

# Experiential Learning as Archival Activation: Reflections on University of Calgary's Student Archival Residency Project Phase One

By David Jones, Laura Reid, Lelland Reed, and Shea Iles

## Abstract

Music archives hold unique value in understanding the process of creators and sparking creativity in new researchers through their exploration. The University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections preserves and shares the archives of prominent composers, record labels, musicians, and music historians. In 2024, three colleagues from University of Calgary Libraries and Cultural Resources were awarded funding from the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning to initiate an archives student-in-residence program. Through purposeful connection with archives, students, archivists and librarians, the project's goal is to investigate the use of the archive as a site for experiential education.

This student-in-residence program invites three students over the course of three years to critically explore, analyze, synthesize, interpret, and activate three prominent music archival fonds: Norma Beecroft, Edith Fowke, and Melvin Crump. The principal investigators will work with the student residents through a process of co-inquiry to support them through the archival research process and applying creative approaches to the rich and varied archival materials maintained by Archives and Special Collections.

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Through multiple iterations of residencies, one every year over the course of three years, team leads will be able to move beyond a single context and look for patterns that emerge from the collected experiences. This article explores and reflects on the first year of the project focused on the Norma Beecroft fonds and explores the goals of the long-term project into the coming years.

## Introduction

Archives offer the potential of unending exploration of material and knowledge to support scholarly research and creative practice. However, protocols, rules, and procedures in place to ensure their safe access present physical, cultural, policy, technical, and logistical barriers for users. These barriers represent obstacles, structural and systemic issues that can hamper the perception to users that these spaces and collections are open and accessible.<sup>1</sup> User experience in archives can vary depending on a researcher's prior experience with primary sources and archival structures and practice. Those whose scholarly practice falls outside that of the practice of history, including creative researchers, may not walk into archives with honed skills in archival intelligence, expertise and practical skills that have been built by repeat users of primary sources over time and through a continuous process.<sup>2</sup> While archival intelligence presents a framework for understanding how users work within the systems and structures of archives, recent scholarship critically questions the structures and systems themselves and the "symbolic annihilation" arising when archival structures and practice are developed without users, belonging, and inclusion prioritized from the outset.<sup>3</sup>

In recent years, Canadian mainstream archives have been expanding the landscape for research and artistic residencies, including Concordia University and the University of Alberta, and government institutions such as Libraries and Archives Canada.<sup>4</sup> These projects, informed by local collections and researcher interest, all serve to facilitate new interactions with archival materials through hands-on exploration, to prompt activation of collections and community voices that have historically been silenced by mainstream archival institutions, and expand pedagogical approaches and methods informing user experience within archives and libraries. In Spring 2024, University of Calgary Libraries and Cultural Resources (LCR) launched

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<sup>1</sup> Rachael Dreyer and Cinda Nofziger, "Reducing Barriers to Access in Archival and Special Collections Public Services," *Pennsylvania Libraries: Research & Practice* 9, no. 1 (2021): 38-39.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Yakel and Deborah A. Torres, "AI: Archival Intelligence and User Expertise," *The American Archivist* 66, no. 1 (2003): 51-78, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.66.1.q022h85pn51n5800>.

<sup>3</sup> "Michelle Caswell et al., "To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing: Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives," *The American Archivist* 79, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2016): 56-81, <https://doi.org/10.17723/0360-9081.79.1.56>.

<sup>4</sup> "Black History Archives Student Residency – COHDS," Concordia University Library, updated February 17, 2025, <https://storytelling.concordia.ca/black-history-archives-student-residency/>; "Archives Residency Project 2024-25: Call for Proposals" University of Alberta Kule Folklore Centre, August 2024, <https://www.ualberta.ca/en/kule-folklore-centre/research/callforsubmissions/index.html>; "Library and Archives Canada Announces Its First Creator in Residence," Library and Archives Canada, February 26, 2025, <https://library-archives.canada.ca/eng/corporate/news/pages/launch-creator-residence.aspx>.

the Archival Residency Project (ARP), a three-year initiative aimed at bringing in UCalgary students into the archives to explore and respond to three different music archives at LCR's Archives and Special Collections (ASC).<sup>5</sup> The project has been led by three academic colleagues, David Jones, Laura Reid and Lelland Reed, supported through funding from the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning. Through a process of co-inquiry and purposeful connection between students, archivists, librarians, and collections, the project's aim has been an investigation of how student-driven research in the music archives at UCalgary can activate archival collections and provide unique research and creative opportunities for the resident and campus community. This paper will present a reflection of the first year of this project: context and planning, process and outcomes, growth and next steps.

The project is structured around three year-long cycles of a paid residency for a University of Calgary student to thoughtfully and critically explore three prominent music archives. The first project on Norma Beecroft (currently underway at the time of the submission of this article), focuses on the records of the electroacoustic composer, arts administrator, broadcaster, and radio producer.<sup>6</sup> The second project will center on the fonds of Edith Fowke, a folklorist who worked to legitimize oral traditions and non-professional musicianship, but whose legacy brings up questions in a contemporary context regarding ethics and extractivism.<sup>7</sup> The third and final project will be focused on the fonds of Melvin Crump, a prominent Black Albertan and musician.<sup>8</sup> Crump's significant legacy in Alberta's music history also intersects with that of civil rights on the Prairies, as Crump was an active member of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and the Alberta Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (AAACP).

Both the Norma Beecroft and Edith Fowke fonds are part of the Richard Johnston Canadian Music Archives Collection at University of Calgary ASC. The Melvin Crump fonds is part of the Glenbow Archives Collection which became part of ASC with the transfer of the Glenbow Museum Archives to the University in 2019. These archives were specifically chosen as the creators of the materials are distinctly outside the realm of white men working in the realm of western classical music, which are the majority present in UCalgary's music archives. The project team wanted to take the opportunity to engage the campus community in the activation of three archives documenting the work and lives of individuals that have been underexplored in historical narratives, those whose legacy is deserving of critical re-contextualizing, and those who are representative of communities that have been traditionally missing or silenced by mainstream archives. Through thoughtful

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<sup>5</sup> "UCalgary Library Announces New Archival Residency Program," University of Calgary, published May 8, 2024, <https://ucalgary.ca/news/ucalgary-library-announces-new-archival-residency-program>.

