The 2010s is an era of media plenty, with an unprecedented volume and scope of material available, particularly online. However, with changing technical standards; restrictive, pre-digital copyright and distribution policies; and inconsistent preservation practices, the fate of past media texts is far from assured. The production and use of physical media objects (e.g., as celluloid films or optical discs) is waning, in favor of cloud storage and temporary access regimes. Past media restoration, preservation, format migration, and access (as well as disposal) are not high social or institutional priorities, and are further complicated by disputes over intellectual property. On a philosophical level, the relationship of past media to present (and future) culture is similarly ambiguous, in media studies in particular, and in culture more broadly. This talk will explore the parameters of this issue today, and examine several different institutional and individual strategies for dealing with past media texts.

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