

Work/Cited Episode 12 Transcript

Meredith Mann: Welcome everyone. Thank you for joining us this afternoon. My name is Meredith Mann, and I'm a librarian for Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books here at the New York Public Libraries Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, and we are here to celebrate our, what month is it? January installment of Work Cited, which is a program series of the library that showcases the latest scholarship supported by our rich collections with a behind-the-scenes look at how the finished product was inspired, researched and created. So today I'm very excited to be joined by our speakers. Today's speakers are Tal Nadan, who is a reference archivist here with me in the Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division at the Schwarzman Building. We also have Lisa Hurwitz, who is the director of the upcoming documentary The Automat, as well as Alec Shuldiner, who is Lisa's collaborator and a co-producer of the documentary. And he also wrote his 2001 dissertation on The Automat. So we're going to be hearing about their research process, the final film and their experience being here at the library. Our guests will speak for about 30 minutes and then we're going to open up the conversation to your questions. So please use the Q&A function at the bottom of your screen to submit any questions. They can be submitted throughout the talk and can also be submitted anonymously. So if you'd like to remain anonymous, please click that checkbox when you're submitting your question. You are also welcome to chat with our fellow attendees via the chat box and so we've already got a lively exchange going because apparently it's Lisa's birthday. So feel free if you'd like to contribute that way. Just make sure that you change the to field so that it's to everyone rather than just the panelists. And lastly before we get down to business I'm going to be sharing a poll. So if you would like to let us know a little bit about yourself so that we can structure our programs accordingly, please do participate. And with that I'm going to turn it over to Tal to get the conversation started.

Tal Nadan: Hello, can you all hear me okay? It looks like I might be having connectivity issues.

Lisa Hurwitz: No, it's good now. You had a bit of an echo but now it's good.

Tal: Good. Okay. All right, can everyone hear me okay? Sorry?

Lisa: Yeah.

Tal: Okay, perfect. I'm going to go ahead and share my screen. Welcome. Sorry for that inelegant beginning. So we're here today to talk with Lisa and Alec about The Horn & Hardart Automats. So for those of you that might just be Work/Cited series devotees, what we're talking about today is a chain of mid-century restaurants that were in New York and Philadelphia. They're called the Horn & Hardart Automats and they occupy this really amazing space in American collective consciousness. People are really nostalgic for them. And what we're doing

right now is we're celebrating the fact that Lisa's documentary is going to be playing at the Film Forum in Greenwich Village in New York this February. There's a link to the event page on this work cited announcement, but it's really the culmination of over 25 years worth of work collectively between Alec and Lisa. So we're just going to start by finding out more about Lisa's film, more about Alec's dissertation, and I'd like each of you just to introduce yourselves briefly and talk about how you became interested in The Automat as a subject.

Lisa: I think Alec should go first because he used the collection first.

Alec Shuldiner: That's, that's the historical, yes, I guess the historical is the correct way to do it. Yes, I was a grad student in science and technology studies back in the late 90s at Cornell, and I was traveling at the time in the Netherlands and I happened to notice that they had a, a sort of vending machine in a wall that people were eating taking hot foods out of and that sparked a sort of memory for me about that I had myself done that as a kid in New York many years earlier in what was, turned out to have been the last of the Horn and Hardart Automats. And from that I sort of got an interest in this and started to develop this as a possible topic for my dissertation and that very quickly led me to do NYPL's collection, the Byrnes collection in the archives there, which was what made it possible. If I hadn't found that collection, this would not have ever been a topic, a viable topic for a dissertation in the history of technology. So I went ahead and I wrote the dissertation and completed that work in 2001 and then went on to very different things. I didn't try to write a book for my dissertation or anything like that. I just went on and did other things. And then some years later, I'm not quite sure quite how many but quite a handful, Lisa, you popped up and maybe you want to take it from there?

Lisa: I was at the beginning of this process of making the film, and I visited the New York Public Library, I had Alec's dissertation, and I reached out to him. I remember I was feeling excited and a little overwhelmed, and I was curious if, you know, he would be interested in participating. And so that was maybe 8 1/2 years ago or something like that.

Tal: Yeah, so how did you come up with the idea of doing a project on Automats?

Lisa: Well, I was a very devout eater at my school cafeteria in college and that's where I got the passion for cafeterias, and I spent some time in my school library because I was really curious to know more about cafeterias and then in my library that was how I happened upon the Automat, and I was so interested in it and that's where this rabbit hole began. And eventually it brought me from Olympia, Washington, which was where my college library was, all the way to the New York Public Library. And at that point that was when I reached out to Alec, but I was living on the West Coast and most of the film was made on the West Coast. It was only more recently that I became a New Yorker myself.

Tal: And had either of you ever been to an Automat in the way that we think of them in a nostalgic mode before coming across this topic other than the experience that Alec had in the Netherlands?

