Modern Ideas About Old Films:
The Museum of Modern Art's Film Library and Film Culture, 1935-39

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Abstract

This dissertation provides a cultural history of the first North American film archive, the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art (New York), established in 1935. It asks a seemingly simple question: How was it that small, popular, debased, ephemeral objects like films came to be treated as precious, complex and valuable historical objects? It therefore explores how ideas about archiving (seeing and saving films) intersect with practices of collection and exhibition, by mapping the evolution of key institutional discourses and cultural trends from the birth of the medium to the Film Library. It considers links between the archive and longstanding concepts in film culture—utopianism, cinematic knowledge and art. It attends to the more specific convergence of interests—public and private, national and international—which impacted on the Film Library's institutional shape and on the debates in which it was embroiled. This dissertation shows that despite the Film Library's home within an institution of modern art, film's archival value was associated more with the urgency of recovering a history that had been lost and less with an art that had been neglected. This contention is further supported by an examination of the Film Library's first circulating film programs and their public reception. This dissertation postulates that the library's development of an unprecedented and broad acquisition policy as well as an active exhibition program made it more than a mere reflection of the uniquely historical and modern attributes of the cinema: a meeting of aesthetic ferment, technology, commercialism, propaganda, popularity and information. It concludes that the library was an important intervention into these discourses marking with institutional certainty the contested nature of film as a cultural object as well as the ongoing project to understand it.

Résumé

Cette thèse porte sur l'histoire et la signification culturelle de la premiere archive cinématographique en Amérique du Nord, la Cinémathèque du Musée d'art contemporain de New York, fondée en 1935. La problématique semble fort simple: comment expliquer que ces films, objects populaires, sans valeur ni prestige apparent, aient été conservés pour devenir aujourd'hui des témoignages historiques complexes, d'une valeur inestimable? La réponse trouve son point d'ancrage dans la confrontation du concept d'archive cinématographique (le conservation du film) avec les practiques d'acquisition et de diffusion. Elle conduit à retracer l'evolution du discour institutionnel et des grandes tendances culturelles, depuis la naissance du film jusqu'a la création de la Cinémathèque, pour ensuite examiner les liens qui existent entre cette institution et les fondements même de la culture cinématographique, c'est-à-dire l'amour de l'art, du savoir et d'une certaine utopie. L'analyse porte ensuite sur la convergence entre les intérêts publics and prives, nationaux and internationaux, qui ont influencés le cadre institutionnel de la Cinémathèque et les debats qui ont entourés sa création. Bien que la Cinémathèque soit logée dans un musée d'art, la motivation à archiver les films s'associe plutot à l'urgence de sauvegarder les traces d'un passé historique, qu'à la reconnaissance d'une forme d'expression artistique jusqu'alors négligée. La these examine en dernier lieu le contenu des premières représentations de la Cinémathèque, la diffusion des programmes et leur réception par le grand public. Les politiques d'acquisition et de diffusion de la Cinémathèque, de par leur envergure et de par la nouveauté d'un tel effort, firent de la Cinémathèque plus qu'une simple réflection de la conception du film comme forme d'expression unique et particulierement modern, témoin d'une renaissance esthétique, de l'essort technologiqe et commercial, baignant dans la propagande et le domaine populaire. La Cinémathèque devint aussi un intervenant dans le debat sur la nature du cinéma, créant à la fois un espace institutional pouvant accommoder le cinéma en tant que medium culturel ambigu et un espace ou pouvait s'élaborer le project de comprendre ce medium.

For Daniel Wasson,
whose cinematic personality and
archival impulses continue to bewitch,
befuddle and inspire.

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This dissertation has been fuelled by two very personal fascinations, one for images and the other for archives. In the process of shaping these fascinations into legitimate academic pursuits, I have benefited from the reasoned guidance of many faculty members, colleagues and friends. Of course, serendipity has also reared its wondrous head. I must first, therefore, thank George Szanto and Scott MacKenzie. Were it not for Scott's incessant invitations to his class screenings, I might never have stumbled upon the short film that fused my interests and catalysed my choice of this subject matter. Moreover, his informed criticism, dialogue and debate, combined with his precious sarcasm and ritualised cheerleading, have supplied some of this project's basic building blocks. He is an exemplary colleague and a cherished friend. Without George's rehearsal of horror upon finding that a bibliography for a paper submitted to him on the subject of 1950s television contained no entry dating before 1989, I may not have been inclined to dig as far back into the historical record as I have. Old things matter! Further, George's munificent and avuncular disposition, as well as his firm commitment to seeing beyond the hermetic aspects of the academic world, have been a beacon throughout.

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Alan McKee, and to Carfax Publishing, who allowed me to reprint, in substantially revised form, parts of an article that first appeared in the journal's pages.[1]

Importantly, Ramona Whitaker has inspired awe with her generous and diligent editorial efforts. Ramona bravely ventured to share with me the joys of felicitous prose and expressive clarity. I can only hope that the following tempts her approval.

Daniel and Carole Wasson, Janina Wurzer, Ken and Margo Oborne—a most unlikely grouping of parental figures—have collectively reminded me that even adult scholars can benefit from a little childish play and a lot of familial generosity. As a final and lasting acknowledgement, completing this project would have been unthinkably more difficult if it had not been for Justin Oborne, who knowingly and courageously accepted the challenge of dealing with it (and with me) on a daily basis. His calm, patience and enduring optimism have lent perspective and wonder to this process, and to life in general.

[1] This article was published as "What was Old is New Again," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 12.3 1998 (Carfax Publishing, PO Box 25, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX14 3UE, United Kingdom).

Dear, Dead Dumbshow

I gaze at the haunted screen of
The Museum of Modern Art
And Memories cruelly keen of
Old raptures invade my heart

The Ghostly drama flickers
With wavering imagery
And, the young spectator snickers
Snickers of you and me

He has sneered to see Lou Tellegen,
He has threatened the loss of breath
When Sarah Bernhardt fell again
To an amply cushioned death

For him the divinest Sarah
Has vainly revealed her pain;
The bosom of Theda Bara
Has heaved for him again

He does not attempt to smother
The critical thoughts that come
"Really! Father and Mother!
You were a little dumb....

- Morris Bishop, *The New Yorker* (February 29, 1936)

I. Introduction

Unpacking A Film Collection

> I am unpacking my library. Yes, I am. The books are not yet on the shelves, not yet touched by the mild boredom of order. I cannot march up and down their ranks to pass them in review before a friendly audience. You need not fear any of that. Instead, I must ask you to join me in the disorder of crates that have been wrenched open, the air saturated with the dust of wood, the floor covered with torn paper, to join me among piles of volumes that are seeing daylight again after two years of darkness, so that you may be ready to share with me a bit of the mood—it is certainly not an elegiac mood but, rather, one of anticipation—which these books arouse in a genuine collector. For such a man is speaking to you, and on closer scrutiny he proves to be speaking only about himself.
>
> Walter Benjamin[1]

In 1935, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, announced formation of the Film Library, a department tasked with saving and exhibiting films that had been lost to public view. The proposal struck many of its contemporaries as novel and, at times, odd. Why see old films? What was a film museum? What did old films have to do with art? As ephemeral and popular amusements the vast majority of commercial films had disappeared quickly into ill-kept studio vaults, were recycled for their material-chemical components or were simply dumped into the ocean.[2] Inflammability and deterioration further threatened film's permanency. Moreover, no public institution had been charged with saving films whether as examples of popular amusement, aesthetic achievement or as a collection of historic moments presumably immortalised by film: presidential

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[1] "Unpacking My Library," [orig. 1931] trans. Harry Zohn, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) 59-67.

[2] During this period, the recent shift to synchronised sound had spurred an industry built up around recycling unmarketable silent films. For an excellent overview of the various industrial, legal, material and practical reasons that silent films disappeared see David Pierce, "The Legion of the Condemned - Why American Silent Films Perished," *Film History* 9 (1997): 5-22.

inaugurations, public ceremonies and moments of human accomplishment. Despite the profound influence film had exercised on conceptions of time, space, knowledge and entertainment, most films could not be seen only a year after their initial release. Even as a small group of cinephiles and writers lamented that the material traces of film's history—films, production and publicity materials, program notes—were in jeopardy of being forever lost, film's lasting value as an object of historical significance was not generally accepted. Film archival ideas had persisted from the inception of the medium, nevertheless, the resources required to assemble and maintain a comprehensive record of films and related materials had simply not been made available.

With the founding of the Film Library this dearth of resources was remedied; the Rockefeller Foundation, a prominent philanthropy, provided the long-absent funds required to design and build a film archive. With a basic infrastructure in place, library staff began hunting for films in basements, attics, junk shops, scrap firms and the poorly maintained vaults of production companies extant and defunct. A vast range of films was collected: old and new, popular and eclectic, American and European. The Film Library became an archive assembled from film history's sprawled and scattered remains. In Benjamin's words, the crates were wrenched open, dust was cleared from the air and torn paper was sorted through. Films found new light; the anticipation and anxiety of the collector permeated the scene.

This dissertation is rooted in an apparently simple question: How was it that these curious, spectacular, shameful, fantastical, contested, compelling, ephemeral images came to be thought of and treated as precious objects—collected, saved and essential for building a historical record for the future? It provides, therefore, a cultural history of the

first North American archive mandated specifically to save films for the sake of saving a record of film's unique participation in a wide range of phenomena: aesthetic, sociological, psychological, political, national and international. It traces ideas and practices that underlie the relationship between saving and seeing, collecting and exhibiting films. Concentrating on institutional discourses and highlighting broader intellectual and cultural trends, this dissertation addresses the film archive, in general, and MoMA's Film Library, in particular, as a reflection of and response to longstanding undercurrents in film culture. It suggests that ideas about the film archive and film itself are intimately intertwined. It demonstrates that the conceptual film archive has, from its earliest formulations, been closely related to concerns about the nature of visual information and to the impulse to design a visible past for a future eager to see. By invoking the ideas and rhetoric of visual plenitude—seeing anything, anytime, anywhere—the film archive has also served as a comfortable home for the utopian impulses long attached to films themselves. Situated within a museum of modern art, yet determined to enact a broad acquisition policy, the Film Library further coloured the conceptual archive by navigating seemingly irreconcilable points on a broad cultural map. It implicitly and explicitly reconfigured relationships between high and low cultural forms, art and capitalism, the human and the machine, the visible and the invisible. In short, this dissertation argues that the Film Library was a complex and quintessentially modern institution

The history of the film archive is also awash in basic material questions: By what means would old films be saved and seen? This dissertation demonstrates that the archive was linked to important film cultural issues—access, distribution and exhibition—which

changed considerably during the cinema's first 40-years. More specifically, the Film Library built upon the idea that films should be seen outside of theatrical venues by audiences eager to shape them to various ends, fostering discourses about specialised screenings, critical publics and film study. The acquisition of films was inextricably linked to their exhibition; the library consequently sought to feed the expanding nontheatrical exhibition circuit. The challenges were numerous. Films were required. Projectors had to be supplied. Legal agreements defining what might constitute a non-commercial screening needed to be struck. Indeed, the early years of the Film Library highlight the intense struggle for resources engaged in by contemporary noncommercial film groups generally. The library's own quest for these resources rendered its project, and the discourses generated by it, particularly beholden to the interests of dramatically different constituents. The publicly mandated film archive would be characterised largely by compromise.

This dissertation posits that the film archive is a set of ideas and practices in which film's value has been reflected, configured and reconfigured over time. It shows that despite the library's institutional home within a museum of art, film's archival value was associated less with an art that had been neglected and more with a history that had been lost. The complex concept of film's historical value became the stage upon which film's status as an archival object was negotiated; film art became a broad rhetorical category, changing considerably across and within different contexts. During—and sometimes despite—deliberations on film's value, resources were gathered and an archive was built. Nontheatrical exhibition was catalysed and a series of discourses regarding the historical status of an increasingly complex visual form became more

evident. The Film Library, therefore, marks an important and telling intervention into the conditions under which film's value unfolded, institutionally embodying the intellectual and material possibility of extending debates about this value in time and space through the condensed, concentrated space of the archive. Equally important is the way in which this possibility was shaped and constrained by contemporary interests—public and private—that converged upon the archival site. The Film Library provides one example of how these interests have come to bear on discourses and practices that address the question of film as an object of broad historical and cultural concern.

While researching this dissertation, an unfortunate lack of critical literature on film archives and their important role in film culture became evident. Several informative survey histories have been written on particular archives but these are largely descriptive overviews of institutional operations or animating personalities.[3] A few essays have been written on the early years of the Film Library itself, however, collectively these demonstrate little attention to the larger yet socio-historically specific convergence of factors that effected the very conditions in which films came to be saved at all. The institution is often treated as an isolated and unidirectional event rather than a complex cultural site wherein film's value was discussed, contested and negotiated.[4]

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[3] See Penelope Houston, *Keepers of the Frame: The Film Archives* (London: British Film Institute, 1994); Georges Langlois and Glenn Myrent, *Henri Langlois: First Citizen of Cinema*, trans. Lisa Nesselson (New York: Twayne, 1995); and Anthony Slide, *Nitrate Won't Wait: A History of Film Preservation in the United States* (Jefferson, N.C.: MacFarland, 1992).

[4] See Mary Lea Bandy, ""Nothing Sacred": Jock Whitney Snares Antiques for Museum," *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: Continuity and Change*, vol. 5, Studies in Modern Art (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1995) 75-103; and Peter Capatano, "Creating 'Reel' Value: The Establishment of MoMA's Film Library, 1935-37," *Film & History* 24.3-4 (1994): 28-46. Bill Mikulak provides a thoughtful account of the Film Library's early inclusion of animated films. He does not, unfortunately, address himself to the larger questions mentioned above in any length. See "Mickey meets Mondrian: Cartoons Enter the Museum of Modern Art," *Cinema Journal* 36.3 (1997): 56-71.

Other problems inevitably arose while conceptualising this project. The Film Library was not a library, museum or archive in any established sense of these terms. At this point in American history, film had not benefited from the civic institutions that had formed around other cultural objects. Moreover, the film object was significantly different from the book, the *objet-d'art*, or the typical archival document which preceded it. Films could not be perused on shelves or accessed at will. They could not be mounted on walls or subsumed by elaborately choreographed displays. Films were not deemed worthy of a sanctified repository, culled from private holdings and preserved mysteriously for an unknown date with posterity. Crucially, the business of film and the unique qualities of the medium shaped a system of legal rights—exhibition rights, in particular—that were more restrictive and easier to enforce than were similar rights attached to reading books or viewing paintings. In other words, the film object was like no other cultural object and this partly explains why the Film Library was like no other institution. By collecting, lending and exhibiting films and by making such films and film-related resources available for study, the Film Library inflected old films with some distinctly modern ideas.

The Film Library was a privately endowed institution with an ostensibly public mandate that required support from largely irreconcilable interests for its very survival. Many industry members were suspicious of "cultural" film projects. Populists scowled at the highbrow inflections of a "film museum." Museum trustees expressed open distaste for film's commercial taint. The library had few safe places to turn and little institutional authority or cultural capital upon which it could rest. Many of the resources that are commonplace today had yet to be procured. This includes the very basic legal definition

of the educational use of commercial films, thus allowing certain kinds of exhibition relief from standard mass exhibition fees. The Film Library did not benefit from a supporting circuit of film study programs, film festivals, previously extant archives or publicly funded agencies that might have otherwise collaborated in film artistic or historical endeavours. These core "art cinema" institutions did not emerge in force until well after the war.[5] The impact of their absence on the Film Library was further complicated by the wide range of practices that claimed or were attributed with the title "film art," as well as by contemporary debates—spurred by modernism and modernity—about the nature of what "art" was at all. Moreover, the very public and popular status of the film medium did not expedite its cozy acceptance by the privileged art world. Collecting and exhibiting a wide range of film types within an art museum in the 1930s, the Film Library does not readily fit into established assumptions about authoritative institutions, ordained museological spaces or transparently democratic projects.