<sup>6</sup> "Norma Beecroft Fonds," University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, <https://searcharchives.ucalgary.ca/norma-beecroft-fonds>.

<sup>7</sup> "Edith Fowke Fonds," University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, <https://searcharchives.ucalgary.ca/edith-fowke-fonds>; Clark, Emily Hansell Clark, "Introduction: Audibilities of Colonialism and Extractivism," *World of Music* 10, no. 2 (2021): 5–20.

<sup>8</sup> "Melvin Crump Fonds," University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, <https://searcharchives.ucalgary.ca/melvin-crump-fonds>.

selection of archival fonds for student residents to explore and prompt creation, the team hopes to promote critical and creative action, and research into stories and histories that have been underexplored in mainstream narratives. Additionally, this project presents a unique opportunity for the project team to build upon our own knowledge, skills, and practice as archivists and librarians, as we see it our responsibility to improve upon structures and systems within our reach and control.

In the Spring of 2024, we began the process of hiring a UCalgary student for the first iteration of the residency focused on the Norma Beecroft fonds. A call for applications was created, articulating the project's focus of navigating, reflecting, and responding to materials in the archive in a format of the student's choosing (artwork, sound piece, text, multimedia). Efforts to build awareness of the opportunity were multifaceted: department communications from liaison librarians, digital posters added to library displays, a Q&A session held over Zoom, and physical posters created and posted in department and common areas of campus.

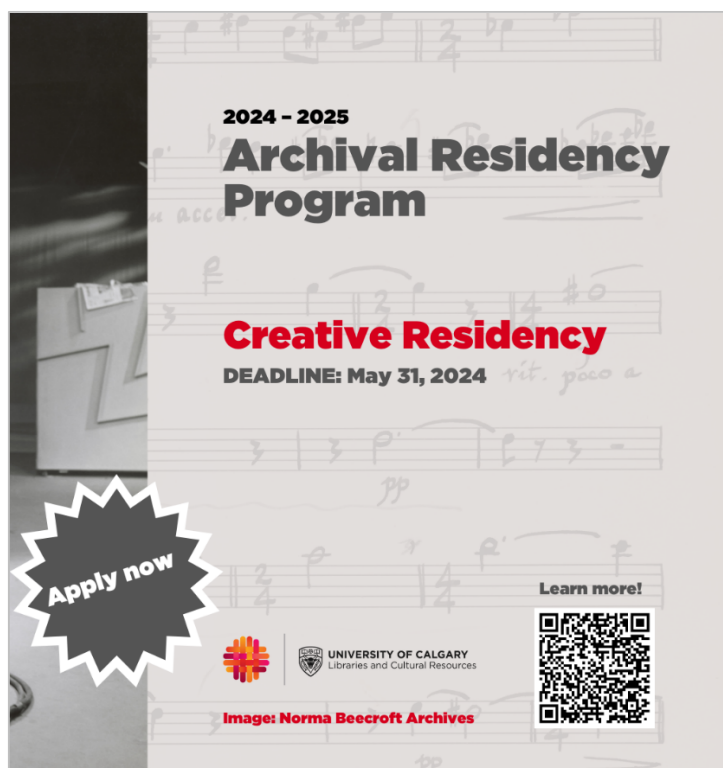


FIGURE 1. CROPPED POSTER, LCR DIGITAL STRATEGIES TEAM, 2024.

The call asked students to submit a short biography and/or artist statement, curriculum vitae, examples of work, and a project proposal. While the project proposal asked for applicants' preliminary thoughts on creative response possibilities, it was understood that the project would shift and evolve as the chosen applicant engaged with the archive and discovered materials, new knowledge and ideas over the course of their residency.

The call for applications brought in nine submissions from a variety of artistic and scholarly disciplines: music composition, film, classics and religion studies, communication and media, data science, and visual art. Four students were invited for interviews with the team, allowing the students to speak further on their proposal and ask questions regarding the project, and to facilitate an enhanced understanding of the project and its potential by both the hiring team and students. Ultimately the project chosen was that of graduate composition student Shea Iles, whose proposal spoke directly to engaging with Norma Beecroft's archive and legacy, particularly Beecroft's work with electronics and technology, as well as an interest in investigating the larger scope of material in ASC. Shea proposed to write and record a new work, with the composition process being informed by research findings.

### Norma Beecroft Fonds

Norma Beecroft, born in Oshawa, Ontario in 1934, was a pioneering composer, broadcaster, educator, and arts-administrator. Over the course of her career, she sought out new technologies and theories in contemporary classical composition, from post-serialist and avant-garde approaches to the use of tape machines, synthesizers, and computers. With Robert Aiken, she co-founded New Music Concerts, and produced radio shows for CBC, such as *Music of Today* which she co-hosted with Harry Somers, and CJRT-FM. The Norma Beecroft fonds at University of Calgary was established in 1988 by Richard Johnston, a teacher of composition and former Dean of Fine Arts.

The ARP arose out of activities and plans in late 2023 for a way to celebrate Beecroft's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, which was approaching in April 2024. At this time, interest in Beecroft's archive amplified, as celebratory events were planned across Canada, many of which relied on archival sources. The three examples that follow show the potential for archival materials to support creative, performance, and academic work. In sum, they acted as a prologue to our project as we considered the role of the archivist or librarian in mediating research and creativity. From a practical point of view, we used the opportunity to look at how our resources, such as finding aids, digital asset management and professional knowledge could be employed. Our experiences working with ongoing projects also offer comparisons with the residency, which can give us insight into how we want to measure success in our overall project.