Alec: So I did have, as a child, both my parents were born and grew up in the Bronx and so my grandparents were living in the Bronx and we would come into the city from Western Massachusetts where I grew up, you know, every now and then. And I think probably just on one of those trips, maybe it was a couple of them, but I do have a memory. I wouldn't even be able to tell you how old I was at the time it's way back there, a memory of eating at that last Horn & Hardart Automat. Lisa, you know what's the address of the last one? Forty-Second?

Lisa: Forty-Second and Third.

Alec: Yeah. So we would have, you know, gone from the Bronx down into downtown Manhattan and had that experience while it was still possible.

Tal: Great. So both of you engaged with archival collections at NYPL particularly this Robert F. Byrnes collection that we'll talk about a little bit, in a little more detail about Byrnes himself later on, but for those that aren't familiar with archives both Alec and Lisa used this collection, but they used it in very different ways based on their project needs. Alec, you relied primarily on the bulk of the collection, the standard archives part, which are these textual documents.

Alec: Yeah.

Tal: And so there's a complicated relationship between the archives and display. Much of what the collection is looks like this. There's sepia toned, handwritten, printed material, which can be mined for intellectual information in the way that conduces itself for a dissertation, but they aren't necessarily the most visually appealing. So Lisa used the other half of the collection primarily. Is that right? Can you describe it a little bit for us?

Lisa: Well, I would say if you've never been to an archive before, you absolutely should and you should check out the manuscripts and archives at the New York Public Library. It's open to the public. I'm not sure right now with COVID how accessible it is, but in times past you could just make a reservation, and I believe you needed at least a temporary library card and it's just boxes upon boxes that are meticulously organized. They spent a long time processing the collection before. It's now in its current state, and I believe the archivist who processed it was [inaudible] Bolling. And as Alec was doing his research they were actually I think still in the process of --

Alec: -- yes, that's right. There was only a very rough index at the time, but it was, how many boxes of material was it? Or is it?

Tal: It's 32 plus some scrapbooks that were troublesome for Lisa at some point.

Alec: Yeah. So a large amount of material but not, you know, not too much to go through all of it. I mean if you need to write a dissertation you're going to go through all of it. So the fact that it

wasn't fully indexed when I worked with it wasn't such a problem for me. I went, I think I went through pretty much everything that was there.

Lisa: And the scrapbooks if you saw our segment on CBS Sunday Morning, you saw myself and Mo going through and turning the pages of the scrapbooks and they're giant scrapbooks unlike anything you've ever seen before and the company kept these scrapbooks and the person who completed the scrapbooks was an executive of the company Robert F. Byrnes, who started out in the company as an office boy and became vice president. And so the collection at the New York Public Library has his name as he gifted it on behalf of the company to the library. And the scrapbooks are, they're the most beautiful scrapbooks. I used to be a scrapbooker, but then I saw these scrapbooks and I was like, wow, I don't know anything about scrapbooking.

Tal: They have some very elegant bindings on them. They're embossed and they're always, they weigh a ton as well. So the physical moving them around is always a bit of an effort on our part and even just setting them up safely so people can go through them in the way that they need to. We're going to talk briefly about one particular document. So even though like documents might not make for the best film content, they are important. And let's play this clip and then, Alec, if you would introduce the rule book, that would be [inaudible].

Documentary narration: You could start it with a set of principles. Mr. Horn and Mr. Hardart said you can do something the right way, you don't have to compromise. It's harder that way, it's more work, but you can do it and you ought to do it. That's what they said.

Tal: The reason I like this clip is because Lisa and her sort of team went through the effort of making this document, which might not be something that would stop anyone in their tracks, into this sort of dynamic segment, and he showed it off. However, Alec, if you would just introduce the rule book.

Alec: Yeah, so this was probably the single most important document that for my purposes that I found in the collection because I was really interested in Horn & Hardart as a system. What was so interesting to me about Horn & Hardart wasn't, you know, just this sort of unique technology of the Automats themselves, those vending machines that they had built into the walls, but the fact that it was so large, such an enormous amount of food was being created and vended throughout the city every day. And that was the work of a system that they built so there were a lot of hidden elements to that system and one of those elements was this rule book that structured how the system would work, how each of the sort of nodes in this network of restaurants that they built in the two cities would function and how it would communicate with headquarters and what its responsibilities were and how information and goods and such would be moved back and forth between them. I think, Steve, he's Steve Stollman [phonetic], the guy who is talking there in the background, he's quite right to call out that there was a certain ethos that was also communicated by the book, right? There was a, they had their vision and their sort of culture that they were communicating through this, but it also detailed how the system worked

in really quite, quite great depth. So as a historian trying to understand this system that no longer existed, it was absolutely a priceless document.

Tal: Yeah, and I think it also contains some of the recipes.

Alec: It contains many, many recipes, yes.

Tal: The consistency of experience so everyone has that same glass of grapefruit juice.