Because of the library's complex status during these early years and the limited nature of previously existing literature on film archival questions, the scope of this dissertation has been necessarily limited. It begins with an investigation of the longstanding relationship between ideas about the cinema and the archive, considering interventions into seeing and saving films that preceded those of the Film Library by identifying key discourses and cultural trends. It then examines the more specific

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[5] Jan Chrisopher Horak has outlined these conditions succinctly in "The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919-1945," *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde. 1919-1945*, ed. Jan Christopher Horak (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995) 14-66. Janet Staiger has identified the post war period as important for the crystallisation of key film art institutions, in particular, repertory or art cinemas, see "With the Compliments of the Auteur: Art Cinema and the Complexities of its Reading Strategies," *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 178-195.

intellectual and film cultural trends that directly informed the integration of film by a modern art museum and that foreshadowed the project to make more films available outside of dominant commercial systems. The dissertation then turns to the Film Library itself, considering the shape it took and the discourses in which it was implicated. The Film Library's first circulating programs are outlined and their reception examined in order to assess the library's larger public significance.

Discussion of the Film Library is confined primarily to its first four years, 1935-1939. After this period, the library became a more accepted element of museum operations; it was finally granted both office space and a theatre of its own within the museum's main building. Concurrently, war broke out in Europe and the Film Library became implicated in dramatically different kinds of activities, taking government contracts, reviewing seized propaganda, opening its resources to Hollywood filmmakers who had been drafted, and working to sponsor European refugees under the guise of film research projects. Importantly, many of the records of these activities are only now being made available for scholarly use. These and the many other Film Library activities that followed provide the seeds for a much different but no less important inquiry. This project concentrates on the library's formative years in the attempt to exhume its early history and to consider the archive-in-formation, a period during which it had to fight especially hard to gain acceptance from trustees, industry members and the general public alike. The discourses generated by the library during these early years provide crucial insights into the ways in which their archival project was legitimated and therefore into the various interests which came to bear on the process of constructing historical discourses through film and the archive.

While there is little pre-existing literature from which this project draws directly, it is clearly indebted to ongoing and sizeable scholarly debates. Recognising the importance of visual technologies for exploring modern institutions, in particular, and modernity, in general, marks an important development in philosophy, film and cultural studies.[6] This work has been immeasurably aided by the groundbreaking interventions of thinkers as wide-ranging as Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas, and Raymond Williams.[7] Consideration of the Film Library has been indirectly informed by the ideas and critical practices evolving out of the debates generated by their ideas.[8] What kinds of objects are made visible or not? How have cultural forms participated in larger socio-political processes? What are the interests guiding these processes? What are their functions? How have concepts of the public been reconfigured by the presence of the cinema and its various discursive epi-phenomena? While I have chosen to concentrate on the diverse and often contradictory discourses and practices through which the archive and the Film

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[6] See for example Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz, eds. *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995); David Michael Levin, ed., *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); and Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990).

[7] Crucial texts include: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (London: Allen Lane, 1977); and *The Order of Things* (London: Tavistock, 1970); Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991); and Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1965).

[8] One of the most prominent and challenging examples of Foucault's influence can be found in Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (Routledge: New York, 1995). Habermas has been important for generating models that attempt to accommodate the many ways in which the cinema has been implicated in various public formations. A noteworthy example of this is Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991). Equally important is the critique of Habermas, which has itself unfurled important amendments to concepts of the public. See Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the

Library developed, much work remains to be done on how film archives have and have not contributed to particular configurations of knowledge and to the fortification and contestation of dominant interests.[9]

By considering the archive a germane site upon which many interests collided, interacted and were resolved, this dissertation demonstrates that in the 1930s film was neither a simple nor an uncontested object. It was used variously to criticise, to explore, to celebrate and to think about the nature of representation, the rise of the culture industries and even the conditions of modernity itself. As Miriam Hansen has written,

> the cinema was...the single most expansive discursive horizon in which the effects of modernity were reflected, rejected or denied, transmuted or negotiated. It was both part and prominent symptom of the crisis as which modernity was perceived, and at the same time it evolved into a social discourse in which a wide variety of groups sought to come to terms with the traumatic impact of modernization. This reflexive dimension of cinema, its dimension of *publicness*, was recognized by intellectuals early on, whether they celebrated the cinema's emancipatory potential or, in alliance with the forces of censorship and reform, sought to contain and control it, adapting the cinema to the standards of high culture and the restoration of the bourgeois public sphere.[10]

For Hansen, the cinema is both a real and imagined space whereupon disparate social forces have acted and through which diverse discourses have been generated. The cinema is an *effect* of modernity that also came to provide a *method* by which its, and other effects, were made sense of, negotiated with and protested against. The film archive is an

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Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992) 109-142.

[9] The recent outright purchase and accumulation of image archives by large multi-national media conglomerates provides a suggestive and contemporary place to begin pursuing such questions. For a useful overview of this see Elliot Forbes and David Pierce, "Who Owns the Movies?," *Film Comment* November/December (1994): 43-50.

[10] Miriam Bratu Hansen, "America, Paris, the Alps: Kracauer (and Benjamin) on Cinema and Modernity," *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, eds. Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 365-366.

institution inextricably linked to circulating conceptions pertaining to the value of films themselves. Thus, if film can be considered an expansive discursive horizon, then the film archive might be thought of as a site on this horizon. In other words, I contend that the film archive is a figurative and actual place upon which to explore one manifestation of films' *publicness*, the reflexive quality of film as both a symptom of, and negotiation with, modern ideas about visual history. The film archive is a shared public site—real and imagined—which embodies the tensions and complexities of film and its related phenomena. The archive is also an actual place through which specific forces have acted to shape the cinema and the role it plays in cultural debate.

This dissertation is primarily a historical inquiry. It has, consequently, been influenced by work in film and cultural studies that has recently shifted to accommodate the rise of historiographic concerns—inquiry into the assumptions and methods of historical practice itself. This has resulted in a move away from historical models that prioritise a canon of great films and filmmakers, and that rely on teleological meta-narratives about film's development as a set of aesthetic, corporate or popular practices. It also marks a move away from what has come to be seen in film and cultural studies as an over-dependence on theoretical models of audiences and spectators which tend to overlook the material, historical, gender and class-based specificities which have underlain the impact and experience of cinematic phenomena. One implication of this methodological shift has been greater attention to extra-theatrical and non-feature film activities, non-studio based film organisations and institutions, and socio-historically specific—at times local—audiences.[11]

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[11] For examples of this, see Mary Carbine, "'The Finest Outside the Loop': Motion Picture Exhibition in Chicago's Black Metropolis, 1905-1928," *Camera Obscura* 23 (1990): 8-41; Jan-

The film archive has played a double role in this historiographic turn. Not only have archives supplied crucial resources for new research, they have become of interest unto themselves. As scholars and archivists have established greater cooperation and more mutual benefit between their respective communities, a small body of literature has been generated, yielding some basic introductions to the varied ways in which films have survived and circulated through archives and outside of the image industries.[12] Unfortunately, most of this work has focussed on contemporary archival issues and tends to be suggestive rather than comprehensive, primarily addressing ways in which more access to materials can be gained in the face of the numerous barriers to this access.[13] Contributing to this body of work, the following investigates a particular and historically situated archive, lending insight into how the American film archive came to exist at all and how its activities were informed by the broader conditions in which it operated. The archive is treated as a productive site, where the cinema was made meaningful by new mandates and old films.

Christopher Horak, ed., *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919 - 1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995); Shelley Stamp Lindsey, "'Is Any Girl Safe?' Female Spectators at the White Slave Films," *Screen* 37.1 (1996): 1-15; Diane Waldman, "'Toward a Harmony of Interests': Rockefeller, the YMCA and the Company Movie Theater," *Wide Angle* 8.1 (1986): 41-51; and Patricia R. Zimmerman, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). A key text marking the rise of general interest in methods of historical inquiry is Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).

[12] See: Paolo Cherchi Usai, "Film Preservation and Film Scholarship," *Film History* 7 (1995): 243-244; William Uricchio, "Archives and Absences," *Film History* 7 (1995): 256-263; and the special issue of *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* entitled, "American Film and Television Archives,"16.1. (1996). See also the special issue of the *Stanford Humanities Review* entitled, "Inside the Cinema Archive: Practice, Theory, Canon," (forthcoming 1999).

[13] A clear exception to this claim is the work of David Pierce, cited above. While his writing does not specifically address any particular archive, he has researched related issues, including the multi-faceted reasons for the disappearance of so many silent films. See David Pierce, "The Legion of the Condemned," 5-22.

Defining Terms

Use of the term "culture" requires caution as it has been employed to designate a wide variety of concepts and phenomena. Its two most common applications have been succinctly identified by Raymond Williams: (1) naming the general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development which is often attached to implicit or explicit assumptions about the best and most noteworthy products of this development; and (2) invoking—in the anthropological sense—"a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group."[14] This dissertation draws on both definitions of this term and, as such, its varied use in specific instances is clarified. Importantly, the term "film culture" is intended to draw on the anthropological definition of culture outlined above. It identifies the ideas and practices that have coalesced into recognisable institutional, visual or cultural formations which directly or indirectly involve the production, distribution, exhibition, collection and criticism of films. This includes the material, conceptual and ideological circuits in which films participated: clubs, societies, journals, and nontheatrical exhibition sites. Significantly, this methodological maneuver brings into focus the range of film-related activities which has persisted over time, moving away from a longstanding tendency in film studies to concentrate on particular and often canonised films or filmmakers themselves. Rather than placing film at the centre of analysis, attention is placed *within* the socio-historically specific processes in which films have been implicated.

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[14] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Fontana/Croom Helm, Glasgow, 1976) 80.

This dissertation treats "film art," therefore, as a discursive and institutional category, historically situated and informed by the numerous debates in which it was embroiled. It acknowledges the variety of institutions and practices that emerged during this period which made claims on "film art," rendering any general definition of the concept difficult due to its diverse invocation and amorphous shape. Importantly, this dissertation is neither a direct examination of the kinds of "art" films collected by the Film Library nor an overview of contemporary theories of film art that may or may not have affected its choices. Further, it does not attempt a definition of what aesthetic properties should or should not constitute a work of film art. While the Film Library is, indeed, an important site for considering what film art was at this historical moment, its rhetorical and practical emphasis rested largely on its archival rather than its art-museological capacities. That is, while assumptions about film art informed MoMA's efforts to collect films, the broad definition of film art that was reflected in its archival and exhibition practices cannot be reduced simply to one clear or consistent definition. This dissertation demonstrates that partly because the very idea of film art was a particularly problematic one, the rhetoric of recovering a lost history became the preferred and powerful platform from which the Film Library established itself as a viable and valuable site.

Navigating the Library

The dissertation begins by tracing the history of discourses and institutions that preceded MoMA's Film Library, lending insight into how ideas about vision have interfaced with the technological, material and ideological configurations attached to film. More specifically, chapter 1 considers the close relationship between the film

archive and the cinematic medium itself, highlighting how each has informed the other. Ideas about storing and transmitting pictures of *everything* have accompanied film from its inception—as a method for recording daily life, faraway objects and ceremonial events. With uncanny likeness, films depicted the world-in-motion. Discourses about cinematic qualities proliferated as film quickly became an international medium; cameras ventured to parts unknown and revealed the world in an unprecedented manner. Space and time were seemingly compressed not only because images traveled great distances at considerable speeds, but also because cinematic texts themselves connoted this compression. Seeing things across spatial and temporal boundaries was made possible by the cinema in new and spectacular ways. Discourses about film archives drew on these ideas; they invoked a newly visualised world while adding layers of time and space within the confines of an actual, singular place.

As film's value diversified, so too did the archive's mandate. While the understanding of film as an uncanny record of social phenomena persisted, its value also came to be associated with its more properly artistic potential as well as with its ability to embody abstract phenomena such as individual and national psychology, popular tastes and "sensed realities." Films became integral elements in theories about new forms of knowledge. Its historical value consequently expanded to include the idea that the material traces of film's distinct and increasingly complex role in modern life should be saved as records of its distinct and valuable participation in modern phenomena. Moreover, the impulse to save films was commonly burdened with claims that these records were essential for the future: the past should be saved today, so that it can be known tomorrow. This chapter explores the compelling and, at times, utopian idea of the

film archive, seeking to place this idea within broader discourses about film and the systems of value in which it was implicated: economic, social, historical, popular, intellectual and aesthetic. It considers how the idea of the archive reflected broader shifts in the conception of film's value and reflects on what kind of historical object film was consequently understood to be. Importantly, as archival discourses evolved, they came to include both an imagined visual plenitude of the future and a lost visual plenitude of the past. It was these discourses that the Film Library would consciously invoke in its attempts to win resources and support for its project.

The film archive was more than a powerful and persistent idea; it was also a diverse set of practices. When MoMA initiated its film archival activities, the department under which these activities were housed was not given the title "Archive" but rather adopted the title "Film Library," purposefully connoting access, study and educational utility. Indeed, such concepts have a formative relationship to longstanding issues in film culture, particularly those addressing the possibilities of nontheatrical exhibition and questions about the use of cinematic knowledge. Chapter 2 explores the proliferation of film libraries throughout the 1920s and 1930s, paying special attention to the importance of the 16mm gauge for increasing the portability of films and film equipment generally. The feasibility of collecting, lending, renting, borrowing and exhibiting films outside of commercial cinemas increased. Consequently, a nontheatrical film circuit was catalysed that facilitated exhibition in basements, churches, union halls, schools, social clubs and living rooms. Films were less tied to theatres and more integrated into a variety of public and private spaces.

Like film archives, film libraries often accompanied utopian discourses about a store of distinctly visual knowledge. Unlike film archives, film libraries were more directly involved in accessing and distributing this knowledge. After briefly discussing film's place in public (book) libraries, this chapter surveys discourses attached to the commercial, home and specialised film libraries that formed during this period. Many of these were implicated in the edifying principle that increased access to a visual world implied increased knowledge of the world in general. Additionally, this was a new kind of knowledge that was being made available. Moving images of the present and the past, from near and far, were accessible not only on commercial screens but also in the home and hall. To some, the film library was a whole new way of thinking through the cinema, as well as the library.

Other kinds of libraries also emerged which were less aligned with the rhetoric of visual knowledge and more with the practices of forwarding particular causes through specialised film exhibition. Such institutional forms were an essential component of early film cultural groups who worked outside the direct control of dominant, commercial film interests. The Amateur Cinema League, The Workers' Film and Photo League and smaller, less formed art groups depended on such collections of films to feed their growing nontheatrical exhibition circuits. The idea and function of the film library captured the imagination and the initiative of ideologically diverse groups, eager to mould the cinema in their image. Cinephiles, in particular, were drawn to the possibilities of seeing more kinds of films, again and again; the idea of repertory and film study had crystallised and was often linked to the very future of cinema itself.

By examining the film libraries extant during this period, this chapter provides insight into nontheatrical film activities that preceded and informed those of MoMA's Film Library. Nontheatrical film exhibition had become increasingly common, creating a technological infrastructure that facilitated Film Library screenings. Films had also become more commonly associated with everyday, worldly and historical knowledge. MoMA's Film Library took this one step further by claiming publicly, and with institutional authority, that not only did films possess knowledge of far away places and peoples, they also possessed lessons about distinctly cinematic phenomena: the formal and functional capacities of the medium itself. Importantly, examining contemporaneous film libraries highlights a common problem of film cultural groups during this period: gaining access to films they wanted to see. Film libraries mark a material and discursive trace of this problem and the persistent attempts to resolve it.

The immediate intellectual and institutional formations out of which the Film Library was born are also important for understanding film's archival status during this period. Chapter 3 considers how film came to find a place in an American museum of modern art. It outlines the context in which MoMA was established, the internal disputes in which it was embroiled and the specific debates over film and its relationship to art that ensued. Film's relationship to the broader modernist movement will also be examined. The museum's first director, Alfred Barr, links these various debates. How was it that Marlene and Manet, the Marx Brothers and Monet, would come to be housed within the same institution?