Composer and McGill University professor of music Brian Cherney had been working directly with Norma Beecroft since 2019, exploring the passionate but ill-fated love affair between Beecroft and Harry Somers through personal letters exchanged in 1959-60.<sup>9</sup> These letters, now in the Beecroft fonds at University of Calgary, formed two recent works by Cherney. He had been encouraged by Beecroft herself to use the letters in his research on Harry Somers, and ultimately, to publish them.<sup>10</sup> Cherney's edited and annotated book, *Between Composers: The Letters of Norma*

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<sup>9</sup> For an overview of the letters and Cherney's performance see: <https://www.mcgill.ca/music/article/brian-cherneys-between-composers>

<sup>10</sup> Brian Cherney, *Between Composers: The Letters of Norma Beecroft and Harry Somers* (Montreal: Queen's University Press, 2024), 3.

*Beecroft and Harry Somers*, became available in late 2024, exposing a fascinating exchange between the two artists at a critical time in Beecroft's career. Cherney had reached out to the archive for a digital reproduction of the score for *Movement for Woodwinds and Brass* (1956), one of her earliest works from her time studying with Lukas Foss and Aaron Copland at the Berkshire Music Centre in Tanglewood. Cherney, a professor of composition, also staged a dramatic reading of the letters set to music by the two composers, Somers and Beecroft, which took place at McGill University in 2024, entitled *Between Two Composers*.<sup>11</sup>

In early 2023, ASC was approached by Timothy Roth in Toronto who was planning performances of Beecroft's *Cantorum Vitae* (1981) and *Jeu II* (1985).<sup>12</sup> Notes for the event recognized that Beecroft's *Jeu II* (a work for flute, viola, tape and live digital processing) had been performed rarely, due to the lack of access to the obsolete technology required.<sup>13</sup> Beecroft described *Jeu II* "a highly technical piece" and, "the most adventurous piece I had ever tackled."<sup>14</sup> The piece requires a 6-channel PCM-F1 VHS digital audio tape (and player), and digital effects processors, specifically an AMS DMX 15-80 a "computer controlled stereo digital delay" and AMS RMX 16 digital reverb dating from the late 70s.<sup>15</sup> Pursuing the work with due diligence, Roth had contacted Ron Lynch, Beecroft's technical engineer and long-time collaborator, who played a critical role in realizing this piece, to qualify the intended use of the multichannel audio to be played through a multi-speaker arrangement.<sup>16</sup> ASC sent the original VHS audiotape for digital migration, but unfortunately the sound quality had deteriorated significantly and was unusable for the performance. Ultimately the original multi-channel open-reel audiotapes were provided, as well as the sketches and pencil scores for both

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<sup>11</sup> Hannah Darroch, "Brian Cherney's 'Between Composers'," McGill University Schulich School of Music, March 13, 2019, <https://www.mcgill.ca/music/article/brian-cherneys-between-composers>

<sup>12</sup> Incidentally, *Jeu II* had been conceived by Beecroft to celebrate her reaching half a century and *Jeu de Bach* (1985), the first piece in this series, was composed to celebrate the 300th centenary of J.S. Bach.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Gorman, "TaPIR Lab Present New Ways for Old Works," Canadian Music Centre, October 20, 2023, <https://cmccanada.org/tapir-lab-presents-new-ways-for-old-works/>.

<sup>14</sup> Norma Beecroft, "A Life Worth Living," unpublished autobiography, 2021, 68.

<sup>15</sup> The AMS DMX was one of the first audio effect units to use digital memory to record, store and play back sound. By using adjustable delay times and feedback, the DMX was capable of a variety of effects including echo, delay, pitch shifting, phaser, flanger, ADT spatialization, and with the addition of the AMS MX15R, reverberation effects. The AMS RMX 16 was a dedicated digital reverb unit and both devices and their programs are listed in the score. The two effect units have since been re-introduced to the commercial marketplace, first as digital emulations in plugin format by Universal Audio and then by actual hardware recreations by AMS Neve, demonstrating an enduring interest in the particularities of the units and esoteric demand for hardware components.

<sup>16</sup> Timothy Roth, email correspondence with David Jones, October 2023.



pieces to contextualize the works and guide the technical aspects of the performances authentically.<sup>17</sup>

Interest from Western Canada arrived in 2024 in the form of a grant funded project for multichannel audio mixing of Beecroft's Amplified String Quartet with Tape (1992). Beecroft described this work as "the most emotional piece I ever wrote," and in 2004, it was nominated for a Juno award for best Classical Composition. Amplified String Quartet employs the playback of prepared thematic electronic parts produced by Beecroft with MIDI-capable digital devices (a Macintosh computer and a Roland D70 synthesizer), accompanying violins, viola and cello. University of Victoria Fine Arts student Kian Dunn, under the supervision of Dr. Anthony Tan and Dr. Kirk McNally, remixed and remastered archival recordings from stereo recordings on DAT cassettes to create a digitally spatialized mix using a variety of techniques, including binaural synthesis, to recontextualize the stereo recording into an immersive 3D hall. Dunn experimented with spectral editing (via Izotope RX 10), A.I. stem splitting (via DEMUCS), frequency-based separation (via PRO-Q 4) and 3D space synthesis (SPAT Stereo Max for Live device for Ableton Live). This approach echoed Beecroft's interest in state-of-the-art digital audio technology and aural spatialization.

LCR celebrated Beecroft's 90th birthday with a commemorative exhibit in the archive's reading room (Glenbow Western Research Centre). David Jones designed an exhibit and digital slide show featuring a variety of material representing her career, including press clippings, correspondence, photographs, posters, annotated radio scripts, musical scores and sketches. At the exhibit launch, the ARP team gave presentations covering the exhibit materials, the history of Beecroft and her accomplishments, and the resources available at the archive and library. We ended with the announcement for the residency and an invitation to a Zoom information and Q&A session, where we would introduce the project and field questions from interested students.