Alec: Right, although I'll warn that anybody who is thinking, oh, wow, I can go back and make the Horn & Hardart, you know, the mac and cheese that I remember from eating and I can't remember. Yes, you can, but the recipe will be for like, you know, 50 gallons at a time. So it may not scale down.

Tal: Yeah, there are a couple of images. The Automat collection figured into an exhibit NYPL called Lunch Hour and while there is some digitized elements that are found on digital collections that researchers can look at from home there's a few pages from this rule book but there's also images of luxurious cherry pie slices most of which were created not only just for this project eventually but also for this exhibit at the New York Public Library. So we talked a little bit about Byrnes and Alec actually dedicates his dissertation to Byrnes, this collection being so important when it came to the library in 1996 to enable the study that you did. There's another figure who comes up in the documentary John Romas [phonetic]. And, Lisa, if you want to talk about how he developed his collection and how you became connected with him.

Lisa: I also should mention that Robert's daughter and granddaughter were at our Philadelphia screening. So the Byrnes Family is very much excited about the film and, you know, pleased that the collection is being put to use, but so John Romas he was vice president of engineering, and he was very meticulous in his own right with keeping together documents and photographs that eventually when the company went out of business, he kept it. And so Alec found him first in his research and then eventually I got to John and once you start talking to other Horn & Hardart people, you know, people start mentioning other people and John was somebody that everybody knew and everybody liked. And John had tons of responsibilities at H&H and an interesting thing is that kind of where the Byrnes Collection ends off John's collection picks up. And there is a little bit of overlap but John does have some stuff that pertains to the very end and some newer photographs. So it was really helpful and it's wonderful how accessible everything is at NYPL and Tal and the other librarians were very, you know, helpful and made it easy, but with John's collection it was something that I could just bring home with me and I could, you know, scan in the comfort of my living room. And I remember our director of photography, Phil and I, we spent a week scanning. We were just there, we kept playing movies in the living room and we were just scanning John's stuff, and it was slow because we were scanning at high resolution, but we created our own kind of digital archive of John's things and so that was really wonderful.

Tal: You're definitely right about the Byrnes Family being involved with this, which is something that we kind of see throughout the executives and people that lasted with Horn & Hardart for so long is that they really, the company had that ethos of making everyone a family member and people are really dedicated to preserving its memory. I mean Byrnes and his family visited when the collection was donated and first in archival boxes, which isn't that sensational to people that deal with archival boxes all day, but it was special and like this was being made. He intentionally collected that stuff. I think it's important to point out that both Romas and Byrnes were, they developed their archives not only out of an affection for the subject matter but also because they had to take pictures for their work. So while we have these great photographs that Lisa is able to incorporate into her film, much of the photographs, which are organized by location in New York City. So, you can go to the sites and figure out where they were and [inaudible]. A lot of them are construction because they were both involved with the construction and then eventually the demolition and this is what they needed to gather as evidence of their work. It was functional for them to have these photographs, which I as an archivist I stress because I know there's a lot of people out there that are looking for visual images to enhance their stories and thinking about finding them through the people that are involved. So you were able to look at his bibliography and figure out a couple of avenues to go. I think you also said that you looked at his images and you were like, okay, which of these repositories might be worth for me to visit in my goals to collect more images to tell the story, but a lot of archives they just arise because it's the natural accumulation of things over the course of work, right. And we can look at them for all these other different ways, but this is why they started and why they wind up in repositories, which can be very different and probably want to use them in the future. Speaking of images we're going to talk about Lisa's process of sort of finding things, incorporating them and how that's a very unseen part of creative works coming from library research. I think we're going to, oh, you also used images really effectively in the documentary as sort of prompts for your interviewees to start the conversation that you're talking with and to build on those memories. Let's start with this clip and then maybe you can tell us a little bit more about the context around it.

Documentary narration: My father understood financial matters. He had the training, he had a broad vision, he was intensely loyal to the company and Mr. Horn knew that.

The day we took over from Horn after his death in 1941, the Horn & Hardart Company expanded even faster than they had previously.

[Music]

This is the period with a great deal of growth. As a matter of fact during the Second World War, Horn & Hardart supplied the food on the troops ships so when the Queen Elizabeth or the Queen Mary went out of New York carrying troops, they were eating Horn & Hardart food.

[Music]

The 1940s and early 50s was Horn & Hardart finest.

In 1953, the company served 2,206,000 beef pies, a 1,427,000 chicken pies, 10,652,000 dessert pies, 3,388,000 hamburgers, 4,886,000 chopped sirloins, 6,527,000 loaves of bread, 314,000 gallons of baked beans and 2,365,000 pounds of macaronis. That's a lot of food. [inaudible] feeding 800,000 people a day.

At this time in terms of the volume of business that they were doing in terms of the number of seats, the number of people who are being served, there wasn't anything to compare with the Horn & Hardart Automat.

