Exploring the C-SPAN Archives

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CHAPTER 12

REFLECTIONS AND
A LOOK AHEAD

Patrice M. Buzzanell

With this second volume in Robert X. Browning’s Purdue University series on discovery, learning, and engagement on and using the C-SPAN Archives’ online Video Library, the hopes expressed just a year earlier have started to come to fruition. At the time of the first conference and edited collection focused on the C-SPAN Video Library, namely The C-SPAN Archives: An Interdisciplinary Resource for Discovery, Learning, and Engagement (Purdue University Press, 2014), there was deep interest in multidisciplinary work that utilized the C-SPAN Archives in novel ways to stimulate further theory, research, methodological innovations in digital archival use, and workshops to draw in students and non-academics. With this second volume, these interests have grown. Now we see much more complex findings and sophisticated procedures that tell a story about scholars’ interests and analytic techniques but, even more so, capture the enthusiasm expressed in the first volume.
Like the first volume, this book is not designed or presented to be the final word on how to conduct C-SPAN archival research, nor are the findings expected to be conclusive. Instead, this volume is designed to focus on and be generative in the area of discovery. The importance of increasing awareness of the C-SPAN Archives as a resource for discovery cannot be understated.

Less than a month before the November 2014 C-SPAN conference that provided a context for C-SPAN researchers to meet at Purdue University, I was in Shanghai at the Global Media Forum hosted by colleagues at Shanghai Jiaotong University. The title of my keynote address was “How Do C-SPAN Archives’ Discourse Portray the Chinese Internet? Legitimization Strategies Around US–China Relationships” (see Buzzanell, 2015). At the conclusion of my talk, I was somewhat surprised and hugely encouraged at how many conference attendees and speakers wanted to chat about C-SPAN. Their enthusiasm for the unedited content about government policymaking, special features about life and political figures in the United States, and archived online content was strong. Audience members wanted to know how to access and search the C-SPAN Video Library; they wanted to know the specific steps that they could take to retrieve and analyze data; they wanted to express their fond memories for the programming that was so much a part of their lives while they lived in the United States during visiting scholar or graduate and undergraduate years. Most of all, they wanted to say how much they appreciated the C-SPAN commitment to discourse as it occurred in the moment and without censorship. Still others, including a couple of other keynote address speakers who specialized in media and different communication contexts, remarked that they had not considered analyzing video from the C-SPAN Archives. They started to talk about possible bridges with their own data and research interests. Of importance to these scholars is that the C-SPAN Video Library offers insights into the bases of collective memory that is unfiltered and not nostalgic. In eras in which history is reworked—and all eras demonstrate this capacity for reconstructing and recollecting history and particular events—the C-SPAN Video Library has tremendous import.

**Reflections on Discovery Using the C-SPAN Video Library**

In the first volume of Robert Browning’s series of edited books featuring the C-SPAN Archives, we see glimmers of several themes that now have come to fruition in this second volume. In the chapters, we see researchers grappling
with how to access and analyze data. Although the focus of their work is on academic research consistent with the foci in their disciplines, their inquiry offers contributions in different areas as noted by several recurring ideas or themes within this book. These themes are (1) making sense of recorded events and re-collected memories; (2) changing ways of searching and analyzing data; (3) contributing engaged scholarship; and (4) celebrating difference, telling our stories.

Many chapters have aspects of these different themes. In this final reflection, the following sections do not attempt to cover all of the interconnections but just position some chapters as presenting examples of and/or complexities within particular themes.

**Theme 1: Making Sense of Recorded Events and Re-Collected Memories**

The basis of the theme “making sense of recorded events and re-collected memories” is researchers’ interest in reexamining what actually happened, as recorded for and displayed in the C-SPAN Video Library, in contrast to what was promoted at the time in news media and what now is recalled and part of our collective memory.

Although this theme is central to many chapter authors’ work, we see the foregrounding of these processes explicitly in the sole-authored work of Kathryn Cramer Brownell and the collaboration between Alison N. Novak and Ernest A. Hakanen.