There had been regular contact between ASC and the Beecroft family in recent years, including the news of the residency plans and navigating details of material to be added to the fonds. In October of 2024, ASC received sad news that Beecroft had passed away at the age of ninety, prompting

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<sup>17</sup> Beecroft emphasizes the importance of the technological aspects of the piece, most importantly the dynamic use of digital effects, in the notes describing the composition on the CMC website. A note introducing the score reads "NOTE: there is NO TAPE PART available for this work, as all of the electronics must be manipulated in real time. (This in response to repeated requests from musicians for the tape part.) THERE IS A REHEARSAL TAPE AVAILABLE, but the piece itself must be performed with digital processors. This piece cannot be performed without tape part." <http://1443.sydneyplus.com/final/Portal/Music-Library.aspx?component=AAEY&record=115bc057-620c-427a-8236-89afbb9f2be5>. Similarly in an email correspondence with a music Professor in March 2004 interested in acquiring the performance tapes for their students, Beecroft replies: "This is not an easy request, as my composition is not simply a piece for instrument and analog tape, but was a concept to use live performers amplified and transformed instantaneously through what was then state-of-the-art technology [...] I do hope that you can understand, and explain to your students, that I am unwilling to present this work without an attempt at using some form of technology to enhance live instruments. And therefore, cannot ask my recording engineer to produce a performance copy of the original 6-channel tape without some guarantee that the piece will be presented in the manner it was conceived." Norma Beecroft fonds, University of Calgary Special Collections. Acc. 2019.91, file 10.4.

arrangements of final accruals. Among these materials were her personal scrapbook with photos from throughout her career and some rare tapes, including an undated ¼-inch tape of her first composition to be performed in Europe, Tre Pezzi Brevi, ca.1962.



**FIGURE 2.** BEECROFT BIRTHDAY PRESENTATION, GLENBOW WESTERN RESEARCH CENTRE. PHOTO BY ANDY NICHOLS, 2024.



**FIGURE 3.** BEECROFT BIRTHDAY PRESENTATION, GLENBOW WESTERN RESEARCH CENTRE. PHOTO BY ANDY NICHOLS, 2024.



## Preparing the Archive and Supporting Access

A challenge in knowing how best to approach the early part of the project from the librarian-archivist perspective is a common challenge: balancing a presentation of resources that support possible pathways while avoiding information overload and bias or personal preference. A value of primary sources is in how they can inspire subjective connections of meaning and knowledge during engagement with materials and supporting information. As noted in Colleen Farry's work collating case studies of experiential learning and pedagogy in archives and digital collections, critical engagement with information processes has the potential to lead to meaningful experiences with primary sources and archival theory.<sup>18</sup> This often requires the mediation of archivists, librarians, and staff to facilitate the knowledge architecture of the archive to build information and digital literacies.

There were many factors to consider in our attempt at this fine balance, including how the finding aids, supplementary documents and digital assets were structured and presented. Materials in the Beecroft fonds are discovered through the various finding aids, including the AtoM platform, a digital access management system and staff knowledge. In our case we also pulled the entire fonds (save the audiovisual materials) for in-person perusal; an uncommon practice, but one that we felt could be fruitful. It is also worthy to note that the Norma Beecroft fonds was active and semi-processed at the time of the project's outset. This fact presented both challenges and opportunities. Similarly, while UCalgary has a robust public-facing digital asset management system, only a handful of tapes had been digitally migrated. We therefore could not present the Beecroft fonds in its entirety and had to make appraisal choices in which tapes could be digitally migrated given the resources at hand.

The head of the Archival Processing Team performed the physical and intellectual work of re-organizing series structure and preparing the finding aids. Information from the finding aid is made publicly accessible using the AtoM platform. The AtoM descriptions were augmented with an embedded legacy finding aid, which consisted of a PDF document without Object Character Recognition (OCR) and with limited descriptive information. The legacy finding aid was a linear, non-searchable document, most likely in a non-finished state. This finding aid would require integration into online information systems with linked data and deeper multi-level description. Much of the work therefore needed to be redone in its entirety. The intellectual organization of the legacy finding aids followed Beecroft's professional activities, composing, broadcasting and teaching, with audiovisual formats separated into a different series. However, this intellectual structure was

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<sup>18</sup> Colleen Farry, "Experiential Learning in the Archives: Case Studies in Digital Humanities Pedagogy for Undergraduate Research," *Pennsylvania Libraries: Research & Practice* 10, no. 2 (December 9, 2022): 40–53, <https://doi.org/10.5195/palrap.2022.274>.

broken with every successive accession as newly arrived materials would reference series across accessions in the finding aid.<sup>19</sup>

With the rest of the materials now in the custody of the university, the finding aids could be restructured with a view to their totality, respecting as best as possible the provenance and original order of the materials. The new finding aids built on the legacy structure in tracing the main activities of the creator. Audiovisual items were organized into their own series, and further organized by activity, such as radio work, collaboration and composition, with the latter organized by individual works.<sup>20</sup> Audiovisual items were described at the item level, a necessity for the digital migration project, but that was also deemed highly beneficial. Beecroft's professional activities made up the higher-level series structure, including correspondence, composing, arranging, business, personal life and others. In important series' such as Music Composing, compositions and works were placed within commissioning provenance. Another important activity, one that came to be central to the creative project undertaken by Shea, was correspondence. This series was organized according to whom Beecroft was writing. Associated compositions, events and subjects would be obscured. Finally, it is important to note that the arrangement and description work described above was done externally to the project, but it would play a key role in information discovery for Shea.

It has long been known that researchers familiar with archival intelligence, and by extension the language and structures involved, will have more "success" in the archive than newcomers.<sup>21</sup> While these practices towards standardization have lifted the finding aid from its ancient history of colloquial gnosticism, recent studies have focused on, among other things, addressing heterogeneity in user needs.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, archival intelligence may have a circular logic at play, whereby a researcher familiar with archival description standards will rate as a success a finding aid that was crafted as expected. Other approaches to the finding aid, such as outlined by Craig Carey, drawing on Walter Benjamin and Robert J. Connors, look to play theory and the fragmented nature of the archival collection as the key to meaningful encounters with the material.<sup>23</sup> Stochastic, impulsive or random encounters with the material could be possible through the digital platform,

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<sup>19</sup> As a point of interest, the chronology of accruals which imposed itself on the finding aid can be seen as purely administrative and would be dissolved in the new finding aids. But this organization also speaks to how the creator deemed what was ready to send to the archive. Returning to the final archival accrual we received, as noted above: the personal photographs, scrapbook and early audiotape, it could be read that sentimentality was a factor in deciding when items would be parted with, and these items may have had a deep personal meaning to the creator not otherwise perceivable.