MoMA was an aesthetically progressive museum for the time, collecting then unusual art emanating from European modernist art circles. It orchestrated wide-ranging

collection and exhibition practices, thriving on the debate their choices engendered. However, many of MoMA's trustees resisted including films in their museum, deeming the cinema unworthy of serious deliberations. Their scepticism persisted, despite film's established role in celebrated modernist experimentation. Its specifically cinematic properties as well as its popular forms had fuelled film's use by many artists. Indeed, conventions from these various modes of film practice—European modernist and American populist—had come to inform the other. One question remained: could a museological project be built to accommodate film? What would this imply?

The debate about film and art at MoMA was a small manifestation of much larger cultural trends. Films, in general, and American films, in particular, were not only disparaged by a cultural elite because of their association with popular and therefore crass entertainment, they were also conscripted into a more sweeping Marxist critique of the culture industries. Hollywood films, it was claimed, made the very conditions of critical art impossible. Their omnipresent formulaic tripe dissolved important categories of judgement and taste. Thus, films became key symptoms for those who feared imminent social and high-cultural decay. Radical Marxists and bourgeois aesthetes joined each other in the bed of cultural conservatism.

This chapter invokes the important debates then emerging about film as a mass medium and identifies some of the interests that informed its conceptualisation as a popular art, a high art and a commodity. These debates provide one aspect of the intellectual context in which film's archival value was negotiated. Some of the key theorists of the Frankfurt School are discussed in order to lend specific intellectual context to the contemporary debates about the relationships between film, the film

industry and art. Moreover, the Frankfurt School's pessimism—embodied by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno—and its optimism—embodied by Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin—provide a particular resonance with the Film Library itself. Ideas utopian and dystopian were particularly present in the Frankfurt School debates and resonate at the everyday level of the archive. This is evident not only in the dystopian/utopian tension between what had been lost and what might be found, but more generally in the ambivalence over what kind of object film was and would continue to become. Films could be collected as emblems of distaste and decay as surely as they could be cherished as markers of cinematic genius or unprecedented popularity. Collectively, these movements mark longstanding attempts to wrestle with the role of film in critical cultural debates and to consider the intricate relationship between modernity, visual knowledge and the cinema.

Nowhere, perhaps, is the uncertainty about film's manifold forms more clear than in the broad acquisition policy adopted by the Film Library upon initiation of its project. By 1935, the idea of a film department had transformed from an exclusive cine salon to a sprawling and inclusive film archive, exhibition program and study centre—accommodating both elitist attacks on popular film and populist attacks on "film art." Chapter 4 approaches the question of ambivalence, cinephilia and film institutions of the period by using the figure of Iris Barry to trace international trends in film culture which place the Film Library's activities in broader perspective. These questions are important as they conjoin utopian ideas about film, the problems of gaining access to films and the active, international film culture of the period.

Iris Barry was the Film Library's first curator. Before arriving in New York, she worked as a film critic and co-founder of the first anglo film society in London, founded in 1925. The Film Society provided important lessons to those interested in seeing films outside of commercial contexts as they needed to innovate methods by which films might be available at all. The means of acquiring, distributing and exhibiting films outside of commercial theatres were crucial for developing a diversified film culture. Importantly, the film circuits that ensued were informed by a marked internationalism that yielded both a progressive aesthetic outlook and a keen awareness of the specifically nationalist contributions to this. Issues indigenous to British film culture include: the beleaguered state of the domestic industry, an increasing objection to censorship and the emerging interest of private citizens seeking to infuse film with their civic interventions. The Film Library's internationalism and the material and ideological implications of this echoed that of the Film Society's. Importantly, many of these early film cultural formations were similarly initiated by private citizens and resources, separate from explicitly commercial or state interests, marking the clear use of film as an object and a medium through which concerns about the social, political and aesthetic world might be negotiated and reconfigured. Iris Barry was a figure linking these various trends; she also exemplifies one manner in which cinephilia manifested itself across unevenly supported film institutions of the period.

Iris Barry's film writing will be discussed in order to characterise aspects of the critical milieu in which film cultural shifts were taking place. Not only did organisations such as the Film Society inform the intellectual and institutional conditions in which the Film Library grew, they were also both largely designed by a nascent, film community

that had crystallised through shared scepticism of the commercial interests ascendant in film culture. These concerns created a concomitant enthusiasm for the possibility such institutions held for exploring film form and function. The Film Library became an important manifestation of these concerns, as was Barry's career.

The Film Library was never wholly accepted by its parent institution. Its struggle for resources was constant and its mandate broad; this made it particularly beholden to a wide variety of interests. Chapters 5 and 6 explore the activities undertaken by the Film Library, considering how concepts of film art and film history were interwoven in efforts to gain legitimacy for their project. The Film Library quickly became a dynamic institution—seeking to archive films, to foster film study and to exhibit these films to an interested public. American feature films were sought after as eagerly as European avant garde experiments. As such, the constituency to which the library staff needed to appeal diversified. In addition to assuaging conservative museum trustees, the Film Library's staff also needed to appeal to studio executives as well as international filmmakers controlling copy and exhibition rights. The general public proved equally important. Despite their institutional home within a museum of art, "film art" was a term invoked in a variety of irreconcilable ways in the process of legitimating their activities. Often, an emphasis was placed on the vast body of films that had been lost to view rather than on reified or ritualised conceptions of film art. Chapter 5 considers the models of film's value forwarded by library staff to museum trustees and industry members, and discusses how these various forms of value came to be housed within the discursive and institutional space of the archive.

The archive-as-repository was largely an imagined or unknowable space to the general public. Similarly specialised was the emerging body of film scholarship that was facilitated by library resources. Chapter 6, therefore, turns to the more broadly public functions of the Film Library, considering its early exhibition programs and their reception in the popular press. It examines how the library's first circulating exhibitions were presented and received by the public, and speculates on what this suggests about contemporary popular conceptions of film's aesthetic and historical value.

This chapter contends that the library's exhibition practices are an under-examined aspect both of the Film Library's activities and their place in the history of alternative film exhibition. Situating these activities within the specialised exhibition practices underway during this period—film societies, little theatres and other film cultural groups— demonstrates that interest in old films was an important element of emerging film critical groups operating from the mid-1920s onward. Moreover, examining articles in the popular press reveals that what was most striking about archival screenings to audiences of the period was less the novelty or sanctity of film art and more the uncanny visual experience of seeing old films. Further, explaining the value of the archive and its screenings in the popular press often drew on rhetoric of nostalgia, popular memory, American heritage and international influence. Film's popular historical value was linked less to the development of critical cultural activities and more to innocent memories of a period long passed.

This dissertation seeks to unpack a collection of films, heeding both the anxiety and excitement this entails. It shows that the process of sorting, shelving and labeling them is conceptually complex, historically persistent and materially demanding.

II. Chapter 1

Complicating Utopias: Thinking Through the Film Archive, 1894-1945

> A Lighthouse of the Past, a university of universities, a fountain of all revealed knowledge inculcated through a medium understood of all men, a Mecca for the pilgrims of peace and progress from all corners of the earth, forever adapting itself to the growing needs of mankind for enlightenment, sending forth, year after year, its polyglot graduates to carry its teachings, warnings, promises to every tribe and nation on the planet—is it not a consummation to be devoutly wished, a dream worth every sacrifice to being within the purview of reality?
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> -Edward Van Zile, 1923[1]

> We are perfecting a medium to be used as long as Chinese ideographs have been. It will no doubt, like the Chinese language, record in the end massive and classical treatises, imperial chronicles, law-codes, traditions, and religious admonitions. All this by the *motion pictures* as a recording instrument, not necessarily the *photoplay*, a much more limited thing, a form of art.
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> -Vachel Lindsay, 1915[2]

The early history of the American film archive is replete with religious visions of utter plenitude, combining ideas about photorealism with institutional models of Alexandrian proportion. Both the past and the future were to be served by this pairing—beneficiaries of the compelling, transparent and vital moving images the archive would contain. Moreover, the film archive, so it was said, would both gather and then carry its incontestable truths to the farthest reaches of the globe, binding humanity with glorious images. The utopian imaginings of both film and the film archive are inseparable and persistent, readily evident from cinema's earliest days.

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[1] Edward S. Van Zile, *That Marvel - The Movie: A Glance at its Reckless Past, Its Promising Present, and its Significant Future* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1923) 17-18.

[2] Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture* [orig. 1915] (New York: Liveright, 1970) 254-55.

Despite the common association of both film and the archive with the powerful ideals of universal knowledge and democratic form, the convergence of the ideas and resources necessary to realize a broad and publicly mandated film archive would not emerge until forty years after Lumières' debut. This is due, in part, to film's place within a wider social and cultural economy, one which worked against the construction of this imagined space. Who would pay for it? What utility would it serve? What kinds of films were worthy of such an institution? Interests public and private have struggled to control, regulate or absent themselves from film's economic and ideological powers. The film archive could never be extricated from this struggle, it is both idea and practice, beholden to and reflective of available material, legal and intellectual resources. Indeed, even the prehistory of the American film archive is a compelling configuration of such ideas and practices, reflecting the expansion of film form and its increasingly complex role as cultural image, object and commodity.

This chapter will focus on the discourses generated in the first half of the cinema's life about the archive—a largely nonexistent archive—whose image persists to this day. It will not address actual archival processes, films lost or found. From a magical recording device to a complex cultural object embodying or reflecting a range of phenomena (national, aesthetic, industrial, political, popular, psychological), film was eventually embraced as a multifaceted historical object, open to debate about the kind of knowledge it might impart. Its value as an historical object was, in part, fuelled by ideas about storage of, and access to, the images held within its frames. The drama of this debate has been played out on the stage of the archive; its material remnants have become a crucial part of our collective visual history. The following will explore the early history

of *ideas* about the American film archive, considering how they reflect the cultural status of film as an object of historical concern and how they informed the early American archival movement of the 1930s.

The Skins of Lions

The idea that popular, mass-produced objects like films might be useful or relevant as records—that is, differently relevant from their more common and immediate projected forms—has been asserted by scattered, individual voices since the beginning of the cinema; their uncanny verisimilitude being one of the dominant tropes invoked in the process. Films provided incredibly accurate renderings of people, places and things. Nevertheless, the project to build archival institutions based on this phenomenon lacked the inspiration of the rhetoric that supported it. Outside of commercially driven studio and newsreel libraries, it is generally recognised that the first broadly mandated American organisation to save films was the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art, (MoMA) established in 1935, fuelled by the growing international recognition that film was a modern art. During this period, however, film was a particularly complex and contested art. Small emergent groups in film culture, including the staff of MoMA's Film Library, had broad, inclusive, working definitions of film art, embracing forms as seemingly disparate as social realism and surrealism, Hollywood features and Disney cartoons. Moreover, film was thought by some to be a quintessentially modern art, reflective of an innovative pairing of human expression and technology, catalysing explorations of form, space and time. Its popularity and position as a mass medium was seen, by some, as a virtue and, by others, as a vice, believing that films had nothing to do with art and everything to do with mass-production and commodification. Further, film

lacked the well-developed and authoritative institutions so instrumental in upholding the traditional arts: museums, galleries, universities, criticism, and collectors. Complicating this were the tremendous intellectual, aesthetic and financial resources devoted to the propagandic potential of film—a project well supported in the 1930s by state authorities in Italy, Germany, Canada, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and to a significantly lesser extent in the United States. Film was a powerful, ascendant idea sustained not only by the idea of malleable form but also by the idea of malleable minds. During this period "film art," a term used loosely, was an uncodified, and expansive concept, designating a wide range of film practices: aesthetic, popular, commercial and political.[3] It was also a term implicated in the fascism rising throughout Europe; the aesthetic ferment of the 1920s and early 1930s was either eliminated by or conscripted into various fascist causes. War was increasingly imminent; the film archival movement emerged within this context.

By the mid-1930s, the idea of a comprehensive record of motion pictures had captured the imagination of a small but growing international community of aesthetes, ideologues and scientists alike. Following from this, film archives were established in Berlin, Paris, London and New York. A brief survey of these archives reveals dramatically different conceptualizations of film and the role of the archive as an institution. The *Reichsfilmarchiv* was established according to Joseph Goebbels' principles of cinematic propaganda and state supremacy, having already expelled those films deemed "degenerate."[4] In London, the National Film Library operated under the

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[3] Film's relationship to ideas about modernity and to modern art generally will be discussed further as this dissertation develops. See in particular chapters 3 and 4.

[4] For more information about the *Reichsfilmarchiv* see Anthony Slide, *Nitrate Won't Wait: A History of Film Preservation in the United States* (Jefferson, N.C.: MacFarland, 1992) 22, 23.

aegis of the British Film Institute, a state-funded project formed by a tacit alliance between the civic and educational ideals of government and the concerns of industry to protect and further British interests.[5] Henri Langlois established a permanent home for the films he had been storing in the family bathtub at the *Cinémathèque Française*, an institution which had grown out of film art circles in Paris, but was initially committed to saving any film that could be saved.[6] These were the contemporaries of MoMA's Film Library.

Archives of the 1930s were granted ideologically diverse mandates. Nevertheless, one interest bound them together: a concern for recovering the scattered history of film. MoMA's Film Library and its contemporaries recognised that while film was becoming a more diversified visual form, its history and its appeal as an object of knowledge rest in one of the most basic cinematic characteristics: film's ability to accurately depict the physical world-in-motion. Early actuality films were saved along with the most recent experimental films as documents of both sociological and cinematic significance, marking the ferment of ideas and practices integral to early formulations of cinematic form and function. The ideas engendered by cinematic fidelity clearly owe a debt to those engendered by photographic realism.

Long before the cinema, the powerful idea of a photorealistic archive was being explored by early proponents of, and commentators on, photography. Its presence can be

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[5] For more information on The National Film Archive see Penelope Houston, *Keepers of the Frame:The Film Archives* (London: British Film Institute, 1994).

[6] Langlois reportedly bought film by the pound from contract companies which melted films down that had outworn their commercial welcome as entertainment and become more valuable for their component material-chemical parts. For more on Langlois and the *Cinémathèque Française* see Georges P. Langlois and Glenn Myrent, *Henri Langlois: First Citizen of Cinema*, trans. Lisa Nesselson (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1985).

seen from photography's earliest days. Photographs themselves have long been understood as uncanny archives: records of human behavior, gesture and sartorial convention, inventories of accomplishment in the fine arts of painting and architecture, detailed renderings of the natural world, and of human subjects themselves.[7] As such, film's capacity to serve as a record is significant for understanding film archives not only because of its relevance to the development of film practice but also for its contributions to the film archival idea itself.

One of the most well known and articulate advocates of the idea that photographs captured the essence of the objects they depicted was Oliver Wendell Holmes, an American physician, poet and humorist. Holmes termed photography the "mirror with a memory," suggesting that the photograph effectively divorced form from matter. In 1859, twenty years after the official announcement of photography's invention in France, Holmes wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly*:

> Matter in large masses must always be fixed and dear; form is cheap and transportable. We have got the fruit of creation now, and need not trouble ourselves with the core. Every conceivable object of Nature and Art will soon scale off its surface for us...The time will come when a man who wishes to see any object, natural or artificial, will go to the Imperial, National, or City Stereographic Library,[8] and call for its skin or form, as he would for a book at any common library. We do now distinctly propose

[7] One of the pioneers of photographic processes was William Henry Fox Talbot. He was an English mathematician, scientist and linguist whose poor sketching skills led him to pursue the possibility of a more efficient and accurate method of creating permanent records of the visible world. Inspired by the possibilities latent within the two-dimensional images cast within his *camera obscura*, Talbot succeeded in creating the first photographic method to make use of a negative process, thereby allowing numerous prints to be made. By 1843 he had published *The Pencil of Nature*, a quarto of nature prints likely to be the first photorealistic archive of the natural world. For Talbot's own version of his discovery see William Henry Fox Talbot, "A Brief Historical Sketch of the Invention of the Art," [orig. 1839] *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980) 27-36.

[8] The stereograph was a device that held two photographs in careful alignment creating the illusion of three-dimensionality.

