
Findings in Relation to Research Questions

<u>What kinds of information are preserved by ARCs, how is it saved, and what purpose does it serve?</u>

This study identified four main categories of information collected by ARCs that are stored in both physical and digital formats. These categories are exhibition history and artist files, institutional documentation, publications by ARCs, and external publications. Although most of the ARCs in this study have kept records from all four categories, there is a dominant opinion on the part of ARC directors that the most interesting and relevant part of their collection is the exhibition history and information about artists and shows. This may be a natural assumption to make for organizations whose mandate is to support new art and artists, but the near exclusive focus on this record type downplays the value the other categories have in telling the story of artist-run communities. Specifically, documents about the origins and activities of the ARC are thought to be worth saving, but less worthy of making available through their own archive. The New Gallery and Neutral Ground both donated their early organizational documents to local institutional archives indicating that they thought the information was important but were not interested or able to manage it themselves.

The earliest records ARC collections are print, photographs, and slides which were typically stored in boxes and file cabinets, usually in ARC gallery spaces. With the exception of The New Gallery's resource centre kept in the multi-purpose John Snow House, none of the ARCs interviewed for this study have a physical space dedicated to housing or providing access to their physical archives. Current physical documents mainly take the form of print publications with most documentation since the early 2000s being born-digital. Some ARCs have digitized much of their physical collections, however, there are print publications and ephemera at all of the ARCs interviewed for this study.

Digital records are kept on hard drives, internal networks or databases, websites, and social media accounts. In most cases, the way digital information is stored has developed organically as an extension of the way that information is generated and used. ARCs that consider their website or social media accounts to be their archive are good examples of this approach. Within the sample for this study Stride is the only example of a publically accessible, purpose-built digital archive. Their digital archive and online library catalogue have been specifically created based on information from their exhibition records and their extensive monograph collection.

Figure 3: Stride Gallery Online Archive Search Interface. Screenshot from http://www.stride.ab.ca/archive.html

ARC archives serve multiple purposes for both internal and external audiences. For ARC directors, operational information, financial statements, and show documentation is kept for reporting purposes to their board of directors and granting agencies and as a functional record of the organization's activities. Records of past shows have both practical and academic purposes. Archives are a way for ARCs to demonstrate the collective impact and longevity of their work. ARC staff and curators have also used archival records to understand a centre's history, introduce new members to the culture of the centre, and to create new reflective work and retrospective shows from past shows.

For outside users of ARC archives, the purpose is less clear because they have not been well established as information resources outside of their immediate communities. ARC collections contain unique materials not available from other sources including original curatorial essays, installation documentation, and show catalogues that are often difficult to find for purchase or from libraries. ARCs are also in the unique position to generate and collection information from emerging artists and experimental works that go on to become well established and influential in mainstream art circles. While these opportunities to expose ARC collections to researchers, curators, artists, and the public have not been explored, directors see the value that their collections can have for these groups and endeavour to find ways to make their collections visible.

Under what context is archived information able to be accessed and by whom?

In theory, all of the information held in ARC archives is open to the public. In government-funded institutions, operational records may be requested at any time. In practice, ARCs are open to sharing information whenever possible, but often find it impractical to do so. As discussed in chapter four, ARC staff often struggle to answer requests for information because they find it difficult to locate items in their own print or digital archives. Retrieving documents can be time consuming and but useful information is easily overlooked.

At this moment, ARCs are not commonly identified as being places that researchers, students, or the public can look to as sources of information. Because ARC collections have largely been kept in storage and not promoted online, few people outside of the ARC community are aware

they exist. Typical uses of ARC archives have been people who already have connections to the centre, know something about the kind of documentation they have, and are looking for a known item. Stride is the exception to this largely closed information exchange. Their online archive provides access to multiple kinds of documents related to each show but they do not collect metrics on the usage of their archive site so we cannot know if they are reaching a wider audience than their counterparts who respond to individual requests.

How do actual archival practices relate to ideal or preferred methods within these organizations?