<sup>20</sup> These are general headings, the full series structure with proper series titles is available to view at: <https://searcharchives.ucalgary.ca/norma-beecroft-fonds>.

<sup>21</sup> Richard J. Cox, "Revisiting the Archival Finding Aid," *Journal of Archival Organization* 5, no. 4 (2007): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332740802153245>.

<sup>22</sup> Cox, "Revisiting the Archival Finding Aid," 13-14.

<sup>23</sup> Craig Carey, "Archival Play: The Magic Circle of Fragments, Finding Aids, and Curious George," *Pedagogy* 21 no. 3 (2021): 455-479, <https://doi.org/10.1215/15314200-9131845>.

and in our choice to let Shea pick from the boxes at will. Aspects of our creative residency could speak to the discovery process and potentially prompt novel ways to present archival access.

In digital discovery applications, concepts like original order, series structure and multi-level (hierarchical) description can be lost or suppressed.<sup>24</sup> This is a characteristic of many digital platforms, but also a corollary of user expectations. Platforms like Spotify or YouTube present scrollable walls of titles and images, and users not familiar with archival repositories, or digital collections, may approach the materials with certain assumptions about how they work and how information is organized and presented based on popular media. In these platforms, titles are visible but finding detailed contextualizing metadata requires many mouse clicks, if it is even available. Context seems to be deliberately subordinate to content. In the University of Calgary Digital Collections, users are presented with a similar experience. Although metadata and archival structures are necessarily available, familiarity with content streams may also diminish their presence on the platform. Would the flattening effect of the digital display encourage arbitrary discovery by Shea? Could this be a feature to drive creativity? On the other hand, would it suppress high-level comprehension and insight into the material as whole and the connective tissue between items, potentially trivializing or reducing them to superficial readings? Can both approaches be preserved when desired?

Stephen Ramsay, in a short piece entitled “The Hermeneutics of Screwing Around; or What You Do with a Million Books,” provides insight into this problem when he outlines the distinction between searching and browsing.<sup>25</sup> The latter offers us the activation of the “interests and proclivities” we bring to bear in our curiosity, while the former is more of a closed loop.<sup>26</sup> Ramsay plays on the pejorative association with the act of browsing, equating it with “screwing around,” but lauding it as a legitimate research method.<sup>27</sup> Browsing is a useful function of digital databases, and now the modus operandi of the internet as a whole. It is a fundamental feature of web platforms that want to encourage discovery without a defined endpoint. It is not trivial to warn of the danger of going down a “rabbit hole” while browsing (or doomscrolling) potentially wasting valuable time. Nor is it trivial to point out how surfing along with endless content on popular free platforms like Facebook or YouTube can also lead to swamps of misinformation, where our interests and proclivities can be appropriated. In the case of archival information systems, the risk is more likely the latter, wasting time or deviating from a given outcome.

Given the creative component of the residency, we felt that access to recorded material related to Beecroft’s compositions and performances would be critical. This was one of our main interventions

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<sup>24</sup> Geoffrey Yeo, “Debates about Description,” in *Currents of Archival Thinking*, ed. Terry Eastwood and Heather MacNeil (Libraries Unlimited, 2009), 92.

<sup>25</sup> Stephen Ramsay, “The Hermeneutics of Screwing Around,” in *On the Digital Humanities: Essays and Provocations*, 43-52, (University of Minnesota Press, 2023). 47.

<sup>26</sup> Ramsay, “Hermeneutics,” 47.

<sup>27</sup> Ramsay, “Hermeneutics,” 48.

and a corollary of the resources available for digital migration of audiovisual materials. Since the archive contains many of Beecroft's paper radio scripts, we deemed it less important to migrate all of Beecroft's broadcasts or program tapes. These materials seemed to offer a significant amount of the same information found in the finished recordings. However, the scripts lacked key elements, such as the voice of the creator herself. Furthermore, while the scripts had notes, annotations, edits and scribbles, the finished recordings were clean and polished and did not show as much evidence of the creative process. Over a hundred tapes were made available to Shea digitally, each of which was documented with high resolution images of the tape and any accompanying materials (such as the box or label). Multi-channel audio was represented in the digital package with individual audio files for each channel as well as a stereo "flat" mix, to give an impression of the overall recording.<sup>28</sup>

As mentioned above, we also let Shea pick and choose from the boxes that made up the archive. In this case, of physical discovery, access choices would be semi-arbitrary and mediated mostly by the look and placement of the boxes. For example, the oversized archival drop-front boxes hinted at their contents, as this is where many of the large holographic scores are kept. The physical boxes, which can be quickly opened and rifled through, offer what Bahde, Schmiesing and Hollis describe as the "magical value" revealed by primary sources.<sup>29</sup> The presence and aura of the primary source in its physical form, it has been argued, helps to establish the allure of the object, sparking creativity and potentially deeper engagement.<sup>30</sup>

### Co-Research and Co-Inquiry

A challenge in a co-researching process was in how to navigate establishing a tone and processes that would allow a student researcher to feel on equal footing with the three professionals working alongside them through this project. Co-research was a conscious framework built into this project, as it would encourage an approach that would allow for both relevant work for each student researcher and meaningful, respectful research findings for the archivist/librarian team. Davis notes the three aspects of co-research that differ from traditional research as "active agents in an iterative process," participation that allows for experiential learning that unites theory and practice and seeking "an emancipatory end."<sup>31</sup> An aim was to avoid a student feeling either the limitations of a support role or the pressures of a leadership role. Efforts were made even in the interview phase of selecting a researcher to establish collegial tone, dialogue, and a validation of the student's perspective, knowledge, and expertise that they would be bringing to the project. Once

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<sup>28</sup> The "package presentation" of audiovisual records on the [University] Digital Collections site can be seen in the publicly available records contained in the EMI Music Canada audiovisual collection, and can be accessed here: <https://digitalcollections.ucalgary.ca/emi>.