> the creation of a comprehensive and systematic stereographic library, where all men can find the special forms they particularly desire to see as artists, or as scholars, or as mechanics, or in any other capacity.[9]

Holmes combined a powerful version of photorealist ideas with the civic ideal and function of a library, calling for a mythical space where all can be seen, for any purpose, by anyone. The form or "skin" of the natural or artistic object was considered by Holmes to be a significant and unique object unto itself. With its universal utility, this new object was worthy of a grand institution tasked with devising a method by which all such objects could be made widely available.

Film: The Living Archive

With film, the photorealist archival model was taken one step further by the addition of motion. In 1894, more than a year before the first public projections in America, W.K.L. Dickson wrote:

> No scene, however animated and extensive, but will eventually be within reproductive power. Martial evolutions, naval exercises, processions and countless kindred exhibitions will be recorded for the leisurely gratification of those who are debarred from attendance, or who desire to recall them...Not only our own resources but those of the entire world will be at our command. The advantages to students and historians will be immeasurable. Instead of dry and misleading accounts, tinged with the exaggerations of the chroniclers' mind, our archives will be enriched by the vitalized pictures of great national scenes, instinct with all the glowing personalities which characterized them.[10]

Early advocates of the medium foresaw film's value as an accurate rendering of observable phenomena and its potential as an unrestrained mobile eye yielding a fully transportable, moving image. Following from this is a demonstration of mastery over

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[9] Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," [orig. 1859] *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980) 81.

[10] W.K.L. Dickson and Antonia Dickson, *The Life and Inventions of Thomas Alva Edison* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1894) 319.

spatio-temporal limitations, commanding worldwide resources and immortalizing national triumphs. As time passed, these records would accumulate relevance as a new kind of historical knowledge, offering more accuracy and vitality than had been previously known. As such, a new kind of archive was possible, untinged by human intervention and, therefore, of immeasurable value to history: a permanent, transparent, living record of human time and space.

Film readily lent itself to such ideas and with the first public projections its capacity to accurately record human activity was explored. What we have come to know as "actuality footage" is the cornerstone of historical inquiry into projected film images. The first publicly projected films by the Lumière brothers in Paris were records of daily life: a train arriving at a station, workers leaving a factory, babies eating lunch. Thereafter films of international public events were taken for both local and international exhibition. Spectators in any number of North American and European venues could be witness to Czar Nicholas II's coronation, Kaiser Wilhelm II on parade, Queen Victoria at her Diamond Jubilee, or the inauguration of U.S. President McKinley.

In March 1898, only three years after the first public projections, the Polish scholar and newsreel cameraman Boleslas Matuszewski presented to the Parisian public his plan to build a *Cinematographic Museum or Depository*.[11] Widely acknowledged as the first to advocate for a well-articulated, purposeful film archive, Matuszewski was the first royal court photographer for Tsar Nicholas II who was himself an early cinephile, owning his own camera before the first public projections in his native Russia. Becoming

[11] Such pleas were international in character. Roy Little and Peter Morris suggest that arguments for national film museums were made repeatedly during the first 10 years of the cinema's life. See Roy Little and Peter Morris, *A National Film Archives for Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1964) 1-5.

enamoured with the potential of film upon seeing his coronation recorded in 1896, Nicholas appointed Matuszewski to record all events the court deemed of historical import. Matuszewski wrote a book in 1898 entitled, *La Photographie Animée*,[12] about his creation of unique historical documents and their impending contribution to education and information-storage. The same year, he traveled to Paris and announced that he had been authorized by the Tsar to establish the first motion picture archive, to be accompanied later by others throughout the world.[13]

Matuszewski argued that film was an indispensable source for recording, saving and disseminating information about the past. Uninterested in the cinema's more popular and spectacular forms as a potential source for history, he predicted that as the cinematographic photographer's curiosity moved from merely entertaining or whimsical scenes to actions and spectacles of a documentary interest, and from humorous slices of life to slices of public and national life, film would become an agreeable method for studying the past.[14] The embrace of film's ability to produce accurate pictorial documents bears remarkable resemblance to those of Holmes, shaping them further by taxing particular films with "public" and "national" mandates. Matuszewski went on:

> Thus the cinematographic print, in which a thousand negatives make up a scene, and which, unrolled between a light source and a white sheet, makes the dead and gone get up and walk, this simple ribbon of imprinted celluloid constitutes not only a historic document, but a piece of history, a history that has not vanished and needs no genie to resuscitate it. It is

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[12] Boleslas Matuszewski, *La Photographie Animée* (Paris: Imprimerie Noizette, 1898).

[13] For more on this see James Card, *Seductive Cinema: The Art of the Silent Film* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994) 99-102; and Little and Morris 2. Matuszewski was unsuccessful in his bid for an international network of film archives or "history depositories." Card, Morris and Little report that even the Tsar's humble collection of films did not fare much better than the Tsar himself; neither survived the Revolution.

[14] Boleslas Matuszewski, "A New Source for History," [orig.1898] *Film History* 7 (1995): 322.

> there, scarcely sleeping, and—like those elementary organisms that, living in a latent state, revive after years given a bit of heat and moisture—it only requires, to reawaken it and relive those hours of the past, a little light passing through a lens in the darkness.[15]

With film, the past can be technologically resuscitated, brought back to life for the benefit of the present. The film object is more than a time capsule saving elements of the past and more than an historic object unto itself—it is a piece of living history which sleeps within folds of celluloid. All that is needed to revive the past, latent in the film-object, is a little light: cinematic alchemy.

Rather than naive prescriptives regarding the nature of the cinematic image, these statements are suggestive of a socio-historically specific, yet persistent, set of ideas about why saving films (and photographs) was thought viable and necessary. Beyond claims to the ontological or epistemological privilege of the image, the clear and utter fascination with film and photography—evident in the writing of both Holmes and Matuszewksi—must also be seen as partly constituting assertions that images were unprecedented in effecting a radically new form of historical understanding.[16] Film was endowed with the power to perform a utopian task—extracting the essence of the world (form) from the

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[15] Matuszewski 323.

[16] Another early advocate for film archives was Franz Goerke who deplored that fact that films disappeared before they could be fully appreciated as the rich social documents they were so well-suited to being. In his words, films were instruments unlike any other; they were tools "which can preserve and faithfully document man for posterity." Goerke also claims that he had argued for the establishment of a state collection of motion pictures in Germany as early as 1897, proposing that films be gathered from all areas of the humanities for the purpose of free rental to educational institutions. If his references are accurate, it becomes clear that films were saved by civic institutions from a very early period in the development of the medium. He wrote in 1912: "Hamburg is planning to create such an official archive. Paris already has had one since 1905, financed out of public sources. London and Copenhagen too have a film archive." See Franz Goerke, "Proposal for Establishing an Archive for Moving Pictures," [orig. 1912] *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* trans. Cecilie L. French and Daniel J. Leab 16.1 (1996): 9-12.

trials of time and space, preserving it in perpetuity. The film-object became endowed with some of the magic attributed to the images it held, becoming a secret hiding place: every film canister a potential treasure trove.[17] Further, as is clear with Matuszewski, there is a strong rhetorical dimension to the writing. Matuszewski self-consciously sought to convince others, presumably unpersuaded, that film possessed an important civic function. Saving individual films was necessary for the completion of this task, a task often fed by a basic cinephilia. The detractors or skeptics to whom Matuszewski and others addressed their concerns about film and film archives provide the other half of a much larger equation, representing those doubtful of film's utility and its historical value as well as those anxious about the same ontological and epistemological status celebrated by early archival advocates.[18]

As film developed into a popular entertainment, actuality footage evolved into newsreels and a regular place for this footage was secured in the proliferating film programs of the early 20th century. In America, actuality footage, travelogues and newsreels were taken up by travelling lecturers, who played to audiences eager to see pictures of exotic, faraway places.[19] Such pictures were often sold as both educational

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[17] This idea is supported by some of the imagery generated by film archives and libraries themselves. A brief survey of books, films and other promotional literature will demonstrate the common appearance of film canisters either on shelves, in neat or unruly piles, decayed or fire-damaged. See for example Slide 3, 4, 12, 14; Langlois and Myrent (front cover).

[18] More research on those who rejected film's civic, documentary and historical value is needed to more fully understand how debates about archives unfolded dialectically. The most readily available research and documentation tend to focus on the great few who heralded the indispensability of film archives rather than those who actively argued against them.

[19] Newsreels were an integral element of film-going during this period. In 1906 their distinct popularity was considerable enough that the first theatre devoted exclusively to them opened in London. Others soon opened in other major cities; their numbers increased until the arrival of television. The first such theatre to open in the United States was Fox's Embassy Theatre in 1929 (Raymond Fielding, *The American Newsreel, 1911-1967* (Norman: University of Oklahoma

and entertaining, sometimes standing alone or as part of a larger program. Lyman H. Howe serves as a representative example of the use of travel films and the ongoing relationship between the perceived function of film and that of the archive. Lecturing throughout the teens, he used travelogues as the raw material for lectures on geographical, historical and anthropological themes. Commenting on his own shows in 1913, he exclaimed:

> Travel is attractive because of a legitimate longing for that broad education which only personal study of other races, civilizations and religions can bestow.... To realize history by visiting the ancient shrines of art, the homes of sepulchres of heroism and the arenas of their heroic deeds; to meet people who live differently and look differently than ourselves; these are more interesting to Americans than any other people in the world.[20]

These were images from elsewhere, construed as spectacular, exotic or edifying, and as especially suitable for that growing, middle class of Americans who aspired to learn about a world old and new, near and far. The film-as-archive was construed as feeding a certain American cosmopolitanism, fostering an image of America as an open, expanding world, uniquely suited to the medium of film. An archive of the world—"skins" from everywhere—was remarkably apparent disguised though it was by Howe in red, white and blue. Moreover, such images were available in nationwide outlets: movie theatres. Film itself had become a kind of mobile archive, enabling compressions of time and

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Press, 1972) 200). Interestingly, the closest approximation of a moving image encyclopedia during this period was probably the vast stock-shot libraries amassed by newsreels companies throughout the 1920s and 1930s, intended to serve the growing business of moving image news. Fielding reports that the Fox Movietone Library held more than forty-two million feet of film from around the world, catalogued and indexed according to subject matter, dates, personalities, political issues, and other headings (203).

[20] qtd. in Charles Musser, *High-Class Moving Pictures: Lyman H. Howe and the Forgotten Era of Travelling Exhibition, 1880-1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) 242.

space to travel in the form of projected, moving images. All that remained was to accumulate these films, making material a nascent and grand archival fate: a comprehensive storehouse of moving images, available on-demand of the spectator/customer/citizen rather than the entrepreneurial film exhibitor/distributor.

The film archive represents the accumulation of moving images and as such it powerfully articulates an impulse that is inextricably linked to the cinema—reorganizing, expanding and shaping the visual world. However, the young film economy was not friendly to the idea of an accumulated body of such pictures; the cinematic appearance of worldly objects was far more ephemeral than their real-worldly incarnations. No sooner were films exhibited than were they whisked away, cleared for the next program. Saving films and making them widely accessible was an unprofitable venture; its possibility prey largely to the whim of a rapidly expanding commercial industry. Further, the medium itself did not readily accommodate the ideas of permanency and access so attached to it. Film was flammable, chemically unstable, heavy, expensive, increasingly controlled by commercial interests, and required a secondary technological infrastructure of cameras, processors and projectors to access its images. Its records were anything but permanent and accessible. Despite this, its archival promise persisted.

While the idea of seeing the world on screen continued to be a popular part of the film-going spectacle, a small group of American film writers and journalists took notice of film's propensity to record such images and speculated that collecting them might provide a valuable service, helping to provide lasting records of a fast-changing, rapidly modernising world. Moreover, the fast-growing industry had inadvertently begun to catalogue these historical incidents in their rental and distribution catalogues, which in

themselves were considered important sources of historical knowledge. These ideas are evident from 1906 onward in the first trade papers such as *Views and Film Index*, *Motography* and *Photoplay*.[21] One such editorial read:

> Are the manufacturers aware that they are making history? Do they realize that in fifty or one hundred years the films now being made will be curiosities? In looking through the maker's catalogues, we observe specially important subjects of great public interest, such as President Roosevelt at gatherings, Veterans processions, Scenes in busy streets, Political meetings, Prominent senators, and a host of other subjects too numerous to mention, all of which are of value to the present generation; but how much more so will they be to men and women of the future? We are making such rapid strides nowadays, the march of improvement is so great that we hardly keep in touch with what a few short years ago we thought wonderful. A large section of a city is torn down, another built in a few weeks' time, and the former state forgotten except to the film or photograph. Perhaps the day will come when motion pictures will be treasured by governments in their museums as vital documents in their historical archives. Our great universities should commence to gather in and save for future students films of national importance.[22]

Film and photography were to become the sites of national memory as well as vital records serving educational imperatives. Seeing more implied knowing more and was therefore conjoined with other cultural projects undertaken by the state to accumulate knowledge, in part, as a sign of a nation's wealth and civic aspirations. Film was conceived by some members of the film community as a permanent record that might withstand the wear of time, providing a stable and objective measure by which change itself could be permanently saved and therefore studied, comparatively or unto itself.[23]

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[21] Slide 9-18.

[22] "History and Motion Pictures," *Views and Film Index* 1 December 1906: 1; rpt. in Slide 9-10.

[23] The idea that film was a key source for documenting change and maintaining objective records of modern life for the future persisted through time and appears in considerably different contexts. See for instance Roy W. Winton, "When Old New York Was Younger," *Amateur Movie Makers* 2.7 (1927): 41; and, Florence Jacobs, "The Motion Picture Will Preserve Historical

The financial resources required to build such an institution were considerable. This provides a primary explanation for why powerful figures such as the state and later the great American philanthropies would be invoked both in its imagining and its eventual construction.

Until years later, little mention was made of saving films as valuable aesthetic documents, demonstrating formal innovation, spectacular accomplishment, or popularity. However, as a critical community developed around film in the early teens, film became increasingly associated with the term "art," usually to the chagrin of the cultural establishment. Early advocates of "film art" often drew on the language and concepts associated with the traditional arts in order to legitimate the rich potential of film as an expressive and popular medium. An oft-cited exemplar of this early writing is the poet Vachel Lindsay. In 1915, Lindsay published his utopian, patriotic and widely-read book *The Art of the Moving Picture*.[24] Lindsay's writing appears persistently in histories of film, partly because he attempted to build a bridge between the less accessible theories of film aesthetics as elaborated by scholars such as Hugo Munsterberg and the descriptive jingoism of fan magazines. Lindsay was both a film fan and an intellectual, freely associating popular American films with valued archaeological objects of extinct civilisations as well as European paintings.[25] Heralding the motion picture as an

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Events for Future Generations," *International Review of Educational Cinematography* 5 (November 1933): 743-744.

[24] Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture*, [orig. 1915] (New York: Liveright, 1970).

[25] For a more in-depth consideration of the context in which Lindsay wrote and the lasting impact of his writing see Myron Lounsbury's introduction and commentary in Myron Lounsbury, ed., *The Progress and Poetry of the Movies: A Second Book of Film Criticism by Vachel Lindsay* (London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1995).

exhilarating young American art, Lindsay rhapsodised about film's ability to rejuvenate the older arts of painting, sculpture and architecture by injecting them with motion. Its ability to picture the physical world cinematically was considered a set of exciting aesthetic devices suited to exploring the formal abstractions of intimacy, action and splendour. Lindsay anticipated the day when the art museum of the photoplay would be a great weapon for setting and upholding the highest standards of civic life just as art museums before it. He wrote:

> The art museums of America should rule the universities, and the photoplay studios as well. In the art museums should be set the final standards of civic life, rather than in any musty libraries or routine classrooms. And the great weapon of the art museum of all the land should be the hieroglyphic of the future, the truly artistic photoplay.[26]

Lindsay's histrionic style aside, his vision for film was deeply mytho-historical and simultaneously utopian, associating films with Egyptian hieroglyphics and the protean spirit of tomorrow. Films, he exclaimed, should be gathered into a museum so that their power to "set the standards of civic life" could be fully exploited. The "truly artistic photoplay" would be the lynchpin of the new, great centre of civilisation, democratising the arts and embodying the true spirit of American nationhood.