In “Going Beyond the Anecdote: The C-SPAN Archives and Uncovering the Ritual of Presidential Debates in the Age of Cable News” (Chapter 1), Kathryn Cramer Brownell is interested in the ways in which presidential debates and memories shape the media construction and the ways the media, along with other coverage, form presidential debates history through news coverage and other media coverage. She revisits news stories that sometimes exaggerated the importance of certain debate aspects. Her work of reconstruction, correction, and analysis provide insights for historians and political scientists, but also for communication scholars and rhetoricians interested in examining the constitutive processes whereby discourse fragments and their materialities become re-collected and re-cognized in collective memory (see Aden et al., 2009; see also Rowlinson, Booth, Clark, Delahaye, & Procter, 2010). Drawing from Aden et al.’s (2009) work and reinterpreting Rowlinson et al.’s (2010) focus on corporate sites of memory and episodic memory studies,
we can approach the C-SPAN Video Library as a site of memory around and in which humans engage in different kinds of and motivations for remembering. Even when data are viewed to establish “objective” reports, we admit that being situated in particular spatiotemporal locations affects and is affected by what we experience through the C-SPAN Video Library. As a result, the C-SPAN record is a valuable resource to re-collect and analyze anew with and for each generation. In this endeavor, we can emphasize the importance of the subjective experiences of the people remembering and of the analysts interpreting. As Charmaz (2000) says about grounded theory, all knowledge claims arise out of relationships, meaning that knowledge emerges in the relationship between people and data. People, analyses, and knowledge are situated, making the C-SPAN Video Library invaluable. In particular, how and why these digital fragments of discourse and interaction become negotiated and sedimented into the stories that we now tell is of interest for understanding the values and motivations of particular generations and storytellers—of the Kennedy–Nixon and Ford–Carter presidential debates, for example, as Kathryn Cramer Brownell did.

A different means of engaging in remembering is offered by Alison Novak and Ernie Hakanen. In “Framing Technological Influence through C-SPAN” (Chapter 2), they conduct a frame analysis of The Communicators’ series episodes from 2005 to the present. Their analysis offers both retrospective and prospective accounts of leaders’ views of technology, offering data for further examination of the reshaping of memory regarding past contributions and of the as-yet-to-be-determined foresight that these leaders have. As examples, program guests such as the inventor of the cell phone as well as a former chair of the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC)1 talk about themselves and their work. They are framing the past, present, and future of technology and who are they in this history. Alison and Ernie provide insights into dialectic tensions surrounding dystopian and utopian views of technology, regulatory policies, and strategic communication implications for engaged scholarship, our third theme in this reflection.

Theme 2: Changing Ways of Searching and Analyzing Data

A second theme is that researchers’ sense of how to search and analyze the C-SPAN archival data has changed and continues to change. For instance, at the November 2014 C-SPAN conference Robert Browning, director of the
C-SPAN Archives, described how the records of votes and of speaker order for events are available in the “graphical timeline,” where anyone interested in searching the C-SPAN Video Library can find particular remarks. Robert related that, for the first time, records have been organized by the speaker who actually spoke when one searches under People. This responsiveness of the C-SPAN Archives staff is commendable in terms of their interest in and ability to make changes that would benefit scholars, teachers, and other individuals.

Foreshadowing the third theme of engaged scholarship, the theme of “changing ways of searching and analyzing data” underscores that scholars live in an era of mixed method approaches and recognition that the questions of consequence that researchers ask require in-depth studies as well as big data responses. Scholars do their work at a time when innovative procedures and techniques are being designed to utilize the C-SPAN Archives to its fullest and in combination with social media and other data.

Researchers can “scrape” much data, use computational social science, and make accessible the minute variations necessary for visual or video analysis because of the C-SPAN Video Library’s free digital accessibility. In light of these qualities, the chapters by Erik P. Bucy and Zijian Harrison Gong, stonegarden grindlife, and David A. Caputo are featured.