<sup>29</sup> Patricia Garcia et al., "The Pedagogical Promise of Primary Sources: Research Trends, Persistent Gaps, and New Directions," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 45, no. 2 (2019): 98, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2019.01.004>.

<sup>30</sup> Patricia Garcia et al., "The Pedagogical Promise," 95.

<sup>31</sup> Tracy Davis and Laura M Harrison, *Advancing Social Justice: Tools, Pedagogies, and Strategies to Transform Your Campus*. (Jossey-Bass, 2013), 33.

Shea accepted the offer, it took some time to contend with bureaucratic and procedural matters like setting up payroll, submitting hours, scheduling meetings and check-ins. A benefit of the three-phase aspect of this project is that the project management approach, including administrative tasks, research data management, and team roles, can be built on and extended to later phases of the project. For this phase it involved establishing a standing weekly meeting for the team which helped ensure collective awareness of the project process, provided a space for communal brainstorming. Meetings were held as needed, but even a checking-in of cancelling a meeting maintained regular contact within the team. Applying this structure also supported part of this project's aims of an experiment and the importance of collecting data for comparative analysis over the course of the project. This included meeting notes and transcriptions, timesheets, tracking archival items accessed and requests. The aim is not to approach the remaining two phases of this project with the exact path used in this first phase, but by building on learning through all phases, keeping some successful aspects and adjusting as needed responding to researcher or subject, we hope to develop functional pathways to the documentation and project planning of research and research support.

We felt that it was important to ensure that Shea had a grounded understanding of archival content, scope, and access, and how it may differ from a library, media service or other type of collection. One of our first activities was an introduction to the archival space, including the reading and hold rooms, and on campus preservation and storage facilities and collections. Examples of archival music materials from various fonds were pulled, including the large, now laminated, original pen-and-ink score for R. Murray Schafer's *Divan i Shams i Tabriz* (1970), a work based on love poems by mystic Rumi. The score, part of the R. Murray Schafer fonds at the University of Calgary, can be seen as a work of visual art, resembling a looping coquillage of fiddlehead frond and tentacle coils as graphic notation.<sup>32</sup> We discussed its value as a unique artifact, and how the details in the ink showed evidence of its composition. Following from this, we wanted Shea to feel comfortable and unimpeded navigating and discovering materials in the archive. We staged an instruction session where we introduced our finding aids and supplemental documents, digital asset management system, item request process and reading room procedures.

With a longer time frame of three years, a student-determined outcome, and dissemination of process and work as developed through the research process, each of the three iterations of the project will create data to capture and compare. The impact of the project will be measured in multiple ways: the integration of knowledge gained into each team member's ongoing professional work in practice, scholarship and teaching, the experience gained by the students in residence and the feedback they provide at regular intervals, and interest and insights demonstrated by the campus community into the project and targeted archives. This will be measured through feedback

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<sup>32</sup> "R. Murray Schafer fonds," University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, <https://searcharchives.ucalgary.ca/r-murray-schafer-fonds>.



from stakeholders, attendance in dissemination activities including events, and through evaluative tools employed in the daily work of archives and special collections over the long term.

An aspect of collaborative methodologies is leaning into this balance of structure and flexibility. As summarized by Werder et al.'s guiding principles, "while providing an overarching framework is important to the co-inquiry structure, resist giving students specific questions to research. Instead, provide opportunities for the questions to emerge as part of the co-inquiry process."<sup>33</sup> As archive and library professionals, our pedagogical role is both in information literacy and in facilitation of a researcher's needs. Our aim is to connect researchers to the full extent of resources available to them, in addition to developing our own practice as librarians and archivists. By framing this research experience around one student residency per year (over a period of three years), we will be taking a position of facilitator, essential to inquiry-based learning, and presenting an opportunity for a personalized, immersive archives and library experience for the student residents.<sup>34</sup>



**FIGURE 4.** LELLAND REED AND SHEA ILES, PHOTO BY DAVID JONES, 2025.

Another aspect of a co-inquiry approach is the encouragement of feedback exchange, not seeing the student researcher as only the recipient of support and recommendations, but the institutional representatives eliciting feedback from the student. For this project, not only did this provide

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<sup>33</sup> Carmen Werder et al., "Co-inquiry with Students: When Shared Questions Lead the Way," *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* 4, no. 2 (2016), <http://dx.doi.org/10.20343/teachlearningqu.4.2.4>.

<sup>34</sup> Rachel Spronken-Smith et al., "Enablers and Constraints to the Use of Inquiry-Based Learning in Undergraduate Education," *Teaching in Higher Education* 16, no. 1 (2011): 15–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2010.507300>.

practical insights to inform immediate responses to the research and future phases of this work, but it also allowed for mutual teaching and learning opportunities and a sense of tandem growth. This echoes another co-inquiry principle as articulated by Werder et al.: “Intentionally include opportunities for formative assessment, time to ask, ‘How are things going?’ Then be open to taking new directions that may not have been obvious at the start.”<sup>35</sup> An example of this was Shea providing feedback in the Winter semester on the onboarding process, with him articulating that although he was given ample information initially, the well-intentioned broad approach left him feeling unmoored in navigating the archival materials. Although it might be folly to completely shift approaches to the next student researcher, the suggestion to bring grounded examples of archival search process and examples of material found in the collection is meaningful and something the team plans to incorporate into the next phase of the project.