During this period, a growing number of Americans believed that film was an object worthy of properly high-cultural and scholarly concern: film was indeed an art. A subset of these aesthetic progressives hoped that film art might democratise the traditional high arts, fulfilling the role of uplifting the spirit and values of the great majority of Americans otherwise unexposed to the benefits of formal beauty. Film was

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[26] Vachel Lindsay, "Photoplay Situation in America," [orig. 1922] *The Art of the Moving Pictures* (New York: Liveright, 1970) 28.

not only an art it was a democratic art. For Lindsay, as for others to follow, the film museum became an integral element of this vision.[27]

Lindsay's concept of film's civic value was an open one; the sheer possibility of it invited a visionary optimism. While Lindsay is often referred to as an important, early spokesperson for the idea that film was an art, his enthusiasm for a collection of films was twofold. Lindsay prophesied both an art museum of the photoplay and a photoplay library. His institutional visions had as much to do with exploring the potential of film art as with a civic project to illuminate the world—less through the mysteries and majesty of art, more through the products of a modern technological wonder. Equally important to Lindsay was the raw potential of film to become infinitely useful. One of these uses was making moving pictures of objects and events available for purposes of reference and study. Prophesying vast moving-image encyclopedias as one manifestation of film's utility in the great battle against ignorance, he wrote:

> The moving picture goes almost as far as journalism into the social fabric in some ways, further in others. Soon, no doubt, many a little town will have its photographic news press. We have already the weekly world-news films from the big centers. With local journalism will come devices for advertising home enterprises. Some staple products will be made attractive by having film-actors show their uses. The motion pictures will be in the public schools to stay. Textbooks in geography, history, zoology, botany, physiology, and other sciences will be illustrated by standardized films. Along with these changes, there will be available at certain centers collections of films equivalent to the Standard Dictionary and the

[27] The use of properly cultural objects to uplift the great unwashed and improve the fabric of democratic life is linked during this period to Progressivism, a movement which supported the creation of a responsible elite, modelled on the concept of cultural stewardship and informed by the ideas of John Dewey. For more on Progressivism and its relationship to film culture during the late 1910s and 1920s see Michael Budd, "The National Board of Review and the Early Art Cinema in New York: *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* as Affirmative Culture," *Cinema Journal* 26.1 (1986): 3-18.

> Encyclopedia Britannica ... Photoplay libraries are inevitable, as active if not as multitudinous as the book-circulating libraries.[28]

In Lindsay's excitement about film, he foresaw its expanding utility as a reference tool, a learning tool, an informational medium and an art form. While its status as an art was important, film's value was not dissociable from its documentary-archival function. Distinctly cinematic qualities fed both. Yet again, film was recognised as a medium with multiple capacities around which institutions of civic utility might be formed. However, its status as a historical medium was primarily left to its capacity to record phenomena external to it. Film's properly artistic or aesthetic properties were not considered inherently historical.

As the business of film developed into a vertically integrated industrial form throughout the 1910s and 1920s, otherwise fierce competitors became interested in managing their collective financial interests and public image. In 1923, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA) was established to represent these interests and, among other things, to lend respectability to the public image of this industry. Will H. Hays, former Postmaster General under the Harding administration, was charged with running this organization. He set out to create and fortify the image of an industry concerned with the public good.[29] One project undertaken in this regard was

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[28] Lindsay *Art of the Moving Picture*, 253-54.

[29] Concurrently, Hays wrote the introduction to a book entitled, *That Marvel—The Movies*, a passage from which begins this chapter. The author of this book, Edward Van Zile, was both a science fiction writer and a writer for the Republican party in which Hays also served under the Harding administration. The extent of their collaboration on this book is unknown. Nevertheless, it is one of the most boldly utopian books on film and film archives I have come across. It makes consistently favorable references to Hays and President Harding, both prominent men on-record with their awareness of the importance of visualizing all things in order to radically improve the transmission of knowledge and understanding (Van Zile 120-121). Like many of his other efforts, Hays' introduction to the book emphasizes the great potential of moving pictures to improve the fabric of civic life and the concomitant concern of the industry to ensure this. This rhetoric should

lobbying for a permanent Motion Pictures Division in the National Archives under discussion in Washington. Soon after his appointment, Hays lobbied for a national film collection that would contain footage of historically significant events including presidential inaugurations, funerals, military battles and public ceremonies.[30] Although the National Archive was under construction by 1926, the inclusion of films within it was not officially secured until 1934 and their acquisition not underway until January 1935.[31] Hays and others worked for 11 years to ensure that films of American "historical activities" would be preserved.[32] They could not, however, ensure adequate funding for this project. Donations to the archive trickled in throughout the latter half of the thirties from government agencies and the film industry alike.[33] For its part, the MPPDA pursued its commitment to the national archive by offering prints of "historic interest" (mostly newsreels) to the archive's collection of educational and news films, winning an opportunity to prove its commitment to national well-being. Servicing the national record

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be seen alongside Hays' other attempts to bolster the reputation of the industry. See Will H. Hays "Introduction," in Van Zile v-vi.

[30] This idea has a readily identifiable international precedent in the Imperial War Museum. Established in 1917 by the British government, the museum began collecting films taken during World War I, which were intended to become part of a larger war memorial. It is generally recognised that the Imperial War Museum is the first non-commercial film archive in the world (Slide 11; Houston 12-13). This claim may not be wholly accurate as films were saved, albeit haphazardly, before this. Nevertheless, the Imperial War Museum is likely the longest surviving archival institution and its collection the first to become part of a national monument to the atrocities of war.

[31] Dorothy Arbaugh, "Motion Pictures and the Future Historian," *Journal of the Society of American Archivists* 2.2 (1939): 106.

[32] Doug Herrick, "Toward a National Film Collection: Motion Pictures at the Library of Congress," *Film Library Quarterly* 13.2/3 (1980): 11.

[33] The National Archive primarily collected films made by government agencies including various branches of the military, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Justice.

was considered one way to identify the industry's contribution to public and historical knowledge. Film's historical value was organised primarily to reflect national accomplishment and secondarily to bolster the public image of the film industry generally. Importantly, the MPPDA was careful to ensure that a historical record would not in any way interfere with exhibition revenues. The archive had no intention of becoming an educational exhibitor. In these early years it functioned largely as a repository rather than an active and vibrant site for the generation of public knowledge.

Film's contribution to the historical ledger as a recorder of significant events was the first widely identified reason to save films. Utopian, nationalist or educational, the ideas that fuelled the construction of representative, publicly accessible, visual histories were to be funded only sporadically by acts of state, forthcoming from the mid-1930s onward. Important to note is that despite concurrent industry awareness of film's archival value, neither group overly concerned themselves with preserving its own films nor actively supported projects with the same goal. Only a select number of spokespeople advocated that film was worthy of public resources because of its service to the public-historical record. This service was of limited form: saving actuality and newsreel footage. Film itself was not historical but it was increasingly recognised as a vessel of history.[34]

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[34] The precise wording of the National Archives Division of Motion Pictures and Sound Recordings laid out a much broader mandate than merely the collection of actuality and documentary films. They were officially mandated to accept films falling under five general categories: factual per se, factual-expository, re-creation, art-craft and historic. The inclusion of "re-creation films" acknowledges the value of accurate re-enactments of historic events. The last two categories were more ambitious. Together they suggest openness to the different kinds of historical value films were considered to contain—as markers of important aesthetic or industrial achievement, indications of public taste, thought and action. This collection mandate is suggestive of other impending archival projects, including a co-ordinated archival plan to consider films as properly cultural objects (more akin to books than to records) at the Library of Congress. For more on the National Archives and their deliberations over motion pictures as historical evidence, see Arbaugh and Slide 25-35.

Meanwhile throughout the 1920s, a growing community of film critics and writers persuaded of the artistic potential of film began to concern themselves with the question of film's history rather than film's service to history deemed wholly separate from it. As these writers took up the challenge of writing critically about film, its history came to be understood as an important yet missing component of film knowledge. Awareness emerged of the obstacles facing the film researcher. In 1926, Terry Ramsaye published *A Million and One Nights: A History of the Motion Picture*,[35] an early and widely read history of the motion picture industry. As he was preparing this book, he proclaimed in the pages of *Photoplay* that the state of decaying films and secondary materials was a serious hindrance to the progress of film knowledge, scattered as they were across basement floors and dusty desktops. Out of "respect for the past and an obligation to the future of art," Ramsaye wrote:

> America sends expeditions of learned men to dig in the dust of Egypt to seek out the gewgaws and bracelets where the Shepherd Kings buried their harems. Meanwhile, the beginnings of the one great art that is more nearly America's alone than any other are rapidly on their way to become at one with Nineveh and Tyre. The endowment of a museum of the motion picture presents an opportunity for some of those so magically enriched by the screen to make graceful acknowledgement of their debt to Yesterday. By this means the motion picture's beginning may be preserved to history and spared the sketchy inaccuracies of some future archaeology.[36]

Ramsaye believed the museum of the motion picture was essential to ensuring that film's history would be known in the future, a future he foresaw as increasingly influenced by the cinema. The cultural legitimacy of a museum would endow the motion picture with the respect that accompanies authoritative institutions generally, guaranteeing that the

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[35] Terry Ramsaye, *A Million and One Nights* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1926).

[36] Qtd. in Slide 17. Ramsaye also reiterates the need for a "moving picture museum" in the preface to his book, see Ramsaye viii.

cinema would have a full history, supported by a repository of material remnants. Crucially, even film lovers like Ramsaye did not consider films valuable merely as emblems of aesthetic beauty, formal innovation or industrial achievement but also as uncanny records of sociological significance. Film art was still an unsettled terrain; the phrase was often used loosely to stand-in generally for *films that matter*. Moving images of President McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt and the Empire State Express mattered as much as Edwin Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) and D.W. Griffith's first Biograph films. Ramsaye conceived of these materials as containing a particular kind of knowledge. He was, therefore, concerned with saving film for the sake of saving a record of film's distinct contributions to the social, aesthetic and soon-to-be historical world—a contribution that he deemed soon-to-be archaeological itself. Not only was film identified as possessing its own material, aesthetic and industrial features, it was granted a place-in-history, as inextricably linked to, yet distinct from, the phenomena in which it was implicated. A film museum was seen as a way to ensure that the material traces of this history would not be lost to current disinterest nor necessarily prey to future "diggings." Films were considered by a growing body of film writers to be valuable objects unto themselves, not only as mirrors of social reality but as modern, mass, popular and entertaining forms—as cultural artefacts implicated in a broader set of socio-historical activities. In other words, films were recognised as having a socio-aesthetic significance of their own, one increasingly recognised as bearing a complex relationship to a growing set of phenomena.

As discussions about the role of film in the National Archive continued with little success, small projects to save actual films emerged. In 1929, the Daughters of the

American Revolution (D.A.R.) set out to build a record of American history, storing select films in their vaults in Philadelphia.[37] In 1927, a group of Harvard professors, in association with Harvard's Fogg Museum, set about to obtain and preserve films past and present as potential contributions to the museum and to the Fine Arts Department of the University. Will Hays secured agreement with the industry. His involvement with the Harvard project confirms one important thing about industry participation in museum and archive projects. While the studios agreed to donate prints of selected films, it was extremely guarded about the possibility of allowing exhibition of the prints, attaching considerable qualifications to the rights passed-on with their films. Donating films to a museum was clearly one aspect of a project to legitimate industry commitment to civic projects in history and art. Offering exhibition and, therefore, revenue-generating rights was an entirely different matter. As with the National Archives project, the industry seemed far more interested in the authority and respectability the Fogg Museum might confer on their products simply because they held them, and much less interested in the broader cultural mandate to make films more widely available for specialised or travelling exhibitions.[38] Regardless, neither the D.A.R. nor the Harvard projects achieved sustained success.

After the fledgling National Archives project, the next noteworthy player on the archival scene was MoMA's Film Library. [39] Distinguishing it from its predecessors, the

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[37] See "State Movies," *Movie Makers* 3.9 (1928): 592; "D.A.R. Film Vault," *Movie Makers* 4.8 (1929): 512.

[38] For more on this see W. A. Macdonald, "The Film Library at Harvard," in Joseph P. Kennedy, ed., *The Story of the Films* (Chicago: A.W. Shaw, 1927) 357-362.

[39] It should be noted that smaller projects to collect films according to more specific mandates had been discussed in other contexts, in particular, the educational and scientific communities.

Film Library had the benefit of a semi-reliable resource base, an internationally visible institutional home, links to national and international film cultural groups and the foresight to actively lobby the industry as well as the international community by associating their project with a varied and strategic mix of aesthetic, historical and educational goals. As previously stated, MoMA set out to acquire a wide range of films: narrative, documentary, western, slapstick, comedy-drama, musical, animated, science, educational, experimental and newsreels.[40] Each of these was considered an essential component of the broader map of film art and film history—important partly because this new map spanned forms popular and elite, old and new. Making a store of these films available for viewing and study was one of the Film Library's primary goals. In the attempt to legitimate its project and, importantly, to secure funding for it, members of the museum staff wrote:

> The situation is very much as though no novels were available to the public excepting the current year's output...as though there existed a great interest in painting on the part of the public, but that almost no paintings were ever exhibited save those executed within the previous twelve months.[41]

The needs of this community lent themselves readily to the film-archival idea, needs derived from the desire to create complete visual records of medical procedures and biological processes that would be useful for reference and teaching. For example, Dr. Adolf Nichtenhauser of Vienna wrote: "The ideal would be a *cinema encyclopedia of our cognitions* in the limits in which they [sic] can be filmed in a more effective way than is possible through speech or writing, or experiments" ("For the Creation of an International Film Archive" *International Review of Educational Cinematography* 6.4 (April 1934): 248).

[40] John Abbott and Iris Barry, "An Outline of a Project for Founding the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art," 1935 (Department of Film Series, Special Collections, Film Study Center, Museum of Modern Art): 3.

[41] Abbott and Barry "Outline," 2.

The Film Library set out to prove that film was a valuable cultural object, contributing to the current and historical social fabric, like other respectable, expressive forms before it. Films needed, they claimed, to be collected, saved and accessed in order that their history and diversity be represented and available in some form—in this case, in the form of a privately financed, publicly mandated art institution. The MoMA project was filled with powerful ideas and highly strategic rhetoric. Its success, however, is due largely to the support of the Rockefeller Foundation, a long-time supporter of research into film's socio-aesthetic role.[42] While the Film Library project was ambitious, the discourses which emanated from it were not as utterly utopian as many of those which preceded it. In the ongoing struggle for adequate resources, the Film Library staff was required internally to argue convincingly and comprehensively for the legitimacy of their undertaking. This often entailed notably undramatic and lengthy surveys of related but inadequate projects and detailed enumeration of their extensive activities. The archive had, in part, entered the mundane world of bureaucratic processes. The Film Library was, nonetheless, born out of a highly charged period in film history wherein film was variously endowed with the power to forge nations, to reflect the ambivalence, the beauty and the detritus of modernity, to communicate with a universal language and to revolutionise art.[43]

A collaborative project undertaken by the Film Library with the Library of Congress to fortify the latter's beleaguered film collection exemplifies the intellectual

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[42] The Rockefeller Foundation has an interesting history in relation to film study and research, funding scholars as diverse as John Grierson, Jay Leyda, Paul Rotha and Siegfried Kracauer during this period.

[43] The strategies invoked by the Film Library to shape and support their project will be discussed at significantly greater length in chapters 5 and 6.

energy that surrounded film. The film collection of the Library of Congress had long-suffered from the neglect of un-film-friendly librarians.[44] With noted progressive poet Archibald MacLeish appointed Librarian, greater effort was made to secure a place for film in the national library.[45] In 1942, five members of the Film Library's staff, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, set out to build a national collection with MacLeish's sanction. Rather than selecting the "best" films, the project chose films from that "year's output which will provide future students with the most truthful and revealing information the cinema can provide as to the life and interests of the men and women of the period."[46] The mandate was designed to compliment MoMA's: thus, it acquired films that would explicitly serve the student of history rather than the student of film.[47] What distinguished this project from other archival manifestos and plans was its assumption about why films were valuable to the future historian—less as discrete objects/records and more as a collection of dreams, relevant collectively as constellations shifting in

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[44] Films were deposited with the Library of Congress as early as 1893 for purposes of copyright registration. However, the library's acquisition of films was unsystematic and fell prey to the disinterest of various librarians. Films were deposited as paper prints under protection of legal provisions designed for photographs until 1912, at which point films were granted their own distinct copyright legislation. The Townsend Act provided nitrate-based, motion pictures with a legal status of their own. Nevertheless, the act failed to provide adequate storage for these new legal creations. After 1912, films were, for the most part, processed and returned to their owners. Scripts, posters, photographs or credit sheets would be used to stand in for the films themselves (Herrick 10).