In “Image Bite Analysis of Presidential Debates” (Chapter 3), Erik Bucy and Zijian Gong provide a look at the broader and multi-institutional research program on image bites and the way people can infer personality traits and motivations of leaders in mediated contexts. Put simply, they coded for indicators such as emotions, blink rate, individual gaze and posture, and production values in two 2012 debates featuring Barack Obama and Mitt Romney, supplementing the C-SPAN Video Library materials with data from Twitter where possible. Using Twitter, they linked biobehavioral and big data, examining such variables as Twitter volume per minute. They studied displays of defiance and affinity, anger and reassurance, and evasion and neutrality in 30-second increments. Although this synopsis focuses on some of the complex methodological decisions, coding categories, and procedural steps and constraints, the larger questions are the ways in which political leaders and, indeed, most public figures can anticipate stakeholders’ responses to even their most minute behaviors.

Similarly, in “Expressive Polarization in Political Discourse” (Chapter 4), stonegarden grindlife explores polarization in appearances in eight years of raw C-SPAN Video Library video—namely, how anger and fear are expressed
by talking faster and louder with individual microfluctuations being consid-
ered with regard to individuals’ baselines. With his data set of over 10,000
speeches, he reports that “the presence of indicators of anger and aggression
are not merely random. They are related in consistent ways with the mechan-
ics of a chamber, the level of controversy associated with the debate topic, and
party strength.”

Finally, in “C-SPAN, MOOCs, and the Post-Digital Age” (Chapter 5),
David Caputo describes the depth and force of C-SPAN and its Video Library
for U.S. citizens and the world, depicting it as “an elixir that energizes the
spirit and recharges the mind.” However, he is mindful of the challenges that
C-SPAN faces and the need to reconsider ways in which C-SPAN and users
might leverage its qualities and enhance its appeal. As one possibility, David
suggests how Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) might utilize C-SPAN
in novel ways to ensure an engaging educational approach. He discusses the
idea of an advocacy MOOC involving campaigns and leaves his readers with
the opportunity to reflect upon other ideas.

**Theme 3: Contributing Engaged Scholarship**

This theme of “contributing engaged scholarship” is not simply about pro-
moting the use of the C-SPAN Video Library for engaged scholarship but
about the ways in which chapters actually contribute research that is, at its
very core, engaged. This theme acknowledges the ways in which researchers’
relationships to their data have changed in recent years. Aligning with core
responsibilities and standards in the particular epistemological and ontolog-
ical stances that researchers hold, this theme acknowledges not only that the
archive creation process itself provides an exemplar of engaged scholarship
but also that chapters in this edited collection illuminate how members of the
academy are engaging with the C-SPAN archival data in different ways. In this
book, engagement is not always blatant but might be part of the underlying
values and/or the strategic use of a results continuum where particular work
may be positioned. Before providing an example of engaged scholarship by
Mary L. Nucci, I include a discussion of engaged scholarship to situate this
work and the value of the C-SPAN Archives and other repositories of people’s
voices and records of sociocultural and political events. Engaged scholarship
using the C-SPAN Video Library encourages new questions about possibili-
ties for and of research in content, form, and values.
Engaged scholarship is a term capturing the profound dynamics within, between, and encapsulating theory, research, and practice. Engaged scholars forge interdisciplinary connections yet recognize the need for arguments about distinct disciplinary contributions. Engaged scholars’ work is multi-topic—often not a linear research program—using diverse paradigms (from understanding to critique and transformation) and multiple and mixed methodologies. Engaged scholarship is funded and not funded and micro and/or macro level, but it produces local and global insights about and effective strategies for managing key challenges facing today’s world.

As Putnam (2009) noted in her keynote address delivered to the 7th Aspen Conference on Engaged Communication Scholarship entitled “The Multiple Faces of Engaged Scholarship,” there are numerous ways of conducting engaged scholarship: “What is clear is that we have a variety of faces for engaged scholarship and simply aligning the term with problem-centered research or the study of practical, real-world problems is not particularly useful for making this construct distinctive.” Indeed, she continues, engaged scholarship has a “unique cast that separates it from merely addressing practical problems or focusing on translation or disseminating and making knowledge accessible.”