ARC directors in this study have aspirations for their archival collections that have not been realized. Each ARC director interviewed has their own plans or wishes for their archival collections, but practical limitations have meant that they have mostly remained unrealized. There are ARCs in this study who have taken major steps toward realizing their larger archival plans and have achieved major milestones. For example, Neutral Ground completed a digitization project of all of its physical archives. The Neutral Ground digital files are not available to the public to browse, but they now have their archival content organized and ready to be deployed into a digital archive framework. Stride has kept their publically accessible archive current as new shows are launched but has early print documents they would like to scan and add to their digital records. The most common reply, however, is that ARCs have safeguarded their archival records with the hope they will be able use them in the future.

As discussed in chapter four, ARC directors in this study question their own skills and knowledge needed to execute a successful archive project. This may be the most significant gap between what ARCs currently do with their archives and what they would like to do with their collections. Archiving, whether digital or physical records, is much more than saving and storing documents. ARC directors clearly recognize this difference and are looking for ways to build the capacity needed in their organizations to make the leap from saving to sharing information.

What organizational and/or operational factors influence documentation and archival projects?

The Challenges section of chapter four details the factors that determine how ARC archival projects are conceptualized, realized, and undermined. ARC mandates that focus exclusively on the promotion of new work, combined with a grant-based funding model mean that archival

projects fall outside of the primary purpose of ARCs. However, since their formation, ARCs have felt that their records are valuable. As ARCs enter their third and fourth decades, the critical mass of documents they have collected demands to be addresses in a formal way. Overwhelmingly, ARCs want to maintain control of their collections pertaining to art and artists; they do not want to hand them over to larger institutions for safekeeping. The major barriers to diving into the development of a digital archive are: sustained funding; having skilled staff to create the archive and help users navigate it; understanding what they have and what is missing in the collection; copyright; the technical challenges of working with multiple formats and digital platforms; discovery of the archive and its resources; and the lack of expertise or confidence directors have in this area.

The strengths ARCs have to build on are the unique qualities of their collections and the investment their community has in the archive. Collections of this type are not built and preserved over time by communities that do not believe in their value. When Stride's physical collection was partially damaged while in storage during the Calgary 2013 flood, staff and volunteers worked tirelessly to salvage everything they could, when it would have been much easier to discard everything that had been under water. That story has a place in the archive alongside the materials they saved. ARCs also benefit from their tightly knit community that holds tacit knowledge about the history of the ARC and can contribute to filling the gaps in the documentary records. While ARCs face a significant challenge in the development of sustainable digital archives, mainly due to their current funding and staffing structure, these organizations are agile and adept at responding to change. Where ARC directors and boards are motivated to pursue digital archived for their centres, creative solutions will be found.

<u>What responsibility do ARCs have to preserve and make archival materials accessible?</u>

ARCs do not have a specific mandate or duty to maintain or provide access to their records beyond standard fiscal operating procedures. This absence of compelling external motivation is common among small cultural institutions, Jacqueline Spence (2005) explains in her work on the potential of digital archiving frameworks for these underfunded groups. She further asserts that the accessibility of collections from small cultural organizations are dependent on the organization recognizing the values of their collections, and having the resources to maintain

access and preservation over the long-term. While ARCs are not compelled by any outside body to keep or share archives past financial reporting cycles, directors and boards are internally invested in the idea of archives and the value of their collections. For the most part, the primary audience for this information is the ARC's own community of artists, curators, and other culture workers. ARCs want to do work that supports their community and the longevity of their organization and they are beginning to see a need to provide this resource and accompanying services.

Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study have implications for organizations that are not typically concerned with detailed archival practices but would benefit from the adoption of low-impact ways of preserving and sharing information. As community archives, the ARCs in this study have employed their own standards for preservation and archiving, emphasizing low complexity, independence from outside institutions, and the exposure of information about artists over information about the ARC itself. I am not convinced that there would be no audience for archival documents about the organizational history of ARCs. There is much to be learned from non-profit arts organizations who have stood the test of time and have continued to flourish as important centres of the arts and culture community in Western Canada.