[45] MacLeish was appointed Librarian under the Roosevelt administration at the protest of members of the House who accused him of being too closely affiliated with the Communist Party. For more on MacLeish and his relationship to film see Slide 37-41.

[46] Qtd. in Herrick 13.

[47] Barbara Demming, "The Library of Congress Film Project: Exposition of a Method," *Library of Congress Quarterly Journal* 2.1 (1944): 3.

relation to each other and the socio-historical world in which they are implicated.[48] Barbara Demming, who worked on the project, described it in 1944:

> It is a collection of films, valuable as a whole, that is desired. So the films must be held up to the light of the criteria not only singly but in shifting constellations. But even if the films could be tested singly, one by one, this test could not be an automatic one, because of the complexity of the medium—a complexity both as art form and as social product. Elaborate analysis is called for, because the film, a performing art borrowing from all the other arts, is multivocal—and its voices speak in harmony or discord, simple or subtle. [49]

The key question for those working on this project was: what kinds of films, set in what kinds of relationships, best constitute evidence of a socio-historical past? The complexity of film images was extended to whole collections of films, subject to the same shifting constellations of the images themselves. Particular films would be collected and saved as pieces of a multidimensional whole that bore a complex relationship to the abstractions it was intended to embody: nation, history, psychology. The individual historian served by the archive was given an equally challenging task: "The analyst is obliged to commit himself to many different kinds of judgements. He must play not only

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[48] This project is also interesting because of the clear and acknowledged influence of German scholar Siegfried Kracauer, well known in film studies for his groundbreaking book *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947). This project was also largely funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and undertaken with the benefit of resources from the Museum of Modern Art. Kracauer was clearly formulating these ideas well before his book was published, discussing them with the small community of archivists and scholars who surrounded him at the Film Library. For a brief but interesting account of how Kracauer came to be associated with the Rockefeller Foundation, partly through his association with Meyer Schapiro, see David Culbert, "The Rockefeller Foundation, MOMA's Film Library and Kracauer," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 13.4 (1994): 495-511; and Mark M. Anderson, "Seigfried Kracauer and Meyer Schapiro: A Friendship," *New German Critique* 54.Fall (1991): 19-29.

[49] Demming 4-5.

the art critic but the historian, the sociologist, the psychologist and in the end even the philosopher."[50]

The Library of Congress project is remarkable because of its radical reworking of films into an exploratory map, implicating film in several longstanding disciplinary projects. The basis upon which films were to be saved had evolved. From their status as raw actuality documents to complex, cultural objects-in-constellation, films came to both reflect history and to be deemed historical unto themselves. This implied that feature and fiction films might be valuable less for their literal verisimilitude and more for their "sensed realities," evoked as effectively by cartoons, melodramas and slapsticks as by newsreels, historical dramas or actuality footage. Further, this openness to what kind of historical object film might prove to be reflected a more profound uncertainty. As Demming wrote: "We are, for the moment, not quite sure where we live."[51] For these archivists, film was appropriate as a modern form of historical practice partly *because* of this very uncertainty; cinematic uncertainty reflected the perceived uncertainty of modern life. Modern history was similarly considered to be an ongoing project, to be worked out in the indeterminate future. Mirroring the writings of many European intellectuals and cinephiles of the period, film was considered a distinctly modern medium, uniquely facilitated to embody uncertainty as often as observable truths. In this instance, the archive was an ambitious attempt to respond to this, constructing a visual history for the future based on the foundational concept of truthful ambivalence. The uncertainty of the

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[50] Demming 5.

[51] Demming 36.

film image reflected the uncertainty of the times and this in itself was seen as a historical asset.

Lasting only three years, the Library of Congress project functions largely as an anomaly in the history of early archival projects. It remains, nevertheless, a fascinating example of how philanthropic resources have been teamed with intellectual resources, and how both have been directed powerfully toward innovative archival ideas. While thinking through the archive has historically been part of an active and intellectually charged environment, material resources for building the archive would continue to be the major challenge to those concerned with increasing public access to the visual past. The most complete archives of the visual world were, and they remain, privately owned and privately mandated.

Summing up the Archive

Fascination with the film image fed a fascination with the archival film object—charged with retaining a slice of the past within the visual-historical whole of the imagined archive. The uncanny resemblance of the film image to the physical world fed this fascination. Yet, the rhetorical frame of the film archive is not wholly reducible to circulating ideas about film, photorealistic, fantastical or otherwise. Contemporary archivists tend also to be painfully aware of the many other ideological and material constraints placed upon their projects: conflicting definitions of art and historicity, the pull between private ownership and public access, the endless search for resources and more recently, corporate initiatives to mine the past for the 500-channel future. Nevertheless, the power of ideas about film's archival capacities and the archival models

that have stemmed from this are a crucial component of the cultural history of film in general and of film institutions in particular.

As has been argued, the central and persistent ideas about film's verisimilitude have yielded different conceptualisations of the film-image's relationship to the physical, spatial and temporal world. In other words, film's epistemological status has itself proven to be a historically varied constellation and has been readily attached to a wide array of imagined and actual archival agendas. Furthermore, organizing film-objects into a collection presents another level of intervention and abstraction to this debate. Three very different types of archives become immediately evident: (1) single images or series of images which serve as archives of objects/subjects presumed to exist external to them; (2) collections of images as archives of objects/subjects presumed to exist external to them which are also significant as a collection of images bearing relationship to each other (a national archive of historic events); and (3) collections of photorealistic images as archives of specifically filmic objects themselves. These overlapping categories are provisionally useful in sorting through a considerable history of thinking about image archives or images-as-archival-objects. Of course, one particular archive may include all three organizing principles or functions just as one film may serve as a record of several phenomena simultaneously. What is most important here, for the purposes of this dissertation, is to note that within these broad categories some films have been saved or recovered over others for vastly different reasons. Various imperatives to recover or save films guide the construction and reconstruction of the visual past. Once saved, the same films can be and have been organized along vastly different principles not only those narrowly conceived by individual librarians and archivists but also by their interaction

with scholars, filmmakers, journalists and members of the general public. Furthermore, as institutions, film archives have also foregrounded different activities—some seek to create shrines to their objects while others prioritize an active, public-oriented model of integrating saving films with access to the same. Upon only a cursory glance, archiving film reveals itself to be both ideologically complex and materially demanding. More than the archival function of a particular film, the film archive offers an elaborate layering of past and present, a place where time and space are full with history and the complexities of spatio-temporal reality, a place where struggles to order these things can also be observed. Like a time machine, then, the film archive might enable mobility through the dimensions of space and time, illuminating at once the infinite folds of their relations: arbitrary and determinate, oppressive and progressive. The film archive is not only a place of wonder but of horror, laden with anxieties about knowledge and truth; the archive is both what is lost and what is found within the swell of ideological struggle over cinematic and non-cinematic truth.

It should not be surprising that archival projects can and have reflected these tensions both explicitly and implicitly. Archivists have attempted to address film's increasing integration into affairs of state and social status, prosaic and poetic life. Calls to save films were not only born of the compelling nature of ideas about the epistemological, ideological and ontological status of the film image-as-record but also of ideas about film's formal innovations and increased social functions. Film was eventually considered an expressive medium unto itself, not simply a recorder of other notable phenomena. Therefore, it was argued, film should be saved in order to build a record of its own development across disciplinary and ideological boundaries—saving films for the

sake of saving a record of film's unique and complex cultural role as mass entertainment, art, propaganda and actuality document. Film emerged from being seen as merely a tool to record phenomena external to it and became significant-as-film. The film archival object became more complex as ideas about films themselves diversified and became more sophisticated. In other words, the film archive as an idea and space is a socio-historical formation, which cannot be divorced from circulating conceptions of the nature of film and its value. Different conceptions of film's value have yielded dramatically different archival mandates not only as its ontological and epistemological status evolved, but also as its formal qualities diversified and as questions relating to the nature of categorically different content and function arose. Within the first forty years of film's existence, its status expanded from a recording device to include its status as a cultural symptom or dream. Meanwhile, resources were slowly gathered to build archival institutions which might harness these values. In doing so, these institutions provided another level on which to discuss the significance of film as a complex: historical object, agent and image. The film archive is an important institutional example of how cultures make things visible—saving and reorganizing the visible past for the seeing future.

Importantly, the archive itself takes on an identity of its own, under whose umbrella its collective films are situated: national, international, historical, aesthetic. The American film archive has yielded to many film-archival ideas, in particular, to ideas about the cinematic archive as a distinctly American institution. The idea of the archive has been grafted onto an imagined America: open, limitless, international, and technologically and aesthetically progressive.[52] The film archive was imagined to be as

[52] The idea that film was an increasingly important and complex form representing national life was not specifically American. In the United Kingdom, under direction of J. Aubrey Rees, the

protean and wondrous as America itself. This space—protean or not—would acquire a different national significance as the film economy developed, one based more on uniquely American contributions to international culture and art. In other words, the idea that film embodied a uniquely American sensibility about space and time expanded somewhat during the 1930s to include the idea of a uniquely American contribution to international art and culture: one that was variously accepted and rejected. The film archive, specifically MoMA's Film Library, intervened in this debate through its collection and exhibition activities. Furthermore, the early formulations of the archive as an impending visual plenitude turned around, looking back to a plenitude that had been lost. The discourse shifted over the years from imagining the multitude of films that would be saved for posterity to imagining all of those films that had not been saved for posterity: the impossible visual fullness of the future turned to an impossible visual fullness of the past.

Empire Marketing Board founded a "National Film Museum" for the stated purpose of preserving films representative of national life and illustrative of the activities of the Empire Board's activities. Films were announced to be "educational, scientific, industrial, imperial, historical, and topical." The announcement for this museum read: "The films would be available for educational and scientific authorities and for visitors from over seas. Some of the more popular films would also be preserved, if only as illustrating the type of entertainment patronised by the British public from time to time. Some of the best foreign films, especially those bearing on this country, would also find a place" ("British Empire Film Institute," *The Museums Journal* 29 (April 1930): 349).

III. Chapter 2

Gauging the Future: 16mm and the Film Library Movement

> It is only a matter of time before film libraries will be a part of every modern home. The proper place to keep your films is in the bookshelves together with your books.
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> -W Sterling Sutfin[1]

> Moving pictures are here to stay, in fact, they have become a necessity and in the near future will become a household utility. I have always claimed, and I say it again, that before long every family will have its moving picture machine in the home and will receive with the morning's newspaper a film showing what happened the day before, thus seeing in life motion of which they formerly could read only. Just imagine sitting at your breakfast table and seeing scenes of foreign lands or the great inventions of a genius, or the President of the United States speaking to you as he spoke at the White House; you see everything of importance right before you and you can talk it over with your family. I lay so much stress on this point because it is there that begins the real utility of the moving pictures.
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> - S. Lubin[2]

The ideas and set of practices encompassed by the term "film library" have always born relation to questions of access, distribution, exhibition and civic utility. From the inception of the medium, films were saved, collected, licensed, rented, lent and borrowed. Manufacturers of film equipment as well as producers of films have long sought to increase the longevity of their products and expand their market. Simultaneously, audiences and individuals have looked for ways to reduce costs and turn these technologies to their own use: to see certain kinds of films on-demand in conditions of their choosing. Pundits have likewise imagined a euphoric, image-saturated future. One of the concepts conjoining these tendencies—past and present—is mobility of exhibition:

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[1] Sterling W. Sutfin, "Creating a Film Library," *Amateur Movie Makers* 2.9 (1927): 9.

[2] Warren Patrick, "Pat Chats," [interview] *The Show World* October 1908: 12.

Who can see moving pictures? Under what conditions? By what means? And, for what purpose? Early film libraries are one piece in this larger historical puzzle and, as such, they are one key to an under-examined aspect of film culture: non-theatrical exhibition.

This chapter will outline the numerous issues feeding the formation of film libraries during the interwar period. The early history of the 16mm gauge and the concurrent trends in 16mm exhibition will be discussed. The film libraries that were inextricably linked to these trends will be considered complex responses to cultural and technological shifts, underpinned by immediate distribution and exhibition needs as well as utopian discourses about a cinematically integrated future.

Cinematic visionaries prophetically shaping the many faces of film and the visual technologies that have followed it can be traced back to the early days of the medium. Industry spokespeople, film critics and fans alike have exhorted, if not believed, that film would herald a more democratic, connected, informed and evolved global consciousness, connecting every citizen within a global network, transporting images of "everything important." While this utopian rhetoric is cast in relief by the long history of skeptics, censors and scopo-phobes in film culture, their presence in film history should not be overlooked. Technological utopianism is, indeed, an integral part of film history. From claims about film's ability to resolve social inequity to its revolutionizing impact on pedagogy, these ideas have informed both the concepts and practices—critical and corporate—that have come to constitute film culture generally.[3]

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[3] The rhetoric of technological utopianism persists in recent discussions of digital technologies and the concurrent spread of vertically integrated multi-media companies which promise 500 channels, video-on-demand and an endless recycling of visual content from past media forms. Film libraries play a crucial role in this shift, as whole libraries are now bought and sold as part of the complex transfer of media capital. This trend has led David Pierce and Elliot Forbes to liken theatrical film libraries to pork bellies; they are now traded as any other commodity. For more

The film-utopianism of the interwar period underpinned more specific discussions about film's potential as an educational tool and an art, as a new element of civic life and an extra-theatrical form. Film libraries were an integral part of these discussions, embodying the idea of ready access to an expanding, comprehensive, distant, and visible world: a living encyclopedia. While clearly borrowing from film-archival ideas present in the earliest discourses generated about film, film libraries prioritized access and active film viewing over collection and preservation. These responses are best understood as serving the need for film distribution systems catering to specialised, non-theatrical exhibition sites rather than as film repositories serving the need to save films as historical records. Further, functioning film libraries have a much longer history than functioning film archives, and thus serve as an institutional precedent for the film archives that followed. While several types of organisations took the title of "Film Library," this chapter will primarily discuss film libraries that rented, lent or sold films to the public for non-profit, non-theatrical exhibition.[4]

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information on the recent acquisition of film libraries, see Elliot Forbes and David Pierce, "Who Owns the Movies?," *Film Comment* November/December (1994): 43-50.

[4] It is, however, important to distinguish between the many different types of institutional entities that have taken the name "film library." They range from studio research libraries consisting in primarily textual and photographic materials to privately owned film collections to stock shot libraries that sold film footage. For contemporaneous writing on studio film libraries, see Miss H. G. Percey, "The Motion Picture Library," *Special Libraries* 21.7 (1930): 255-257; Helen Gladys Percy, George Ingleton, and Betty Lord Fitzpatrick, "Motion Picture Libraries," *Special Libraries* 17.6 (1926): 242-246. For an interesting if cursory history of a commercial stock shot library, see Dorothy T. Stone, "The First Film Library," *Films in Review* 11.7 (1951): 29-35. Individual collectors and hobbyists represent an important element of the history of saving films generally. Unfortunately, collectors are notoriously private about their collections and as such a survey of their activities proves difficult. Anthony Slide has discussed some of the important collectors and their relationships to various archives, see "Thanks to the Film Collectors," in *Nitrate Won't Wait: A History of Film Preservation in the United States* (Jefferson, N.C.: MacFarland, 1992) 45-60.