Whereas Putnam argues that the three faces of engaged scholarship are collaborative learning, activism and social justice, and practical theory, we focus on collaborative learning. Here scholars coproduce knowledge about complex problems in sophisticated and nuanced ways. Engaged scholarship is relational insofar as it exists in conversation with diverse stakeholders. The outcomes are knowledge production as well as help for local communities. Dempsey and Barge (2014) focus on the promise of engaged scholarship to model and enact participatory forms of communication, bridging practitioner and academic communities.

Mary Nucci examines data from the C-SPAN Video Library to illuminate the shift in popular cultural and governmental policymakers’ discourse about science as a means of solving problems related to questions about science and policy and associated problems about whether people believe in and use scientific evidence for policy. In her chapter, “Using the C-SPAN Archives: Evidence in Policymakers’ Discourse on Science” (Chapter 6), Mary positions herself as someone with a non-political science background, invested in science communication, and questioning federal government funding, programs, agencies, and decisions on science. She focuses on legislative committees where nonpartisan actors who are not well versed in scientific procedures
and theories decontextualize findings but have tendencies to support certain beliefs in science along partisan lines. In the end, her analysis provides ideas about how the government thinks about science, and how that affects policy and media presentations about science. In using the C-SPAN Video Library, Mary engages with publics to help people understand who is out there and voting (voting records), what science issues are being debated, who is or is not granted expertise, how science is debated by nonscientists, and how science discussions are framed in committees and in offices that have direct bearing on education and national prominence in science.

Theme 4: Celebrating Difference, Telling Our Stories

A fourth and final theme, “celebrating difference, telling our stories,” encompasses the idea that there are many ways in which stories from different research projects are extracted and told. Chapters authored by several researchers support this theme. In some cases, this theme presents voices of those either not routinely acknowledged or not part of mainstream political stories (Nadia E. Brown, Michael D. Minta, and Valeria Sinclair-Chapman). In other cases, difference comes to the foreground of the research as participants depicted in C-SPAN archival segments—such as Michelle Obama, gays in the military, and women in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math)—and the researchers themselves struggle to explain and remedy what they see as a devaluation or oversimplification of their own and others’ experiences (Ray Block Jr. and Christina S. Haynes; Christopher Neff; Lauren Berkshire Hearit and me). This theme also encompasses research that is not aligned exactly with celebration but with recognition of polarizations that seem to preserve difference (Bryce J. Dietrich), offering scholarship of hope that visualization and sound analyses can offer insights into oppositional stories and potential imagery for incorporating the voice between.

First, in “Personal Narratives and Representation Strategies: Using C-SPAN Oral Histories to Examine Key Concepts in Minority Representation” (Chapter 7), Nadia E. Brown, Michael D. Minta, and Valeria Sinclair-Chapman talk about how members of the Congressional Black Caucus performed their identities, told their own lived stories, and described how they went to Congress. The voices of five African American members of the Congressional Black Caucus described in their oral histories how they were prepared to link
their identities to what they did and how they represented people not only in their own districts but throughout the United States. The oral histories reveal how and why such distinct personalities with very different backgrounds could merge into the Congressional Black Caucus as a collective for social change.

Second, Ray Block Jr. and Christina Haynes describe how Michelle Obama actively created her own image—one bridging public, private, and policy—despite negative depictions in everyday conversations and media reports. Through their chapter, “‘Mom-In-Chief’ Rhetoric as a Lens for Understanding Policy Advocacy: A Thematic Analysis of Video Footage From Michelle Obama’s Speeches” (Chapter 8), they depict the struggles that public figures like the First Lady have with their identity constructions and their efforts to contribute productively to public and private conversations about intersectionalities of race, gender, motherhood, politics, and other politics of import in contemporary society. Ray and Christina center on Michelle Obama’s speeches to, interactions with, and advocacy for military families. Discussing family would provide a means of creating identification—that is, ways of making Michelle Obama seem not so different from other mainstream Americans. The military family dialogues became ways to bridge private–public and policy. Through close readings of texts and thematic analyses of video footage of the First Lady’s speeches, Ray and Christina find that Michelle Obama utilizes rhetorical moves to stress unifying identities (family and motherhood), situate herself as an ordinary person despite her political stature, and blur boundaries between her public and private roles.