At the midpoint of the project, once Shea had enough time to explore and hone his project, he had already prepared feedback for the principal investigators. Shea was initially overwhelmed with the archival materials, numbering around 45 boxes, but that this was somewhat expected.<sup>36</sup> Shea reported that this could have been mitigated with a structured approach to introducing the archive. He noted that although he understood the good intentions of the broad overview provided, he thought it could have been useful if the three investigators picked an item each to talk about.<sup>37</sup> Further, he suggested that one or two of these items could be examples of the access process, whereby we demonstrate how to locate, request and retrieve the item, from beginning to end. Shea wondered whether this more personal approach would have provided a way to understand the subjective navigation of archival materials, open to multiple interpretations and readings.<sup>38</sup>

Shea expressed that he had some difficulty understanding the audiovisual materials and the content of the digital archival packages. Unlike recordings available in a library or on a streaming platform, the tapes were not likely to contain an actual recording of a finished work. In Beecroft’s process, the audiotape was a performative instrument with the score denoting when and how the machine should be played. The tape machine could also be connected to effects, as we have seen above, and transformed even more. Information about the tapes had to be inferred from what was written on them, and contextualized in the broader process or composing, recording, rehearsing, performing and documenting. Some key processes of working with archival audio were highlighted here, with Shea learning about the broader processes of electro-acoustic music composition. Going through the tapes sometimes meant checking to see if the labels and titles were correct. What was the intended playback tape speed? How were the multiple audio channels arranged? What kind of mixing would need to be done during a performance? What would distinguish a rehearsal recording from a final performance?

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<sup>35</sup> Werder et al., “Co-inquiry with Students,” 12.

<sup>36</sup> Meeting notes, Teams transcript. February 7, 2024.

<sup>37</sup> Meeting notes, February 7, 2024.

<sup>38</sup> Meeting notes, February 7, 2024.

A measure of the success in our hands-off approach can potentially be seen in how Shea decided to use the archival materials. Shea studied the scores, sketches, and notes, but also focused on some of the least “musical” of items in the archive, the correspondence. Letters to and from friends, family, composers, collaborators and administrators, sometimes about music, but often about money, grants or family and friends’ issues are being used to inform his piece. Shea noted that from reading Beecroft’s correspondences, he could gain insight into how she saw her works and performances, sometimes from an intimate view. He was drawn to the concept of the fragment, as something that he saw in the way an archive exists, and as it was reflected in Beecroft’s correspondence about her work and interests. Running with this theme, Shea explored the idea of the miniature for his creative work. It is worth noting that the fragmented view could be an expression of the lack of guidance. Feedback to the stacks of boxes, multiple finding aids, complex digital asset management system, Shea expressed as being overwhelming, unsure how, or where to begin.<sup>39</sup> He chose to pick at random, a process that can place the arrangement of materials as a guiding force. It is non-chronological and non-thematic, instead focusing on activities. Digging through correspondence files, for example, introduces fragments from her life; an invitation to visit a composer, a note from a brother, a reply to a grant council, or, as we have seen, a love letter.

Knowledge sharing is an essential part of work within the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, including public outreach, scholarly output, and engagement on campus and beyond.<sup>40</sup> These concepts were built into this project from the outset, from the previously described exhibition launch to discussions of dissemination in the student hiring process. Dissemination of creative research, both in process stages and presentation of outcomes, presents challenges and opportunities. On one hand, the natural presentation of musical composition is one of public engagement, either through live performance or audiovisual recording. On the other hand, academic research and outcomes seen as creative, artistic, or non-traditional can be questioned and scrutinized. Part of the impetus for this residency project was connecting with researchers from disciplines beyond those with developed connections to ASC such as history and English. Shea’s area of music composition is outside those domains that have regular archival engagement integrated into course study. This has made for a wonderful combination of dissemination activities that include the conventional (conference presentations) and the more unique (researcher office hours, podcast hosted on camps/community radio, engagement with undergraduate students within a course, connections to the professional arts community such as the Canadian Music Centre).

Two examples of unique approaches to research dissemination in this project was integration within an undergraduate composition class and the creation of a podcast. Shea’s experience seeing the potential and impact of archival materials for his own practice led him to connect with an

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<sup>39</sup> Meeting notes, February 7, 2024.

<sup>40</sup> Lorelli Nowell, “How to Do Qualitative SoTL Research in Six Easy Steps,” *Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning*, August 2018, <https://taylorinstitute.ucalgary.ca/resources/how-to-do-qualitative-sotl-research>.

undergraduate composition class for the Winter term. This example of dissemination shows the balance between intention and luck, as Shea's research outcome of miniature composition happened to align with a miniature composition assignment already planned for the course. After some discussion of options with the course professor in December, we were able to plan a guest lecture in the class for Shea in February, where he shared aspects of his compositional process and how his archival research offered him creative prompts and insights. To continue our project's approach of collective learning and reciprocal engagement, we facilitated readings of the student works, with meaningful feedback being provided by Shea and the professional musicians who read the works.



**FIGURE 5.** IMAGE FOR SHEA ILES' ARCHIVAL OFFICE HOURS, LCR DIGITAL STRATEGIES TEAM, 2025.

Consideration of the breadth of campus resources led us to connect with CJSW 90.9 FM, our local campus-community radio station that supports both digital and terrestrial broadcasts as well as locally produced podcasts. With the approval of the station's podcast manager, a series of episodes will be produced centred around the research process of this project, presenting aspects of Shea's experience as an illustration of archival research benefits and challenges. This format will also allow for dissemination of Shea's composition in recorded audio form, which allows for broader opportunities for engagement beyond a printed score, only holding meaning for trained musicians. Presenting research process and response in ways that extend the multidirectional learning dynamic of the project supports dissemination that is meaningful and relevant to this phase of the project. The podcast format will incorporate recordings of student miniature compositions from the composition class, bringing student interactions and creative responses into the research-creation processes and dissemination.