The director of AKA Artist Run in Saskatoon identifies two critical factors that all successful archive projects require: financial support and a passionate advocate. While financial and technical resources are the most obvious requirement, a successful project requires someone who is engaged and willing to take ownership of it. The New Gallery director has experienced the irreplaceable value of a passionate advocate. They have a digital archive that was initiated and nearly completed by a previous staff member who made the archive a priority under their leadership. When this passionate advocate for the digital archive left the centre, the new director and programming coordinator were unfamiliar with the archival system and focused instead on other aspects of the centre's mandate including publishing, which they were passionate about. Subsequently, The New Gallery leadership has not been able to make use of or add to the digital archive. The director identified feeling lost and unsure of how to proceed with the archive they

inherited: "It's not that we don't have an interest in it, we just… don't even know sometimes where to start".

Of all of the ARCs interviewed, directors at centres that have an archive or library could identify a former person or persons who were the initiator of that project. In many ways, the archive become the property of that individual, even after they have moved on. Often when that happens, the project loses momentum or requires a significant reboot to be continued. This is the power and danger of relying on a passionate advocate. They can make significant progress in creating a digital archive, but a plan for long-term maintenance is critical. Succession planning is difficult for any organization, but can be especially so for ARCs where one or two people are responsible for all of the organizations day to day activities and are likely to form their own ways of doing things that do not lend themselves to detailed documentation.

The overwhelming nature of the extra work required to maintain a functional archive makes it unsurprising that the two most common solutions proposed by ARC directors are the desire to employ someone to do archival work, or adopt an "auto-archiving" system that requires little change to current practice. This desire to outsource the work to a new member reflects the anxiety directors feel about their own ability to do specialized archival tasks. It is also clearly a manifestation that they do not have the capacity to do the work in addition to their other responsibilities. An opportunity to hire someone to focus on the archive is more than a way to shift the work to someone else. Most of the ARCs directors who proposed this solution wanted the position to not only build and maintain the digital archive technology and collection. They also wanted someone who could develop new programming, aid researchers, and conduct their own research creation using the archive. In short, they wanted some with the necessary archival skills who could also demonstrate what could be done with it.

The other proposed solution to the challenge of finding the time and resources to maintain an archive is the desire for a system that is self-archiving. Many of the ARC directors who rely on their websites or social media accounts for documentation and preservation see those systems as a type of self or auto-archiving system. This perception is not inaccurate. These are systems that demand no additional time or expertise to use and capture much of the information ARCs would want to include into an archive. The danger of relying exclusively on web sites is detailed in

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chapter four, but the benefits are persuasive. A solution that incorporates the benefits of reusing or multitasking other born-digital content with a robust long-term preservation strategy might be the solution many ARCs and similar organizations need to align their archival goals with current resources and practices.

This study has proven that ARCs have the desire and potential to be sources of information about the art and artist they support, and their own community history. This thesis describes the environment in which ARC directors work and their approach to digital archives. My analysis shows that the ARC community in Saskatchewan and Alberta are intellectually and emotionally invested in their archive collections but uncertain who the audience for these materials are and how best to develop them. There remains much to learn from ARCs and I believe that research from the fields of library science and the digital humanities can aid this community in achieving their goals of long-term preservation and creative use of their archival collection.

Glossary of Terms

Born Digital – "Born-digital information is distinguished from digitized, the latter describing a document created on paper that has been scanned (and possibly transformed into character data using OCR)." (Pearce-Moses 2005)

Ephemera – Documentation produced during the various stages of curating an art exhibition. Typically unpublished and difficult to catalogue. Ephemera can refer to flyers, posters, press releases, blog posts, newspaper or magazine clippings, artist publications, notes, installation plans, slides, audio or video recordings, expense lists, exhibition catalogues, or any other number of formats.