With the establishment of the 16mm standard gauge in 1923, film libraries proliferated, operating under numerous mandates. Some were expressly concerned with creating a secondary commercial market in the home; others with the civic potential of particular kinds of films to educate, to advocate, or to enlighten. Less like a library of books where patrons might peruse randomly the frames of many films, "reading" them on-site, the film library more resembled a distribution centre, collecting and then selling or lending films to patrons: a library without walls. This was, in part, a response to the perceived utility and marketability of films in an expanding exhibitory context and a generalised enthusiasm for specifically cinematic forms: projected moving images. Like books, however, films were also seen as part of a larger project to shape the social fabric by imparting select knowledge, aesthetic experiences or by offering quality entertainment. Film libraries were one material manifestation of these ideas.

Following from these commercial and civic film libraries was the smaller "home film library," often constructed by corporate discourse as an extension of the home book library, a sign of affluence and enlightenment and a link between domestic and global spaces. The home film library also represented limitless film sales (rather than rentals) as it introduced the possibility of an ever-expanding film collection in every home, acquiring significance over time, passed on from generation to generation. As such the home film library also represents the most intimate of archives. Films were collected, organized and guarded by individual or family interests, signifying not only a private store of knowledge but also family memory, combining commercial films and home movies on library shelves.

Collectively these libraries housed the growing body of films that were either shot on 16mm stock or, more often, those that were reduced to 16mm stock from their original 35mm gauge. In addition to the growing number of amateur and home movies, titles also ranged from Hollywood feature films to travelogues, from animated shorts to French experimentals. All of this further implied a radical reconception of theatrical space. Technological, cultural and corporate imperatives converged, catalysing exhibition in basements, union halls, schools, museums, social clubs, homes, vacation resorts and rural locations—making more of the visual world available to more of the viewing world. Film libraries were designed to enable this trend. According to some, the film library was one element in a whole new way of thinking cinema.

Sweet Sixteen: Expanding the Market for Films

> Sixteen millimeter is not just the width of a film, it is a state of mind. The same people, the same aims, the same drives would be present thirty years from now even if the physical form of the medium were altered.
>
> - Paul A. Wagner [5]

> As I see it, the future of the cinema may not be in the cinema at all. It may even come humbly in the guise of propaganda and shamelessly in the guise of uplift and education. It may creep in quietly by way of the Y.M.C.A.s, the church halls and other citadels of suburban improvement. This is the future of the art of cinema, for in the commercial cinema there is no future worth serving.
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> - John Grierson [6]

The impact of the 16mm gauge on film exhibition is an under-examined aspect of film culture. [7] Sixteen millimetre or "sub-standard" film was intended to serve the non-

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[5] Paul A. Wagner, "What's Past is Prologue," *Sixty Years of 16mm Film, 1923-1983*, ed. Film Council of America (Evanston, Illinois: Film Council of America, 1954) 9-18.

[6] John Grierson, "Summary and Survey: 1935," [orig. 1935] *Grierson on Documentary*, ed. Forsyth Hardy (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971) 169-186.

theatrical production and exhibition market, that is, production and exhibition outside of dominant, commercial systems. The most significant contribution to understanding and research on the 16mm gauge can be found in Patricia Zimmerman's book, *Reel Families.*[8] Zimmerman has demonstrated that 16mm technology was discursively aligned with amateur rather than professional production by popular, industrial and amateur literature. This literature, she concludes, prescribed a particular set of aesthetic strategies to be practised in private, domestic practices, ghettoising amateur production, making it by definition subordinate to its professional counterpart.[9] Zimmerman has contributed significantly to understanding of the history of 16mm technology and its place in particular discursive formations, specifically those which implicate specific film-types in ideological projects seeking to restrict them to practices unthreatening to dominant corporate interests. Yet, in demonstrating that 16mm technology was discursively confined to spheres of amateur, domestic and leisure activity, she reduces the array of activities that can only be tangentially linked to amateur practices and in which 16mm film was discursively and actually implicated.[10] Elsewhere, Zimmerman offers a token

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[7] Noteworthy though brief discussions of this can be found in Jan Christopher Horak, "The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919-1945," *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919-1945*, ed. Jan Christopher Horak (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995) 14-66; David Pierce, "Silent Movies and the Kodascope Libraries," *American Cinematographer* January (1989): 36-40; and Ben Singer, "Early Home Cinema and the Edison Home Projecting Kinetoscope," *Film History* 2 (1988): 37-69.

[8] Patricia R. Zimmerman, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

[9] Brian Winston has also discussed the clear separation of amateur and professional production though he primarily concentrates on the British context, see "The Case of 16mm Film," in *Technologies of Seeing: Photography, Cinema, Television* (London: British Film Institute, 1996) 58-87, esp. 63-70.

[10] The utility of the term "amateur" can at a certain point be questioned as for Zimmerman it grows to encompass every activity that did not emanate from a studio. The most common bond

mention of the wide range of filmmaking activities in which 16mm was, at times, implicated: political, avant garde, travelogues, educational films, science films, time-motion studies, home movies, and limited commercial experimentation. She attributes this not only to the decreased cost of 16mm production but also to ongoing developments in politically and aesthetically alternative film culture.[11] Implicit in this wide range of filmmaking activity is also a disproportionately large increase in exhibition.

Distinguishing between 16mm production and 16mm exhibition is an important strategy for unravelling the implications of 16mm technology generally. The emphasis shifts from the "how, why and what" of filmmaking to the "how, why and what" of film viewing. Crucial to note is that 16mm exhibition was not necessarily dependent on 16mm filmmaking. A broad range of titles was available, including Hollywood features, amateur films, experimental films and foreign films, many reduced from 35mm. Moreover, "amateur exhibition" was a more accessible process, requiring less skill and specialised equipment than production. Sixteen millimetre exhibition was also a practice which, in the first instance, had less explicitly to do with reaffirming dominant production codes (as Zimmerman claims was the case for 16mm production) and more to do with a nascent sensibility about film viewing. Watching films was primarily linked not only to concerns

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across these forms is the film gauge that should not be entirely conflated with the concept and/or practices of "amateur" film. These practices had diverse relationships to Hollywood, to commerce and to preferred social, political and aesthetic projects. It is this insight that led Don MacPherson to suggest that there was no such thing as an "amateur movement." According to him, the ideologically diverse activities to which 16mm gave rise are best situated under the categories agit-prop, social and civic, experimental, and home movies ("Amateur Films," *Traditions of Independence*, ed. Don Macpherson (London: British Film Institute, 1980) 197).

[11] See Patricia Zimmerman, "Startling Angles: Amateur Film and the Early Avant-Garde," *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919-1945*, ed. Jan Christopher Horak (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995) 137-155. She also discusses this with unfortunate brevity in *Reel Families* 81-89.

about the proper content and form of professional entertainment films, but also to concerns about seeing more and learning more in a modern and progressive way—visually. Initially, creating a secondary market for film exhibition interested Hollywood less than it did technology companies like Bell & Howell and Eastman Kodak, largely because this was primarily conceived as a way to increase sales of projectors and film stock.[12] In other words, the early corporate organisation of this field suggests that it was largely technology-driven rather than content-driven. Companies such as Eastman Kodak approached Hollywood studios, seeking to secure the rights to reduce and distribute old, non-circulating films from their 35mm vaults. They needed content to stimulate demand for their projectors and to increase sales of film stock. Of course, content would change across the specialised audiences they sought to transform into a market. Further, for obvious reasons, significantly fewer properly professional prescriptives accompanied the practice of exhibition itself. Sixteen millimetre exhibition was linked less to a discourse of amateurism and more to the civic or political imperative to become educated, to bring the world into the home or hall, as well as the pleasures of self-designed and controlled, mobile entertainment.

In the 1920s and 1930s, 16mm (production and exhibition) was not only a set of technologies in search of profit from hobbyists, artists or industry or a gauge conscripted to serve dominant ideological interests. 16mm was also participant in a rhetoric of civic uplift, technological utopianism and a new, modern mode of behaviour—the world unfolding before one's eyes. Films were said to make people healthier, contribute to

[12] By examining Eastman Kodak's patents during the period 1923 – 1959, Zimmerman confirms that Kodak was less concerned with filmmaking and was primarily concerned with the manufacture of film stock. Its non-chemical patents indicate a large percentage of them were for film stock manufacturing equipment (*Reel Families*, 59).

charitable undertakings and make previously unknowable places and things visible.[13] Just as technology companies sought to expand their market by making "quality" titles available, so too filmmakers, civic groups and political activists sought to expand their audience by making films, by using the growing technological infrastructure and by forming film libraries to house and circulate their own carefully selected films. While the large commercial libraries dominated this market, smaller libraries with different mandates were also formed. These specialised and general film libraries should not be entirely dissociated from the barriers to non-commercial film production and distribution during this period, that is, from commercial barriers which worked against gaining larger audiences for films not produced under the eye of the studios. Film libraries represent a secondary intervention into film culture as they collected and then circulated films at one remove from theatrical exhibition and studio mandates. Small as the alternative film-cultural formations were during this period, the film libraries established within them were important initiatives enabling increased control over conditions of exhibition. More kinds of films were seen in more kinds of venues for an increasing variety of reasons, from a variety of sources. Further, these film libraries and the possibility of increased exhibition sites they yielded were linked to the enthusiasm surrounding 16mm film generally. Sixteen millimetre became a set of powerful ideas as well as complex material configurations, inspiring its own collection of mini-manifestos and otherwise enthusiastic spokespeople.

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[13] Examples of those who link 16mm filmmaking to a new and improved social world abound in the magazine of the Amateur Cinema League. For examples, see Alexander B. Lewis and John A. Deady, "The Camera in School," *Movie Makers* 11.9 (1936): 381, 399; Epes W. Sargent, "For Charity's Sweet Sake," *Movie Makers* 3.11 (1928): 712; Louis Miller Bailey, "Church and Film Take a New Step," *Movie Makers* 7.3 (1932): 112; Herman Goodman, "Saving Lives with

A Brief History of 16mm

From the very beginning of the cinema, manufacturers had marketed portable projectors and film gauges designed specifically for home and small-venue exhibition.[14] Surprisingly, little systematic research has been done on why these experiments did not succeed. Ben Singer is one notable exception to this, speculating that a combination of factors was to blame for their failure: the high cost of equipment and films prohibited widespread use; the threat of nitrate film fire made much film projection dangerous; the size and weight of the projector worked against convenience and portability; the non-standardisation of gauges worked against generating an adequate supply of subjects to show; and, a basic unfamiliarity with the very idea of non-theatrical exhibition negatively affected demand.[15] Whatever the combination of technological specificity, cultural context and industry collusion that shaped the success of the 16mm standard gauge, one impact is crystal clear: the catalysing of moving picture exhibition in domestic, educational, religious and social settings.

Thirty-five millimetre had been established as the standard professional gauge for commercial exhibition as early as the second decade of the cinema. Scholars have argued that establishing the standard gauge provided a powerful barrier to entering the film business, in part, by professionalising production and exhibition, thereby requiring

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Celluloid," *Amateur Movie Makers* 2.9 (1927): 13, 38; and, Joseph F. Wright, "Curing Fear with Film," *Movie Makers* 4.11 (1929): 715.

[14] Ben Singer estimates that between 1896 and 1923 at least two dozen projectors intended for non-theatrical use had been marketed. This number more than tripled between 1923 and the introduction of television in the 1950s (37).

[15] Singer 41. For a brief history of amateur film as defined by the Amateur Cinema League that includes information specifically addressing 16mm exhibition, see James M. Moore, "The Industry: 1923-1950," *Movie Makers* 25.12 (1950): 450, 470-474.

considerable resources to compete with established enterprises. Patents and high licensing fees, building and fire codes were key manifestations of this.[16] Further, throughout the late teens and early 1920s, exhibition was more closely linked to distribution and production. Studios recognised the need to secure distribution and exhibition circuits for their films; distributing and exhibiting enterprises recognised the need to secure films for their circuits.[17] Vertical integration became a key characteristic of the industry during this period. Despite the increasing consolidation of the film industry concurrent efforts were waged to feed the non-theatrical production and exhibition markets, venues not yet controlled by these same large commercial concerns. Sixteen millimetre was one aspect of such efforts. As studios increasingly controlled theatrical exhibition, the 16mm non-theatrical market was opening, conceived primarily as an extension first, of the film technology market and, later, of the professional film market into the home. Nevertheless, the adaptability of this same technology was also eventually taken up by those seeking to redress the increasing corporate control of film form and practice by undertaking aesthetic experimentation and specialised screenings of films unavailable or prohibitively expensive in 35mm. A brief look at the development of non-professional (non-35mm) gauges is instructive.

German, French and American companies had long experimented with home and non-theatrical equipment. A turning point in this history occurred in 1912. The French film company, Pathé, and American-based Thomas Edison, both launched home

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[16] Winston 37, 58-60; Zimmerman 1-18.

[17] See Richard Koszarski, *An Evening's Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915-1928*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990) 63-94; and Suzanne Mary Donahue, *American Film Distribution: The Changing Marketplace*, (Ann Arbour: UMI Research Press, 1987) 3-36.

projectors which used non-flammable, acetate film stock for the first time, entitled the Pathéscope (28mm) and the Home Projector Kinetoscope (Home P.K.) (22mm) respectively. [18] While Pathé also issued a camera to complement the projector, the primary intended use for this system was the projection of reduced 35mm prints.[19] The Pathéscope and its 28mm gauge were unique to the Pathé company, which initially bound customers to its fairly extensive Pathé film library, primarily comprised of reduced prints culled from its own 35mm library.[20] Films were transported by mail and administered through subscription plans that allowed members to pay a variegated yearly fee for the right to borrow several titles each week. The Pathéscope was a success, surviving both the introduction of Pathé's own alternative 9.5mm gauge in 1922 and 16mm in 1923. Edison's Home P.K. did not fare as well. It relied on a similar system of mail-based distribution and reduced versions of theatrical releases. By 1914 the Edison system was

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[18] One of other key features of Kodak's stock was its acetate base. A primary barrier to establishing extra-theatrical exhibition was the fear or threat of film fires, created by the flammable nature of nitrate based film stock used in professional 35mm projections. Advocates for acetate-based film stock, or safety film, argued that safety was more important than the luminescent image quality offered by nitrate stock; others argued that the quality of nitrate was more important than its chemical volatility. Establishing safety would in-turn increase the number of venues in which motion picture projection could take place. In effect, safety increased portability. This threatened an industry that had professionalised exhibition. The very flammability of film required specialised workers to ensure safety and quality of projection, providing a method of controlling entry into the business of exhibition. Resistance to adapting acetate film persisted despite Kodak's magnaminous willingness to supply only acetate film as early as 1909 (Winston 60-61, Slide 1-5).

[19] Brian Coe, *The History of Movie Photography* (London: Ash and Grant, 1981) 164.

[20] In the United States Pathé Libraries rented and sold titles from the various production arms of Pathé Inc.: Pathéscope, Pathé News and Pathé. They also offered titles from other production companies including Essanay, Kalem, Bray, Paramount and Vitagraph. See *Descriptive List of Pathéscope Films* (Pathéscope Co. of America, 1918). United Projector and Film Co. also had an extensive library of 28mm films that was simply named "Library of Safety Standard Films." United rented films from at least 1918 onward. They also carried a wide range of titles including those from Pathé, Biograph, Selig, Thanhouser, Vitagraph, Lincoln Parker and Triangle. When the 16mm standard was established, United also circulated prints in the new gauge.

defunct.[21] In 1917, A. F. Victor launched a 28mm projector, attempting to make inroads into Pathé's success with an improved projector and an expanded library. Victor's machine could run Pathé's prints, but the reverse was not true.[22] Victor's intervention suggests, among other things, that the more compatible a projector was with available film formats, the more competitive a particular piece of equipment might be. Increasing available titles, partly enabled by gauge-projector compatibility, was perceived as one key to increasing profits. Despite this, the Victor projector met with limited success. [23]

Sixteen millimetre technology was an amalgam of cameras, projectors and film stock, brought together by industry agreements established between Bell and Howell, Victor-Animatograph and Eastman Kodak,[24] three leaders in the field of film technology.[25] Previously, Kodak chose to rely on its comfortable position as supplier of film stock to the other struggling formats. Having observed the failure of so many

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[21] For more on these gauges, contemporaneous yet unsuccessful competing gauges and speculations as to why Edison's system failed see Singer 44-46, 56-63.

