Juan Santiago Posada Abal
March 2026

Methods and inspiration:

I used TouchDesigner to generate the original video. I draw from the digital corruption I found on some MiniDV tapes, which I also used to generate the video. I used video from many sources, though all in the Northwest Folklife Archive, like TV Broadcasts, school video, and candid video from the festival. To accompany the video I made a musical piece. I draw from art and experimental works like Basinki's *The Disintegration Loops* and musique concrète and modern pop works in the vein of rebe, Ecco2k and Arca. I wanted to honor the festival's history of making music for dancing, while also adding a sense of decay and data corruption.

A different TouchDesigner circuit was used to artificially age and distort the video during exhibition time. Every time a person presses the red button, wired through an Arduino board, a 3 minute and 16 second recording will. Once finished that recording will appear on the display, ready for someone else to press the red button.

Discussion

My piece deals with the regular anxiety of the digitization of archives, specifically magnetic tape media. Archives, especially in non-profits, is a difficult job. It is expensive, careful, and boring/meticulous. As the job is not flashy it can be difficult to wrangle the proper funding needed for these efforts. The obvious answer at this point is to leave the object aside, until the money is found. The problem with that is that all objects wither. Magnetic tape will get sticky shed syndrome, film stock will get vinegar syndrome, and paper will turn yellow or get eaten by bugs. It is possible, though, to get enough money to do the job *well-enough*. The problem with this is that the object may be damaged, permanently, during the process and the only chance to preserve history will disappear.

That conundrum is where the piece sits. The feedback loop through which the ersatz digitization process occurs exaggerates the two biggest factors for media decay: aging and improper capture. The aging is created via a TouchDesigner *corruption* circuit that adds some horizontal and alpha channel disruption. As the video is looped these instances of corruption compound. Beyond that the severity of the corruption is set before the start of the gallery to be the length of display. Its first exhibition lasted two hours and so the corruption circuit was configured to have completely destroyed the image by then. Importantly, this circuit is active even if a digitization loop is not activated. This is a parallelism to the real-life fact that the video will decay, no matter what. It makes the attendee engage in the same anxiety as the archivist, is it better to digitize poorly or not at all?

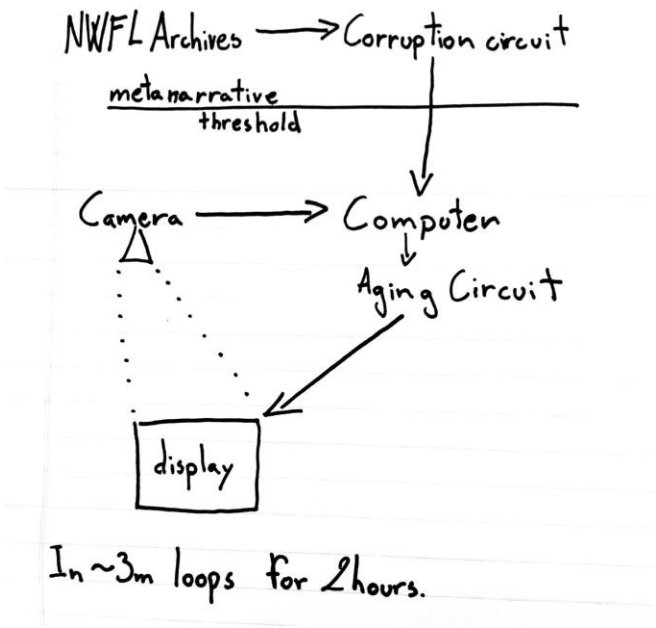
Improper capture happens between the display and the camera. It mirrors the deficient capture mechanisms in real life archives. Though an HD capture card would be optimal, perhaps this fictitious archive only had a DSLR laying around. In my own archival work I often find myself using old, improper equipment and have archivists asking me why I don't send our collections to proper digitization services.

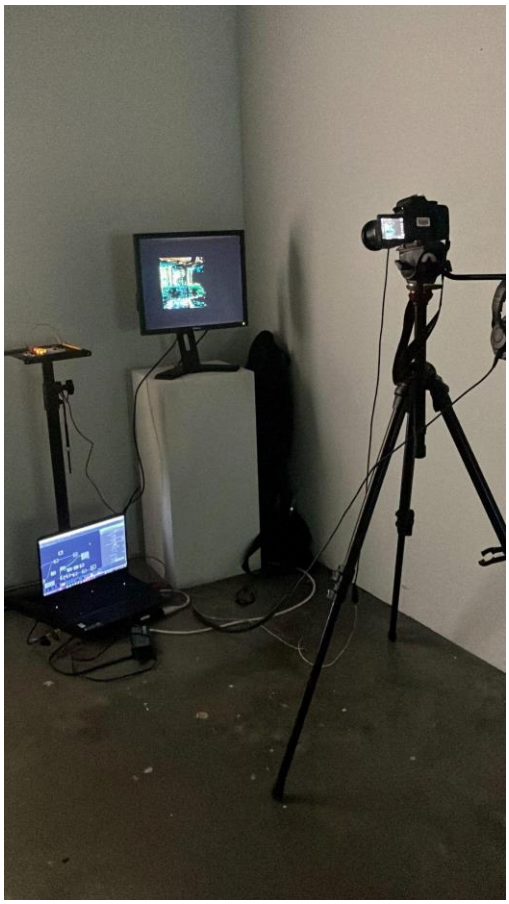
Metanarrative:

(Often when working on this project I would think of some real(ish)-life logic to this object. The paragraph below is how I like to explain it.)

You have come to an archive, tasked to digitize this tape. It was found in a box that used to contain 30 other tapes. Colleagues theorize that an undiscovered aging syndrome has combined the 30 tapes into this singular item. Your employer doesn't have the proper equipment nor the budget to spend on purchasing it, but you know further aging is imminent. You've constructed this digitization rig. Adjust the camera to your liking and when ready, press the red button.

Photos and other documentation:





Compilation of distortion from first display:
https://youtu.be/eeoN2M1VQfA