Parallel Gallery System – The Canada Council for the Arts funded network of artist-run centres was first known as the parallel galleries, or the parallel system. It was created to support exhibitions, publications, and project-driven historical research, creating national and transnational networked communities (Bronson et al. 1987; Jacob 2009).

Post-custodial model – proposes that "archivists will no longer physically acquire and maintain records but […] will provide management over sight for records that will remain in the custody of the record creators" (Society of American Archivists 2016)

Record – "connotes documents, rather than artifacts or published materials, although collections of records may contain artifacts and books. To the extent that records are defined in terms of their function rather than their characteristics, the definition is stretched to include many materials not normally understood to be a record; an artifact may function as a record, even though it falls outside the vernacular understanding of the definition. (…)
'Record' is frequently used synonymously with 'document'. To the extent the vernacular uses 'record' to refer to any document, without specification, the terms are synonymous. However, the concept of record is independent of format, and it includes things that are clearly not documents." (Society of American Archivists 2016)

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Appendix A: ARC Sample Mandates & Missions

Location	ARC Name & Website	Mandate/Mission
Calgary	**Stride Art Gallery Association** stride.ab.ca	**Mandate:** Stride is a non-for-profit artist run centre that values experimental, risk-taking art work, and fosters community conversation and participation. **Mission:** Stride provides gallery exhibition spaces as well as research and presentation opportunities for diverse art projects that encourage the reconsideration and reframing of conventional points of view.
	The New Gallery (previously Clouds & Water Gallery & Visual Production Society) thenewgallery.org	**Mandate:** The New Gallery (TNG) is an artist-run centre located in Calgary, Alberta. This charitable centre for contemporary art was established in 1975 as the Clouds & Water Gallery & Visual Production Society. Today, the Society continues its vision through the operation of two venues – the Main Space, a storefront in Calgary's Chinatown neighbourhood, and the +15 Window, a shallow vitrine located at the Arts Commons building on a high-traffic pedestrian walkway. These spaces support the research, creation, and exhibition of social and political creative practices from artists at all junctures of their careers, while enabling a public engagement with contemporary art. Our programming comprises a broad range of art and educational activities, including exhibitions, residencies, lectures, and community collaborations that serve to invigorate our audience's experience of contemporary art and culture.
	Untitled Art Society uascalgary.org	**Mission:** Situated in the heart of downtown Calgary, Untitled Art Society supports emerging art through public exhibitions, workshops, educational programming, the provision of production resources, and opportunities for discourse. Untitled Art Society exhibitions showcase early emerging artists as an important aspect of critical engagement in provincial contemporary art.

Edmonton	Latitude 53 Contemporary Visual Culture *pilot study* latitude53.org	**Mandate:** Latitude 53 is Alberta's leading contemporary art centre that: • Animates and promotes thought provoking local, national, and international visual art • Stimulates artistic research and education, audience engagement, and experimental art practices • Provides a supportive environment for artists taking risks **Mission:** Latitude 53 creates sites for the intersection of contemporary art and ideas in Alberta.
	Society of Northern Alberta Print-Artists (SNAP) snapartists.com	**Mission:** SNAP is dedicated to the promotion of both traditional and experimental printmaking practices including prints, artists' books, posters and print-based installation as well as new, experimental and hybrid forms. To achieve these goals the Society maintains a permanent, dedicated space including a gallery and printmaking studio, and provides a comprehensive range of programming including: exhibitions (CARFAC fees are paid to exhibiting artists), classes, workshops, lectures, mentorships, artists' residencies and publishing. Programming for exhibitions and education is reviewed and revised periodically to keep pace with new developments in the field and to better serve SNAP's diverse constituency, which includes the many individuals and groups from all backgrounds and levels of experience who take courses and attend exhibitions at SNAP including practicing professional print-artists, schools, high-risk youth groups and more.
	Harcourt House (previously WECAN Society) harcourthouse.ab.ca	**Mandate:** Harcourt House Artist Run Centre is a charitable organization existing to support visual artists and inspire the community through visual art exhibitions, education, low cost studio rentals, and discourse.
Regina	**Neutral Ground Inc.** neutralground.sk.ca	**Mission:** Neutral Ground strives to cultivate a forum for artists to develop professional opportunities and engagement with their audiences. Exhibitions and programs are highly responsive to the fluid

