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Intro to MIAP

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Deborah Shaffer Inventory: *Dance of Hope*

Deborah Shaffer is a renowned documentary filmmaker who has built a career making films about international social issues. Shaffer has directed and produced many films that include *Witness to War*, which won an Academy Award for Best Documentary- Short Subjects in 1984. Her films include the labor documentary *The Wobblies*, made in 1979. Her work then turned to Latin America with the film about Nicaragua, *Fire From The Mountain*, in 1987 and *Dance of Hope*, a 1989 film about Pinochet's regime in Chile at the end of his rein. In 2001 and 2002, Shaffer made *From the Ashes-10 Artists* and *From the Ashes- Epilogue*, both of which documented the effects of September 11, 2001 on artists living in NYC. Her newest film, *To Be Heard*, premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2010.<sup>1</sup> Shaffer has shown films at the NY Film Festival, Sundance, Tribeca, Prix d'Or, FIPA, and Cannes Film Festivals. In addition to her Academy Award, Shaffer has also been nominated for a second Academy Award, has received a Guggenheim Fellowship, grants from the NEH, NEA, and NYSCA, and has recently been awarded the Irene Diamond Lifetime Achievement Award. She has done a variety of work in television, which led to an Emmy Award, among other awards.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Deborah Shaffer website. 6 December 2010. [www.deborahshaffer.com](http://www.deborahshaffer.com)

<sup>2</sup> *To Be Heard* (2010). The Filmmakers. 6 December 2010. [www.tobeheard.org/bios.html](http://www.tobeheard.org/bios.html)

As documentaries, the material generated by Shaffer's work not only includes the finished films, but also many shots and interviews in additional material used for research, created as outtakes, and held as original material. Her archive is located in her Soho loft apartment and consists of 48 numbered boxes and 10 other various items. Four of Shaffer's feature films hold the substantial amount of material in the archive, with various other pieces from her career included in the archive. This work for this project entailed an item level inventory of Shaffer's archive, working with, but independently of, MIAP students Taylor McBride and Kelly Haydon. This paper will describe the process of creating the item level inventory and the problems encountered as a part of this process.

The initial encounter with the archive included a visit and interview with the filmmaker Deborah Shaffer. Shaffer answered questions about her filmography, the history of the archive, her intentions with the archive, and the specifics of each of the four films that are represented in the archive. The archive had been housed in cardboard boxes for over 30 years, in the apartment in Soho for most of the time. The boxes were at no time climate controlled; they were mostly kept in the attic of the apartment and many of the boxes had water damage, were minimally damaged, and were aged. The organizational state of the archive, when we initially encountered it, was in good shape. Everything was boxed up and organized by film and by media type. Each cardboard box was numbered and tagged, and Shaffer provided a spreadsheet, listing box number, film title, and a basic description of box contents. The archive was currently stored in Shaffer's guest bedroom where the boxes just barely fit inside a small room with a twin bed and a desk. The room shared a ceiling with the rest of the loft and the walls did not fully enclose the room. The room also shared a wall with the loft's washer and dryer, located on the opposite side of one wall, while another wall lied adjacent to a bathroom.

Deborah Shaffer was looking to make space in her loft for a functioning guest bedroom, and asked us to look into the contents of the archive. The first step was in assessing the archive's holdings, their condition, and their value, so that next steps of relocating and caring for the material could be pursued. Shaffer was not exactly sure of the specifics of her archive, at the item level, after thirty years of storage. The goal of the inventory was to provide an item level description of each item in the archive, provide a general condition assessment of each item, and create a master spreadsheet of all migrated material. This documentation would then be used in Linda Tadic's Collection Assessment course in the spring semester for one student to provide a complete collection assessment of the archive. In this way, the archive can then be moved to an archive or other institution that is interested in acquiring it, while other items of less interest can be moved out of storage.

Shaffer not only wanted to know what was of value in the archive for institutions to accession, but she was also interested in pursuing the redistribution of the film titles out of circulation. Most of the *Witness to War* material had already been relocated to an archive to place the stewardship of these materials into their hands. The archive inventory would allow Shaffer to find any materials from this film that also needed to be relocated, while moving this material to an archive for proper storage also created interest in Shaffer to move on the other materials in the archive.

At the first meeting with Shaffer to discuss her archive, Kelly, Taylor, and I split the archive's contents by film to create individual projects that required close collaboration to make the final inventory product useful. I worked on the materials from the 1989 film *Dance of Hope*. This material was located in 20 of the 48 numbered boxes described above. After the inventory was finished, materials totaled 164 dailies within 82 boxes, each holding one mag track and one

work print; 144 ¼ inch tapes, each with their own item level box; 27 cassette tapes, most in individual cases; 193 reels of negative outtakes in 106 boxes; and 54 item level boxes of trims and wild sound consisting of 109 individual items. Each individual item, except for the trims, wild sounds, and negative outtakes, were logged on their own individual row in the spreadsheet.

The spreadsheet that was used was provided by Linda Tadic. In this way, the columns used in each of the three spreadsheets created by three students would be consistent and easy to merge. The columns used were: Sequence #, Box #, Item #, Film Release Title, Title on Item Container, Filmmaker(s), Producer(s), Media Type, Element, Generation, Dimension, Film roll Size, Broadcast Standard, Stock, Date, Running Time, Sound Mix, Condition, Container, Enclosures, Notes. Sequence # was the running number provided by myself, starting with 1. The Box # was the number provided by Shaffer. The Item # was defined as any number on the box. Enclosures were defined as paper included in the box. Problems with the spreadsheet and changes to it as a result will be described below. The section of the spreadsheet for the *Dance of Hope* material totaled 637 items and 518 rows.