[Music]

Tal: Okay, so we're in the Automat's heyday there, and I know we're only showing a very few clips from this film because we want everyone to go see it in its premier or when it's convenient to our audience. So maybe just a few words about where this falls in the Horn & Hardart story and then we'll talk about sort of what's really happening in terms of your use of images and moving images in the clip.

Lisa: That scene has to do with the exponential rapid growth of the system and Horn & Hardart are popping up all over the place, and also about the president of the company who came after Joe Horn, which was Edwin Daily [phonetic] and Edwin Daily's son is one of the characters in the documentary as John was also a character in the documentary and he passed away during the production. Fortunately, Edwin is still alive, but it's really, I don't know if this was the last moment to be able to make the documentary and still have some of the key executives of the company be in the film, but it was really fortunate that we were able to do that. So, yes.

Tal: Yeah, it's great. You interviewed not only people that are executives but you also have a lot of big names that you also get the chance to interview partially because of the Automat's location in Manhattan and just the number of people that walk through the store. And you talk about the, and this clip talks about the volume of people that are served not including the soldiers, but what's also happening in this clip is you have 2 interviews, you have 16 still images, you have a solid minute of clips from a couple of sources, which are woven together so I think there's 3 or 4, and you were kind enough to share with us how you organized this, which I'll do a screenshot of here. Can you describe what's going on for other people that might similarly be trying to wrangle around a massive project like this?

Lisa: So that is a document that was internal to the production that was used to track every single image, every single film clip, anything that was in the documentary that wasn't stuff that I owned. For example, things that I own are, when we shot Alec's interview for the documentary, that's something I own. So I don't need to track that, but for every single New York Public Library image or any image from Debbie or from John, I have to track every single one to know if I

licensed it because that's very important to make sure that we have the rights to everything that's in the film. So it was an overwhelming process, and I remember at the beginning of, I didn't have an archival tracker at the very beginning when we first began the film but like maybe 2/3 of the way through one of my editors, Russ, he's like you know now you have to make an archival tracker and so he gave me a sample. It was a very overwhelming process because there's so many individual elements, but it's necessary and making a historical documentary, it forces you to become organized if you weren't already so.

Tal: Yeah, I think you've mentioned that. Well, your project trajectory is so interesting because you're really, when I first met you which was when I first started at the library really, you were just surveying, like hadn't really developed what would come to *The Automat* the movie.

Lisa: Yes, and when I first arrived at the library, Tal had also just arrived at the library, and I didn't realize at the time that she was just beginning to work there, but it's kind of wonderful how we went through this together and one of Tal's colleagues, Thomas Lannon [phonetic], also worked closely with me on the film and he's now with a different archive, Lafayette College in Pennsylvania, but so Tal and Thomas were like my New York Public Library point people on all this. So we're very full circle today.

Tal: I think when you started your team was really you, right, and you've grown to have editors and advisors and all of these other roles, rights management assistance, that kind of thing, legal.

Lisa: Yes. You might have been number 2, Tal, and then maybe Alec was number 3.

Tal: Well, I was just going to say this document is effectively the footnotes for the film, and we think in academia that, you know, we have all these rules about proper attribution and, you know, rules to avoid plagiarism and, of course, the dissertation is full of footnotes, but the level of detail of footnoting I mean it's effectively as if you had to footnote every single sentence in your document. It's actually I think much more demanding what you had to do to track the provenance of your material, Lisa, I think was even more demanding than what I was expected to do for my PhD.

Lisa: I will say that every single time one of these kind of overwhelming tasks comes up and I'm still going through this now because now we have to deliver the film to, different parties are licensing the film now, you know, to show it in Canada or to show it on educational, in educational venues, but there's a lot of work that we're still doing to get the film ready because everybody has different specs for what they need, but every time one of these kind of very daunting tasks comes up, we get through it and we learn something new and in the end it's like, oh, that wasn't as scary as I thought it was going to be. So, I mean I would suggest to anybody who is remotely interested in making a film pick a historical topic or anything that's interesting. I would do historical because it's so interesting you really learn this whole other world of working within libraries and archives and it's easier than ever now because of how digitized archives are

becoming and making their holdings available for researchers to see online from home.

Tal: Yeah, I also think there's some awareness that's changed. I mean obviously the technical requirements of digitizing things and what you need to put it in a film versus what is suitable for our blog post or whatever are very different, but I've noticed at the New York Public Library we get all sorts of different types of researchers. But in the past I would even say 5 or 6 years there's a person called an archival producer that's working with a production company, Channel 13, what have you to go about and try and harness new and unseen images from images or footage in particular, which I wanted to ask you about because you used film clips in your documentary frequently. And I know one of the, people ask us all the time how to find footage, and I think you might have some great tips for that community.