Third, in “The Performance of Roll Call Votes as Political Cover in the U.S. Senate: Using C-SPAN to Analyze the Vote to Repeal ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’” (Chapter 9), Christopher Neff finds not only that gays in the military were disenfranchised through their social identity and institutional structures and policies but that that the sequencing of votes corresponded to electoral implications. Christopher concludes that “party members use the sequencing and clustering of roll call votes to provide political cover for their vulnerable members as a way of addressing controversial political issues within legislative bodies.”

Extending social identity discussions and ways to broaden the participation and inclusion of those whose voices often are not routinely or effectively incorporated in political processes, Lauren Hearit and I offer insight in our chapter, “Public Understandings of Women in STEM: A Prototype Analysis
of Governmental Discourse from the C-SPAN Video Library” (Chapter 10). From media representations in popular culture to video footage from the C-SPAN Video Library, Lauren and I build a case for how prototypes are perpetuated in policy discussions, contributing to the relative lack of progress regarding women in STEM. Echoing the theme of engaged scholarship, we argue that three clusters of prototypical representations continue to situate on the numbers, unique characteristics and achievements, and pattern of selective resource allocations for girls and women aligned with STEM. Rather than portraying everyday exclusionary processes and women’s skills and talents, arguments legitimizing expenditures for STEM education and related practices focus on increasing STEM expertise for national competitiveness by simply incorporating more women.

As a final example of “celebrating difference, telling our stories,” we take a sideways look at the processes underlying this theme. Bryce Dietrich poses the question in his chapter title, “If a Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words, What Is a Video Worth?” (Chapter 11). In response, Bryce illustrates the importance of audio and video for understanding the political processes, particularly cosponsorship. Not only does Bryce provide time series work in the polarization of social networks before, during, and after cosponsorship events, but he also refers to the visual traces that capture Congressional members’ motivations—as they look beyond their local neighborhoods to others, act with other agents, and move more or less quickly and eagerly into interactive space for deliberation—as well as implicates findings from other research to trace patterns in policymaking and those involved on the floor, in caucuses, and in other settings. Through Bryce’s research, visualization analyses offer additional leverage to answer questions about how polarization can be explained, how the stories about difference can be told differently, and how perspectives between these factions gain greater voice in political processes.

A LOOK AHEAD

The authors’ collective goal has been to expand and enrich the use of the C-SPAN Archives’ online Video Library in innovative and profound ways. Although an open call in various disciplinary and interdisciplinary venues produced an encouraging number of submissions (22 proposals) for
competitive selection into the conference that supported this edited collection, we, as contributors to this volume, look forward to more focused collaborations on the themes presented here. Upon reflecting on commonalities and differences among the themes—making sense of recorded events and re-collected memories; changing ways of searching and analyzing data; contributing engaged scholarship; and celebrating difference, telling our stories—we acknowledge that many of the chapters incorporate different aspects of these themes to greater and lesser extents.

As we look ahead, we ask how we might increase awareness of and knowledge generated through use of the C-SPAN Video Library. We’re pleased with the different disciplines and variety of research that have emerged with this conference and edited collection. We are humbled by the visions of particular people, such as Brian Lamb, Robert Browning, Susan Swain, and Rob Kennedy, who produced C-SPAN and the C-SPAN Video Library, and are encouraged by national and global respect for the C-SPAN Archives. As we share our enthusiasm for utilizing the data contained in the Archives, we recognize that they remain underexplored in so many ways. We close by thanking C-SPAN and Purdue’s president, Mitch Daniels, for financial support. And we look ahead to the next conference highlighting use of the C-SPAN Video Library.

NOTE


REFERENCES