Each box of dailies contained one mag track and one work print, both of which were listed as the same reel number. Each mag track and work print was logged separately, and their location in the same item level box was noted. Each cassette tape and ¼ inch tape was logged separately. Two to four negative outtake reels on cores were located in the same item level box; because of time constraints and lack of unique metadata for each neg out reel, each item level box was logged for the neg outtakes. Each unique reel was given its own number, but no other data was provided for each reel. The boxes held camera reel numbers taped to the insides of the boxes, but these did not match up to the neg out reels and were thus not credible. This information was noted but not given specific attention. After speaking with the filmmaker, the

varied metadata, including camera reel information, cannot be directly attributed to the neg outs in the same boxes. The wild sound and trims held a variety of items in the same box, some of which had items taped together, some of which held no information on specific items, and held a variety of sound and film reels, and some of which was not on cores and others that were. Each item level box, not individual item, was logged, with a record of number of items in the box, and a list of available labels listed on each item, information that was listed in the Title on Item column. After 6 visits and 23 hours working in the archive, time constraints did not allow for each individual item in the neg out and wild sound and trims boxes to be logged by item. The decision was made to log them per item box, because of the lack of unique metadata available for each item. Box information and number of items, as well as any available information on each item was documented.

The negative out boxes not only held metadata that could not be confirmed by the filmmaker, but also data that was not consistent in itself. One set of numbers given to the reels, labeled on orange paper tape both on the leaders and on the box, was covering up numbers on yellow paper tape underneath the orange. Thus, the orange numbers were listed, and the information on the yellow paper tape was noted but not directly dictated. More problems encountered involved container concerns that were not archival quality. Negative out reels were encased in plastic bags and most of the dailies were unraveling and held a mild vinegar odor.

Problems that were encountered with the archive inventory involved many basic concerns, the first of which was in identifying film elements and generations. Throughout this process, I learned the different elements in creating a film, and the products that were created as a result. Some of the elements were confusing, including the cassette tapes, and the ¼ inch reels which only contained unique numbers in lab boxes and were in pristine condition, yet were not

connected to camera reel numbers. Upon further consultation with the filmmaker, it was discovered that the cassette tapes and the ¼ inch tapes held the same sets of numbers. Upon further reflection, Shaffer discovered that these cassettes were probably recorded by her co-producer a year before shooting for research purposes; these were then transferred to ¼ inch tapes and were not used in the film, but they are supplemental material that is important historical record. Another problem was in documenting film roll size, and without appropriate experience or training in identifying film roll size, it was discovered that three general sizes were present throughout the process; thus, sm, md, and lg were documented instead of a numerical number. It was also difficult to determine stock without rewinding each reel; however, after the problem of human era described below and being told by the filmmaker that the stock used was consistent, it was discovered that the dailies used Fuji stock.

The largest problem encountered was in human error. During the first day of inventory and object handling, one of the cores slipped out of the dailies work print. After finding a rewind and a split reel in Shaffer's space and trying to rewind the reel back together, I only made it worse by tangling the tail of the reel with the middle. Putting it aside for a few weeks, I returned again to the reel, starting with untangling the end, wrapping it back around the end of the reel, and fastening it. Keeping the reel in the item level box, I then slowly rewound the reel back into one reel, slowly turning the box at the same time to counteract the curling that naturally occurs as a result of unraveling it from the reel. This only took one hour and a half to complete once I started. Since Shaffer did not have extra cores or a clamped down rewind bench, the reel was not given a preservation rewind. All of the reels need preservation rewinds; they are unraveling and loose, making them more susceptible to deterioration, curling, and warping.

Another major problem encountered was in being specific with the inventory language and process in working with two other students. This is important so that migration can be effective and efficient. Controlled vocabularies were essential to complete this inventory; we had to agree to the use of semicolons as opposed to commas, we agreed to use the same phrasing in the notes section, and we agreed to list the information on the box as a priority over the information on the leaders, because of time constraints and the need for consistency.

*Dance of Hope*, as a film, holds interesting content. It documents the moment in Chile when General Pinochet's 15 years of dictatorship, begun with a military coup in 1973, had begun to unravel in 1988. In this year, in an attempt at diplomacy, Pinochet instituted a national vote, where citizens could vote yes, or no, to continued rule by Pinochet. Shaffer's footage was shot in 1988, just before and during the vote, and it documented interviews with players on both sides of the debate, uprisings against the regime as well as the uprisings being squelched, and upper class political events held in favor of Pinochet. The footage also interviews families of the victims of the 'desaparecidos' or the citizens who were spontaneously taken from their home and effectively disappeared from society.<sup>3</sup> It is an interesting array of footage and audio material that documented this unique moment of time in Chilean history, and it could be very valuable to the appropriate institution. Shaffer's co-producer is one of the few people who she no longer has contact with, leading to possible problems with copyright in the event that the material needs to be preserved in an institution and if the film has the opportunity to go back into distribution. This could be a major concern as the project moves forward.

The item level inventory of Deborah Shaffer's archive provided a detailed understanding of the archive's holdings, their condition, and their organization. This is just one step to an

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<sup>3</sup> *Dance of Hope* (1989). Dir. Deborah Shaffer. Prods. Deborah Shaffer, LaVonne Poteet. 1989.

overall collection assessment and possible movement to an archive for long-term stewardship and access for researchers. The material from *Dance of Hope* includes unique interviews with people at this time in history, footage of Chile at this time, including government action against citizens and citizen outrage at the regime and demands for action. The Inventory presented its share of problems, but it was a valuable project for the first semester and can lead to a productive safeguarding of this material.