Lisa: Yes. So we didn't have an archival producer. That was something that I just did, and I think you can do it too. Be prepared, it's so much work to do it, and I would start by just first of all if you find the kind of experts of your subject matter, they will be able to point you in the right direction. They'll be able to tell you, oh, you know, you should look here. And in the case of Alec, for example, I not only had whatever he could remember because keep in mind like Alec did his PhD dissertation a long time ago so we have what's in the dissertation, whatever Alec can remember off the top of his head but we also had his research bins, which I picked up. They were stored in his brother's basement in Pennsylvania, and I went there with a car and I picked up his research, and I went through it. And I was able to, if I saw like, a picture in a photocopy because he had, he wasn't interested in having, like, high-resolution, beautiful pictures. He could just go to an archive, write to an archive and they would photocopy an image for him and send it to him or he would take it, but if I knew each one of his photocopies it said where it came from. So I could sort of backtrack on Alec's work. Maybe that picture didn't do anything for him, but it was useful to me and his footnotes were very helpful to me, but also just Google. You just Google "Automat," "Horn & Hardart," "pictures," and then you start seeing archives popping up and stock footage libraries popping up and you find out what are all of the main stock footage libraries out there. So let's say it doesn't pop up in a Google search, go onto Getty and search "Hardart" in Getty and see what comes up and do that with all of the major stock footage libraries. So, oh, and another great tip there's this listserv of archivists for moving image, and it was a great resource because I could post, if I was looking for something particular, I could send an email to the listserv and researchers would write me back saying, hey, I saw this at this archive or here's some samples of Horn & Hardart footage that I have available to me. So there's, and then filmmakers will help you out too. I just hate doing it.

Alec: Yeah, well, a couple of points on that when I was doing my research, it was more than 20 years ago and the Internet existed but it was almost a strange thing to be relying on it for any sort of research. I remember my thesis advisor being a little, you know, a little skeptical of me being able to find anything valuable on this thing they were calling the Internet. So that's become a thing. I think it's been super helpful for you, Lisa, that you have unique search terms to work with. So if you're going to choose a historical topic, you know, you'll be well served to have one where this one term that's almost certain to find you what you need and not find you a

lot of other stuff that you're going to have to wade through.

Tal: Yeah, "Horn" vs. "Hardart," right?

Alec: Yeah.

Lisa: I definitely used, I used Hardart a lot as opposed to Automat or Horn.

Tal: Yeah. I can picture Lisa just going through like Looney Tunes episode after Looney Tunes episode and just waiting to find the Bugs Bunny one, but I'm sure that wasn't exactly how it happened.

Lisa: With the television and film clips that are in the movie and that are not in the movie because we couldn't include everything because the Automat made appearances in so many different television shows and films and it continues to do so and plays, but our Facebook page was really amazing because and probably a lot of the people are here, you know, with us in the Zoom right now but folks with just, you know, they'd post to our Facebook saying have you seen this? So, and also on YouTube at the very beginning of my project there were already these YouTube reels online of people assembling, they'd cut and paste all the different Automat scenes together and they'd upload it to YouTube because people love Horn & Hardart so I'd say finding all of that stuff was really a community effort, and I would also say that if you're considering making a film as daunting as a kick starter is, aside from, you know, raising some initial funds at least in our case it sort of helped us find our friends and our supporters and these people were not only, you know, good for financial support but they were good in terms of helping us find information and helping also get the word out about the film like now, for example. So I say I would recommend -- as scary as crowdfunding is, I'd say maybe at least once in your life give it a try if you're trying to make a film.

Tal: Are you ready to be the point person on all things Automat in the next like 15 years until the next project comes?

Lisa: Oh, that's funny.

Alec: It's you now and not me. I mean it's funny you say that, Tal, because after I published the dissertation about every year some, you know, once or twice a year somebody would show up, would call me or would email me and say, hey, you know, we're doing a piece in the Times about retrospective do you have a comment for us or I'm thinking of starting a new Automat chain do you have any advice? People would just [inaudible] and Lisa was one of these people, and I think since Lisa has shown up and has, you know, become the public face of knowledge about the Automat that has shifted, that work has shifted to her so I think you're quite right for the next 10 or 15 years I'm sure it'll all be going, those questions will be going to you, Lisa, not me.

Tal: There's a really excellent moment when you're introduced, Alec, in the film where your title is Automat Historian and you're clearly like that's not really a thing, but it's one of my favorite parts actually having gotten to know both of you. Well, I'm just going to put your email account up.

Lisa: Did all these opportunities that came up every year, did they lead to like more copies of your dissertation getting printed or anything like that?

Alec: No, no, the remarkable thing was the, when you popped up and I think you contacted a former professor of mine and he got in touch with me, and you were the only person who has ever contacted me about this who had actually read the dissertation. So that's, and I don't expect I'll meet anyone else who has either so you're it.

Tal: Well, in addition to being on ProQuest and requestable, you can read Alec's dissertation. It's also in five repositories, which is kind of, that means someone had to pay for a copy of it and get it sent to the Winterthur or what have you. So material of cultural history there might be, there's legs in it I guess.