## Conclusion

Although archival research is integral to researchers from a wide range of disciplines, part of the hope for this residency project has been to counter assumptions of archival materials and research

within archives. Archival scholarship has noted perceptions of archives from researchers that can result in barriers to engagement, a lack of what Yakel and Torres dubbed ‘archival intelligence’: how organization and access differs in archives compared to libraries, what material is digitized, how an archivist can support their research and what questions to ask.<sup>41</sup> Although this articulation of archival intelligence was published over twenty years ago, reflections both prior and following this influential article indicate the legacy and ongoing needs to build these competencies for archival interactions.<sup>42</sup> With a composition student being the first resident researcher, this first iteration has offered opportunities for challenging definitions of research and how archival materials can inform and support creativity and inquiry. There is increasing attention being given to work and potential of both activation of artistic figures’ archival work and creative responses to archival materials in general.<sup>43</sup> Despite creative work being integrated in academia for decades, there are still misunderstandings and misgivings about creative research in definition, rigour, and assessment. This confusion has ramifications for student work and for expectations of faculty in arts and social sciences, which in turn influences modelled behaviour for colleagues within and beyond departmental boundaries.

This project has demonstrated how to bring ongoing approaches of composition study and creation to the archival research realm, and how conventions of archival research can inform and expand creative processes. Two aspects of composition process that naturally allowed for dialogue in the archival space are score study and idea generation. Score study allows a music researcher to interact with a composition beyond sound, to look at a work through an analytical and interpretive lens to gain insight into process and approach. This technique is often extended in archival materials with the ability to look at sketches, drafts, notes, or even text exchanges between composer and performer. Not only does this allow for a sort of forensic study of a composition in various phases of process but it also provides rare insight to counter the facade of public narratives of creative work that can range from divine intervention to obsessive toil, bringing invaluable insights into realistic process. An invaluable aspect of non-published score study is the expansion of

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<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth Yakel and Deborah A. Torres, “AI: Archival Intelligence and User Expertise,” *The American Archivist* 66, no.1 (2003): 51-78, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.66.1.q022h85pn51n5800>.

<sup>42</sup> Barbara Lazenby Craig, “Old Myths in New Clothes: Expectations of Archives Users,” *Archivaria* 45 (1998): 118-26, <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/12228>; Kathryn G. Matheny, “Instruction Consultation for Archives Visits: Why No One Talks About It, and Why They Should,” *The American Archivist* 82, no. 2 (2019): 484–507, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc-82-02-03>; Sean D. Noel, “Developing a Research-Based Framework for Teaching Undergraduates with Archives.” (PhD diss., Simmons University, 2024), 21-23 ProQuest (31770524).

<sup>43</sup> Matthew F. Rech, “Creative Research in and with Archives,” in *Creative Methods for Human Geographers*, ed. Nadia von Benzon et al. (SAGE Publications, 2021), 316-317, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529739152.n24>; Fahad Al-Amoudi, Kate Birch, and Simon P. Newman, “Runaways London: Historical Research, Archival Silences and Creative Voices,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 32 (2022): 223–39, doi:10.1017/S008044012200010X; Zoe Bartliff et al., “Leveraging Digital Forensics and Data Exploration to Understand the Creative Work of a Filmmaker: A Case Study of Stephen Dwoskin’s Digital Archive,” *Information Processing & Management* 57, no. 6 (2020): 102339-, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2020.102339>; Paul Clarke et al., eds. *Artists in the Archive: Creative and Curatorial Engagements with Documents of Art and Performance* (Routledge, 2018).



dedicated research to the work and processes of underrepresented artists beyond the canon.<sup>44</sup> Even in Beecroft's case, a composer who published work and achieved noted success, interactions with archival materials allow for a deeper understanding of her compositional production, as her published work is only a fraction of what she wrote over the course of her life.

Idea generation is an aspect of creative research that can be difficult to comfortably place in the box of traditional academic research or what is considered valid research data. Methodologies can be informal and qualitative, and processes can incorporate instinct and personal justification without direct ties to the literature, but it is nonetheless an essential aspect of innovative creation and artistic expression. The necessity of this experiential learning has been incorporated into creative arts enquiry definitions and descriptions, including sensory processes, unpredictable outcomes, and interdisciplinary approaches.<sup>45</sup> Creative sparks are described in language of mystery ("lightbulb moment" "out of the blue" "dawned on me") but at the same time artists have reflected on influencing the mystery with common threads being a combination of workaday consistent practice and following instincts and bringing a curiosity to sensory experience. Interactions with archives allow for this exact combination, with the imposed structure and organization of repositories representing consistent systems, and the inconsistent nature of unpublished material and fragility of material providing the element of surprise and discovery that can prompt generative creative material. Shifts in redefining scholarship have been seen in options for "research-creation"<sup>46</sup> within Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and campuses adopting Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) policies for measuring faculty output and tenure processes<sup>47</sup>. By documenting and supporting such aspects of creative research within academic spaces, library and archive professionals can validate current advocacy for expanding definitions of research and assessment.

At the time of this submitting this article in April 2025, the University of Calgary team is in the final months of the first iteration of the archival residency program, with the recording of resident and student composition works underway, in addition to a podcast planned as a final output. This initial phase centered on exploration of the Norma Beecroft fonds as creative prompt, has demonstrated the potential of the archive as a site for student experiential learning. The team will continue the project with two further iterations of residencies, documenting collected experiences of multiple residents. We hope to reveal patterns and insights to further activate collections, and model the

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<sup>44</sup> Benjamin R. Levy and Laura Emmery, "Archival Research in Music: New Materials, Methods, and Arguments," *MTO: A Journal of the Society for Music Theory* 27, no. 3 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.30535/mto.27.3.4>.

<sup>45</sup> Estelle Barrett, "Introduction," in *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, ed. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (I. B. Tauris & Company, 2010), 1-13.

<sup>46</sup> Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Government of Canada, "Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council," May 11, 2012, [https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/apply-demande/background-renseignements/preparing\\_research\\_creation\\_application\\_idg-preparer\\_l\\_application\\_recherche-creation\\_sds-eng.aspx](https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/apply-demande/background-renseignements/preparing_research_creation_application_idg-preparer_l_application_recherche-creation_sds-eng.aspx).

<sup>47</sup> "KI - DORA | Research at UCalgary," University of Calgary, <https://research.ucalgary.ca/research/our-impact/DORA>.

process of co-inquiry into the pedagogy, services, and student supports at LCR into the future. There is opportunity for archival research to inform and expand creative processes, and for the archive, its structures and systems to likewise be developed and informed by the student experience.

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