		transformations of artistic practices as they are shaped by social, political, and economic forces in the context of currencies in the art world. The gallery fosters the emergence of new artistic genres and voices, historical, interpretive and essential critical dialogue, and research towards shaping the role of the artist in society.
	Sâkêwêwak Artists' Collective Inc. sakewewak.ca	**Mandate:** Our mandate is to ensure that Indigenous artists within the city of Regina and surrounding areas are consistently provided with the space and environment that allows them to develop their self-determined artistic practices through critical exchange with their peers and audiences.
Saskatoon	**AKA Artist-Run** (previously The Shoestring Gallery) akaartistrun.com/	**Mandate:** AKA Artist –Run supports the creation and development of artist driven initiatives and emerging practices that speak to, reflect, and encourage dialogue in our culturally diverse communities. This includes work in all media by local, national, and international artists. Our venues consist of a street-level gallery, billboard and multi-use screening and performance event space; we also source off-site locations for site-specific projects. We are committed to acting as a centre for risk-taking and artistic self-determination produced by a diversity of voices; engaging in critical discourse and intersections with related cultural practices.
	PAVED Arts (previously The Photographers' Gallery and Video Vérité) pavedarts.ca	**Mandate:** Our mandate is to support local, regional and national artists working in the 'PAVED' arts by operating an access and production centre for media and new media creation, while simultaneously operating a presentation centre that exhibits and disseminates contemporary visual media and new media art in time-based, gallery, and off-site modes.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

The following questions were designed to determine what ARC directors see the purpose and ultimate goal of their archival collections to be and describe how their current practice aligns with that vision. The series of questions addresses current practices, use of records, and the role of ARCs as information resources. These questions served as the foundation for semi-structured interviews with the directors at each of the ARCs participating in this study.

Theme: Current Practice
1. Can you tell me about your position here at the artist-run centre?

2. What kind of information or documentation is created for shows?
   a. Is it always the same kind of information?
   b. Who is involved in these activities?
   c. How is information created by the ARC used before and during the exhibition?
   d. What information sources/resources do you use?

3. What happens to it after the show is finished?

4. Are shows documented by the ARC staff?
   a. [If yes] Can you describe this process in detail for me?

Theme: Finding and Using Information
5. Do you ever have people approach ARC staff for information about artists or previous shows? Examples?

6. Do you ever need to look up information about past shows?
   a. [If yes] Can you tell me how you would go about doing this?

Theme: Mandate/Purpose
7. What is the mandate of this ARC or what do you feel is the main function of this organization within the large community of [city]? Canada?

8. What do you feel the roles of ARCs as producers of information or information repositories are?

Theme: Online Presence & Digital Identity
9. Can you tell me about your website, who is in charge of updating it and what purpose it serves for your organization?

a. Who is the target audience for your website, do you have an audience in mind?

10. What digital tools or software do you use for your day to day operations?
    a. Any physical resources that are important to your information management?

Theme: Archival Projects (implemented & imagined)
11. [If they have an archive] – How was this project initiated, how has it been supported during the time it has been active?
    a. What challenges have you faced in trying to support this project?

12. Do you have any official or unofficial policies or best practices for your archival or information management practices?
    a. Can you tell me about how these policies were developed and how they are working for your organization?

Theme: Goals/Dreams
13. Which ARCs or projects do you think are doing something interesting or look to for inspiration?

14. If you had access to unlimited resources, is there anything you would like to change about how curatorial content is managed at this ARC? Can you talk about why you feel these changes would be beneficial?
What resources would you need to pursue this goal?

Theme: Needs/Wants
15. What would be the most useful tool you could see coming out of this type of research project? What would your ARC be interested in to support their work?