Lisa: So you're saying if someone wanted to read the dissertation, they could go to NYPL.org?

Tal: Or they can get it interlibrary loan or order it through ProQuest. It's not available through our database just now.

Lisa: That's what I had to do. When I was at school in Washington State, I went to my librarian and my librarian ordered it for me through interlibrary loan and the dissertation is super readable, which Alec sort of got in trouble for because dissertations aren't supposed to be like so enjoyable to read and they're not supposed to read like a regular book, but it's fun so I recommend reading it.

Tal: It's a good read.

Lisa: Everybody else's work is kind of based off of his dissertation, so that's sort of the Holy Grail and whenever anybody cites any data about Horn & Hardart to, you know, he found it in the boxes and put it in his dissertation and then everyone just cites him.

Tal: Yeah. And just like something to say about the life cycle of, sort of, cultural memory, right? We see, one of the things that when I think about the Automat going from a dissertation, which by Alec isn't, can be a hard to access format and then the documentary being a popular more accessible manifestation of it. I also think about Seneca Village, which is part of New York City which was an African American community which wasn't talked about at all until 1992 and now it's sort of the inspiration and exhibit at the Met. So it's interesting in this career to see academic work lead into different formats and reach different audiences through these sort of [inaudible]. And it looks like we might be ready for some questions because slides are too complicated to

navigate and also with the chat I can see that there's over 100 things that have been mentioned. So I look forward to [inaudible].

Meredith: Yeah, indeed. So on the topic of Alec's dissertation, the link to the catalog record is in the chat if you would like to request a copy or give it to your local librarian to receive via interlibrary loan. There's been basically a shadow program happening in the chat. So it's been great reading all of your comments and all of your personal reflections of your own times at the Automat. The most popular question by far is how can people see the documentary? I'll repost a link to the screening section of your website, but if you want to discuss potential digital options that might be forthcoming?

Lisa: So for everybody in the US who can't get to one of our screenings that's happening in person. Starting in June the film is going to become available on video on demand platforms like the iTunes Store, for example, and you can just rent the film and that's going to be the easiest way. If you want to see it in person, for example, in New York City we're going to be playing at Film Forum in Greenwich Village starting February 18th, and we'll also have posters [inaudible] at Film Forum, and we'll be there for some Q&As and we'll also we're going to be in Los Angeles starting February 25th. We'll be there a week and at automatmovie.com you can look at our screening schedule and every week we're adding new screenings and because of the new COVID variant some of our screenings are going to start becoming virtual. So, for example, if you're, let's say we're coming to Oklahoma, like let's say it's the Oklahoma Film Festival. We're not in that one, but let's say we're there and they're playing it virtually. If you're in the state of Oklahoma, you'll be able to watch the film from home and so we're going to start doing some of this. You'll see it pop up in our screening links because we understand it's, the situation is a little atypical right now. And I'm sure as much as many of you would love seeing the film in a theatre it's not possible for everyone. So, yeah, so see us at Film Forum in New York City and visit Automatmovie.com for all of our screening dates or send us an email through our website and we'll answer all of your questions about when the film is coming near you.

Meredith: Great. Thanks, Lisa. And there are links in the chat to the Automat movie website as well as to further information about the Film Forum screening so be sure to check those out if you are nearby. On the top of the dissertation, Alec, I think kind of speaking to the interdisciplinary nature of the Automat people want to know if you, what discipline you submitted your dissertation towards.

Alec: So I actually just typed in the answer to that on the Q&A. It was a degree in, my degree formally is in science and technology studies and the specialty for me was the history of technology.

Meredith: And perhaps a question for both of you: what's the connection between the Automat and our contemporary kind of fast food landscape? Like was there any direct business relationship or any sort of more cultural influence on the Burger Kings and McDonalds and places that we're familiar with now?

Alec: So I think there are two important connections. One of them is a very direct connection which is that Horn & Hardart was the earliest franchisee of Burger Kings and later on other formats and really actually was sort of the breakthrough into Manhattan specifically for those fast food companies. There was some doubt that you could have fast food in Manhattan where, you know, the rents were so expensive and fast food so cheap how could it possibly work? So Horn & Hardart was in finding its own format Automats and cafeterias falling out of favor reached for this new format and it was, in a way, it was almost like, you know, inviting your own virus in, you know, in through your own defenses. So that's - there was that direct link. It became a major Burger King franchisee, but also Horn & Hardart and this is one of the major topics of the dissertation - it established the means by which you could run a distributed, you know, sort of massive scale food operation. And those lessons were picked up having a book, a formalized book of instructions, for example, that could be used for by all the franchisees or all the locations. You know that's something that Horn & Hardart established, showed how to do that and a lot of those lessons were picked up by those fast food, the large fast food chains.

Lisa: Remind me: is there evidence in your dissertation that these fast food chains were picking it up?

Alec: So, I talk about a comparative example which is the White Castle chain as well. So, yes, there's lots in the dissertation about how these sort of restaurant history and the person you contacted was somebody I worked with closely from the Cornell Hotel School because that really was a major thing. How do these patterns of systems, how do they get transmitted from one organization to another? That was also one of the topics I touched on, yes.

Tal: In the documentary, there's some really effective - because all the photographs, construction photographs in the Byrnes collection are organized by street, it's possible - there's a really effective transition of a specific Automat facade, which is these neon lights, these beautiful Art Deco structures transitioning into "Home of the Whopper" or "Burger King."

Lisa: Exactly.

Meredith: So out of New York City we have folks that are interested in the, kind of the reach of the Automat, the extent to which these existed outside of New York City or even internationally and then specifically we have a viewer who wants to know if any, if you visited or ate at the Bamn! Automat that opened in the East Village between 2006 and 2009? And if so, if you have any comments on the experience?

Alec: Yeah. I'll answer the second question first. It was actually the Bamn! people who reached out to me to ask for advice on creating Automats, and I don't remember offhand what my advice was, but what they were doing was actually much closer to the Dutch approach, which is to serve deep-fried snacks, quick vending snacks. Not so much a meal and certainly not to provide the, you know, you see here in the background picture, right, this huge open space with people

sitting communally, you know. A lot of what Horn & Hardart was about as Lisa very effectively talks about in the film or we talk about in the film and I talk about to some extent in the dissertation as well a lot of what they were about was this feeling of sociability inside the restaurants. That was very much not what any of the successor organizations that have attempted to use Automats or Automat-type technology in restaurants. Those other things like Bamn! treat it as a way either to sort of tap into nostalgia about it or to attempt to get some sort of efficiencies in how they vend the food, but completely miss the sociable aspect of sort of sitting with strangers or spending time in a nice interior while you're eating your food. And then in terms of the other locations Horn & Hardart themselves attempted to expand both to Boston and to Chicago. Those were very short-lived ventures for the company so they really didn't have much impact on either city. I don't think there were other attempts. There may have been sort of one or two attempts to open something like this in other places in the US, but for the most part it was really Horn & Hardart and it was concentrated almost entirely in Philadelphia and in New York. Automat type restaurants have a long history back in Europe where they came from, mostly in Northern Europe, Scandinavia, Germany, and they continued to be used quite commonly in the Netherlands, but there they're in a snack format not in a, not in an even, typically those restaurants have at best a couple of stools if they have any seating at all.

Tal: Yeah. Definitely it's interesting how Horn & Hardart in one of the ways they differ from fast food or from the vending machines that came after in the pandemic. I mean I know there was a butcher shop that was having a vending machine in Westchester County or in upstate New York, which was a way to keep people from interacting with actual persons during their dining experience. So how this like community and the actual cafeteria part of it and sitting together was so important to Horn & Hardart versus the, you know, the making invisible of the labor of producing food and getting it to people, which seems to be much more what the fast food business does now is sort of hide those chains of distribution.

Lisa: Cafes don't necessarily have the range of menu or the expansive seating, but for me, a coffee shop where you can stay all day long and you're sitting with other people sharing a table surely you'll talk to at least one person new. To me that's, you know, that's kind of one way that the Automat lives on for me, and I'm excited about these kinds of possibilities for a world that's a little bit more like that. I don't think there's anything wrong with sharing a table aside from, you know, the COVID stuff aside, I hope that our world gets back to being one where we're sharing tables with each other. I think it's an important and beautiful thing.

Meredith: A question for Lisa. What could archivists and research librarians do or do better that would make your job as a documentarian easier and less arduous?

Lisa: Gosh. Librarians and archivists, they're awesome.

Meredith: We didn't pay Lisa to say that.

Lisa: I feel we all had a pretty kind of wonderful experience dealing with librarians and archivists.

There might have been a few times where I felt like there was a little too much red tape where I had to jump through too many hoops, and it was maybe a little frustrating, but I had had that experience of having John's collection, you know, and not just John like there was also Edwin's family who had like Philadelphia pictures from Horn & Hardart, and I had that, you know. I have to give it back to them, it's in my storage here, but I got a little bit spoiled. But, no, I think overall I don't have any, I had a nice experience. I think archivists, you know, they're not, librarians, archivists are not making the big bucks. They're doing it because they love it and it really showed in my experience.

Meredith: We're glad to hear it.

Tal: And I always tell Lisa that if I ever see anything come in that's Automat-related, like I will send her an email. I mean now that, I mean Lisa has visited our reading room half a dozen times over the course of this if not more. And now that we've had this, like, long records relationship this is someone I'm going to think of whenever I come across material that's not described in a way that makes it super findable for another researcher.

Meredith: Yeah, and that's something that Lisa mentioned earlier or Alec I think to ask when you're working on a project to ask the library staff if they have any suggestions, you know, creating that personal relationship with your librarian or archivist is probably a good way to get started.

Lisa: Maybe like one thing that could have helped me is if a librarian earlier on because it never happened but if somebody had like given me maybe one sheet on how to be organized because, for example, with the Byrnes collection it's so much, you know, material and you kind of have to, Alec, who is a PhD, in school he studied, they taught you systems for organization I believe for how to go through that quantity of material. It's just not something that, you know, a normal person would ever know how. So I don't know. Maybe if libraries could offer, you know, lay people like us just some even how tos. I would take that class because as much as like I'm experienced now I'm still, you know, it's not by training it's just it was something that I learned in the process and I learned that I enjoyed very much.

Meredith: I think that that's a good, it's definitely not something that we've been offering for a long time, but those are the types of classes that here at the library we have the Center for Research in the Humanities, which is the CRH in my little Zoom box here. And we do offer some recurring classes for scholarly communication because a lot of, I mean every year there's new technology for organizing citations and photographs that you take in the reading room. My camera roll is just a total disaster zone so I'm not the person, you know, I'm not a good role model. So I know that the library does offer some classes to go over those skills that you either might have learned in a methodology course in grad school or might have never learned because we certainly have folks from all sorts of backgrounds that ask us about these types of things. So it's definitely not, a lot of people that come in our door are open to learning more in that area too. I am, so we have so many questions that we don't have time to get to, which is a

shame, of course. I guess maybe one to end on that a few people are interested in is does anyone, do you think that the Automat could make a comeback? Do you think that there is a demand and a possibility for the Automat to rejoin us and we could live that experience again?

Lisa: I'll start by saying that for anyone who has a burning question that we didn't get to, just shoot us an email at info@automatmovie.com or send a message at our website Automatmovie.com, and we'll get back to you on your question. In terms of can the Automat make a comeback, I think that a lot of businesses are learning that they can, one of the biggest obstacles if you're a restaurant owner is the cost of labor, and I think that restaurants are learning that they can save money by incorporating technology and incorporating some of the Automat technology into their establishments. In terms of communal dining, I really hope so because I think it's very important for our, for people to be decent, kind human beings. I think rubbing elbows with each other it's essential. Alec, what do you think?

Alec: I think that's right. I think, you know, you'll see elements of this technology come and go. We do see that happening. Eatza out here on the west coast was a thing for a bit and then Bamn! that you mentioned, but the experience, the movie does a very nice job of addressing this, and we have some, for example, some footage in it from the founder of Starbucks talking about, you know, that experience of being in a special space and, you know, being in this communal space how important that was and what an inspiration that was for him in his creation of the Starbucks experience. So I think the movie is your best answer to that and to a bunch of the other questions that we haven't answered in the Q&A. So, you know, this isn't a plug for the movie so much as it's just saying if you really want those answers, a lot of them are complex and the movie does a, the answer is not a simple answer it's a story, and I think the movie does a lovely job of telling that story and giving satisfying answers to most of those questions.

Meredith: Thank you, Alec, and I think that the line "it's not a simple answer, it's a story" is kind of the motto for archival research in general. So with your permission I'm probably going to steal that. So, I just want to thank our presenters for joining us today. What a fabulous presentation. I learned so much and we're really glad that you're able to join us. Stay tuned everyone for a blog post with the video recording for today's talk and links to some of the resources that we test. This will be sent via email to everyone who registered for today's event. You can also find recordings for our previous programs on the blog here along with related resources, and we encourage you to stay in touch with us for news of free public programs, researcher services and move via our social media accounts and monthly newsletter and you can see links to those on the screen and here are some links as well. And lastly our next program will be on Wednesday, February 9th, at 1PM EST when our very own Elizabeth Cronin will be speaking with the writer Lydia Pyne about her book *Postcards: The Rise and Fall of the World's First Social Network*. Although postcards are usually associated with holiday travels they're so much more than notes that say wish you were here. The success of postcards lay in their ability to send and receive messages around the world easily and inexpensively. And fundamentally postcards are about creating personal connections, links between people, places and beliefs. So Elizabeth and Lydia are going to be discussing how these personal connections can be

traced through the library's beloved picture collection. And if you would like to register for that program, there's a link with further details and registration here. So, thank you, Lisa, thank you, Tal, thank you, Alec, for joining us and thank you all in the ether for coming to this program, and yeah, that's all there is to say. Thank you all so much.

Lisa: Really thanks to Tal because I can't imagine making this film without her. The library has played such a major role in this documentary, and I thank her and I also really thank the library for everything that they've given to me and that they're making available to all of us.

Alec: Yeah, this history would not exist without this collection in any form.

Meredith: All right, thanks very much, and feel free to make use of Tal's services in the collections of the New York Public Library by coming to the reading room or sending us an email or visiting our website.