[22] There were several libraries that lent 28mm films. As previously mentioned, the United Safety Film Library was one of these. Designed to lend films to homes, schools, and churches, its catalogue emphasised quality, careful selection processes and safety. The size of the library seems to have been important; their catalogue claimed to be "the most complete list of film subjects that have ever been brought together for general use (2-3)." Their titles were largely culled from the holdings of defunct production companies (see fn 19). Despite this, they were careful to emphasise the current celebrity-value of their collection, proudly announcing possession of the early films of Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, Charlie Chaplin, William S. Hart, Harold Lloyd and Norma Talmadge. See United Film Projector Co., *Library of Safety Standard Films* (Buffalo: United Film Projector and Co., 1921).

[23] Coe 165.

[24] Eastman-Kodak was no stranger to industry collusion. Only 15 years earlier it sought to increase its advantage by entering into an agreement with the Motion Picture Patents Company—a company formed by the primary American production interests in 1908. This deal ensured that the "Trust" would use only Eastman's stock if he would sell only to those who were members of the Ttrust, attempting to squeeze out independent producers. For more on this see Eileen Bowser, *Transformation of the Cinema, 1907-1915*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990) 21-36.

[25] Zimmerman *Reel Families*, 60.

ventures into this market, they resisted introducing a full line of projectors and cameras until satisfactory returns were guaranteed. In 1922, however, Kodak observed Pathé's launch of the Pathé Baby 9.5mm projector. It was designed with the same goal as the 28mm format that had preceded it: expanding their non-theatrical film circuit and extending the use of their library of 35mm prints. The equipment was considerably more portable, easier to use and less expensive than its 28mm system. Obviously, the reduced film size required less film stock, thereby decreasing the weight of both films and their apparatus as well as costs of delivery and storage. The films were sold and rented to customers. The project met with enough success that Pathé introduced a camera to complement the projector the following year. Brian Winston suggests that the commercial viability of this Pathé project served as the catalyst for Eastman Kodak to enter into the non-theatrical market with its own 16mm camera, projector and stock in 1923.[26] Though in addition, Pathé's aggressive approach to expanding its market, first in France and then elsewhere, must have also provided some incentive. Market shares and standards were being established. Kodak may have seen this as an opportune moment to enter with an alternative and competing smaller gauge system, to establish share of an emerging market and persuade those willing to leave the 28mm gauge behind that 16mm was the better choice. If customers could be convinced of the increased benefits of 9.5mm, surely they could be convinced of the benefits of 16mm.[27] If nothing else, it is

[26] Zimmerman *Reel Families*, 62.

[27] While the two stocks were substantially different in size, the actual size of the image they projected was not. The Pathé stock had sprocket holes down the centre of the film between the film frames whereas the Eastman stock was perforated on both sides therefore requiring more film to project the same image size.

clear that the trend in exhibition was portability and ease of use, as the innovations which followed clearly adapt to these principles.[28]

Eastman Kodak set out to resolve cost, portability, flammability and competition problems with the introduction of a complete 16mm system which included the Ciné-Kodak camera, the Kodascope projector, and safety-reversal stock. Kodak targeted both non-professional filmmakers and non-theatrical exhibitors.[29] Reversal processing eliminated the costly need for a negative in the developing process. The original stock could be used to create a final positive, projector-ready print. While this initially worked against the reproducibility of 16mm productions, as only one print could be readily made, it also reduced costs of material and mailing, primarily benefiting would-be filmmakers uninterested in widely distributing their films.[30] Other benefits were to be had from the Kodascope projector as would-be audiences could benefit from an increasing supply of compatible films, lower in cost and higher in image quality than the 28mm films that preceded them. Their lighter weight and increased manageability also further ensured that

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[28] One interesting example of this is the Kodascope Model L, available by September 1936 and possibly earlier. The Kodascope L was advertised as "tailor made to individual projection conditions." Accounting for variations in the size and shape of both exhibition space and screen, the projector came with a range of lens-sizes and bulb intensities allowing projectionists maximum adaptability to varying spaces. See "Kodascope 'L'," [advertisement] *Movie Makers* 11.9 (1936): 391.

[29] Although according to one issue of *Cinema Quarterly*, a plan did exist in the United States for establishing 16mm theatrical screenings in professional film theatres that had been closed. The plan called for portable projectors with a complete program consisting of features, cartoons, and travelogues ("Newsreel," *Cinema Quarterly* 3.1 (1933): 65).

[30] By May of 1927 the limits of the reversal stock were clear and Du Pont announced a 16mm safety film from which a negative could be struck thereby readily allowing for multiple copies ("Dupont Reversal Stock," [advertisement] *Amateur Movie Makers* 2.5 (1927): 31). The new stock was marketed not only by foregrounding the ability to make many inexpensive copies but by highlighting the freedom this gave for repeat projections in perpetuity. By preserving the negative and projecting the positive, "those vital, living, treasured records" would "become a

film projection could be orchestrated by one, minimally trained projectionist capable of transporting and mounting film reels without assistance. Not only did this facilitate exhibition in schools, museums, libraries and homes that were not initially designed or equipped to facilitate film projection, it also increased the feasibility of an extant labour force largely comprised of women using these machines in a cost-efficient manner.

As with the Pathéscope before it, Kodak's use of acetate was a purposeful attempt both to assuage the fear of film's dangerous flammability and to make it appropriate for schools, churches and homes. Acetate film also made shipping less costly, as nitrate film required heavy packaging in lead-lined cases.[31] Films were smaller and easier to handle, as was the projector used to exhibit them. When introduced in 1923, the 16mm Cine-Kodak system met with immediate success.[32] Within months, Victor Animatograph introduced its own camera and projector, the Victor Cine-Camera Model 1 and the Victor Cine-Projector respectively. Bell and Howell followed shortly thereafter by introducing the Filmo 70-A camera and 57-A projector. All three systems used Kodak's safety-reversal stock. In the years immediately following, each of these three companies introduced new, improved equipment. As early as 1927 other companies entered the growing 16mm fray. Included among these was Pathé who, while continuing to offer its 28mm and 9.5 mm services, had to concede the appeal and power of the new gauge. Pathé entered into agreement with DuPont and DeVry, offering the same titles it

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record for all time" ("Dupont 'Mulptiple Copies'," [advertisement] *Amateur Movie Makers* 2.10 (1927): 34).

[31] Zimmerman *Reel Families*, 28.

[32] Zimmerman *Reel Families*, 30.

circulated in 28mm and 9.5mm, reduced on Dupont stock for DeVry 16mm projectors.[33] The German company, Agfa-Ansco, introduced its own camera and 16mm stock with reversal and negative options in June 1929. That same year also saw the coupling of Victor Animatograph and RCA and the introduction of the first sound-on-film 16mm projector. Key to securing the extra-theatrical market after Hollywood's shift to sound was Victor's invention of a Continuous Sound Reduction Printer in 1933. With it, the means by which the store of 35mm sound prints could be efficiently converted to 16mm sound stock was established.

Film Libraries

> All libraries, all book stores, all record shops, etc., will become distributors, in addition to the 2,660 film libraries we now have. Just as Coca-Cola became a national beverage when it was brought closer and closer to the consumer by means of dispensers and handy cartons of six, so the purchase and/or rental of these tapes will become part of the national habit. With 20,000 outlets, the industry will grow geometrically. If there are public libraries in America today whose card holders spend as many hours watching films circulated by that library as they do reading the library's books, then just imagine the picture in 1983.
>
> -Paul A. Wagner[34]

Inspired by the diffusion of 16mm technology and the promise of video technology, Paul Wagner foresaw a time when moving images would, like Coca Cola, be national products available wherever a thirst or habit might develop. The relationship between consumerism, nation and moving images is seen as a harmonious and beneficial one, heralding a wondrous cinematic world dispensed like cans of soda. While this passage rings with the sounds of a science fiction novel, associations between images and

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[33] "Dupont-Devry-Pathé," [advertisement] *Amateur Movie Makers* 2.2 (1927): 10.

[34] Wagner 18.

access to them has a long and complicated relationship to consumerism generally, a relationship more factual than fictional. Many of the early film libraries embodied the pull between film-as-knowledge and film-as-commodity, conjoined by the desire for moving images everywhere.

The term "film library" has been used to denote almost every kind of film collection, with as many different mandates: private, public and commercial. Like book libraries before them, film libraries occupy a complicated relationship to knowledge and to material resources and therefore to culture more generally. The history of the more generic library in the United States begins with private men's clubs in 18th Century Boston, which established private reading rooms and social clubs, spurred by the idea of increased access to books for those who could afford it. Public libraries, that is, the redirection of state resources toward libraries ostensibly open to all citizens, did not take shape until the mid-1800s, supported considerably by philanthropic contributions beginning around the turn of the century under the cultural stewardship of Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller and others.[35] Many early public library advocates heralded the library as the crystallisation of American democratic ideals: egalitarianism, liberty and the unfettered quest for knowledge.[36] Public libraries were seen as clear statements about American nationhood.

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[35] See George S. Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1969) 3- 23; and Mary B. Haskell, "Brother, can you spare a dime?: The Rockefellers and Libraries," *Libraries and Culture* 31.1 (1996): 130-143.

[36] Sidney Ditzion, *Arsenal of a Democratic Culture: A Social History of the American Public Library Movement in New England and the Middle States from 1850 to 1900* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1947) 72.

Recent library scholarship has moved to complicate such claims by excavating the rich history of American libraries, paying critical attention to the gap between the rhetoric and ideals of the library, and the material and ideological configurations housed within them.[37] Issues of class, gender and race have been explored in relation to the library, considering how the library as an institution has functioned to serve or not serve its various publics.[38] In sum, the American library has always occupied a space somewhere between activating a citizenry and ensuring its proper behaviour; the ideal of universal access and the ideological barriers to it; the library as temple and as communal, public space; and the tension between middle-class tastes and working class needs. The ideals of universality and claims to absolute knowledge are a part of the institution's history as much as are its ghettoisation of women's labour and its middle-brow prescriptions of literary taste. Its accomplishments as well as its failures reside within these polarities.

The film library is a similarly complex cultural institution. Films, like books, have belonged to institutions upholding both private and public mandates. While public film libraries may never be as numerous (let alone replace) public book libraries, their purpose and function have not been conceived of—in their ideal sense—very differently: increased access to forms of cultural expression which entertain, educate and enlighten. In short, the civic utility of film is often foregrounded in legitimating the civic utility of

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[37] At the annual meeting of the American Library Association, Carpenter outlined his belief that the agenda for future historical research into libraries required openness to considering them as complex cultural institutions. See Kenneth E. Carpenter, *Readers and Libraries: Toward a History of Libraries and Culture in America* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1996).

[38] For examples of this relevant to the period under investigation, see Patrick Williams, *The American Public and the Problem of Purpose* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989); Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920* (New York: The Free Press, 1979); and Patrick Williams, "Adult Education, 1920-1948, " in *The American Public and the Problem of Purpose* (Greenwood Press: New York, 1989) 41-63.

the film library. Historically, smaller groups in film culture have set out to build specialised collections of films, serving particular aesthetic, pedagogic or political needs. Film libraries have always been about preventing or, conversely, securing access to films. Yet, because of the constitutionally different nature of the film economy and the film-object, publicly funded open-access to a comprehensive collection of films in the United States is still largely anomalous. Films are fragile and easily damaged. They require a projector, a screening space and a projectionist. Compared to books, they are expensive. Further, film is a distinct medium, implying very different configurations of public and private space. Film exhibition is largely bound to the concept of audience, which has invited many veiled attacks on the medium itself. Debates about censorship are one example of these attacks often, in their most benign form, resulting in the admission of certain kinds of films over others into public institutions. Moreover, film distributors have also exercised influence over the possibility of non-profit, educational screenings, fearful of their threat to profits. This further informed processes by which certain kinds of films could be made available in certain kinds of environments. For instance, between the project of middle-class uplift and industry protection, feature films entered libraries at a much slower pace than did educational and documentary films.

Despite the material and ideological challenges posed by film to "free" access, from a very early period, films have been likened to books, acknowledged for their potential contribution to the store of human knowledge and the ongoing project to educate. Such views have been promulgated by industry spokespeople as often as by cultural stewards. They are evident from film's earliest spokespeople and became even more evident with the rise of efforts to integrate film into school curricula. As early as

1913 Stephen Bush discussed educational films and their availability in *Moving Picture World*: "If the university of today is a collection of good books, then it is likewise true that the university of tomorrow will be a collection of good motion pictures."[39] As early as 1914, people were advocating for the use of films in libraries. For example, Orrin G. Cocks of the National Board of Censorship (later to become the National Board of Review), warned the readers of the *Library Journal* that they would have to pay the price for their indifference to the educational potential of film exhibition. One of the problems pointed to very early in these discussions was the difficulty of covering the costs of film exhibition. Library budgets were small and there was little sympathy for the idea of non-profit exhibition on the part of established, commercial film libraries. In their eyes, this constituted unfair competition. The flammability of film stock was also considered a serious problem to protecting the public space and public holdings of the library.[40]

Nevertheless, the role of film in the public (book) library carried on in other forms as information about films and their relationship to novels and literary works or even exotic places inspired library displays. It appears that these activities were as much about treating films as valuable documents, lending respectability to both the medium and the industry, as they were a response to the perceived threat film posed to the relevance of the library. Libraries responded to this threat by organising book displays that in some

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[39] Stephen W. Bush, "Educational Catalogues, Part One," *Moving Picture World* 25 October 1913: 357. Other sources suggest this was not a wholly unusual supposition. In 1916, O. R. Geyer predicted that by 1936 students in Iowa's schools would learn their history through motion pictures alone. He cites the pioneering work of Edgar Harlan, curator of the "world's first" motion picture library of historical films, whose collection was largely comprised of films dealing with Iowan history. Subjects included scenes of daily life, public parades, and public officials. See O.R. Geyer, "Motion Pictures in the Schools," *Scientific American* 26 August 1916: 193.

[40] Cocks 668.

way spoke to contemporary films, recommending good films over bad films, suggesting secondary readings, supplying information about film production or historical subject matter. [41] The National Board of Review (an anti-censorship, film uplift organisation) partly succeeded in its quest to have film acknowledged by the library community. As early as the later teens, *Library Journal* began publishing lists of literary classics that had been adapted as films thus preserving the class-based assumptions about what a quality film would be—derived from more pure literary and theatrical models.[42] These listings appeared consistently throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of American (MPPDA) also argued for the importance of film as an educational tool. Its representatives published short pieces in library journals, asserting that by bringing good literature to the attention of those previously ignorant of it, film was serving to "make ignorance not only uncommon but impossible."[43]

Despite the persistence of cultural denizens and industry representatives to advocate for film's place in such educational institutions as the library, it seems that full-fledged experiments with screening films did not begin in earnest until 1929.[44] The larger

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[41] E. G. Avey, "Motion Picture Cooperation in Cincinnati," *Library Journal* 60 (1935): 570; and "Nation-wide public library film bookmark," *Library Journal* 60 (1935): 26.

[42] Additional discussions regarding film and the library suggest that this was, indeed, a small but ongoing dialogue. See Mrs. A. H. Maze, "The Library and the Motion Picture House," *Library Journal* 48 (1923): 660-62; Vera Snook, "Motion Pictures and Library Work," *Public Libraries* 26 (1921): 574; M.J. Wrigley, "The Film and its Relation to the Library: A Neglected Educational Agency," *Library World* 23 (1921): 625-628; and Lamar Trotti, "Film Preservation," *Library Journal* 54 (1929): 720.

[43] Carl E. Milliken, "A Motion Picture Library for the Future," *Special Libraries* 17.8 (1926): 318.

[44] R. Russel Munn, "The Film and the Public Library," *Film and Education: A Symposium on the Role of the Film in the Field of Education*, ed. Godfrey Elliott (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948) 363. This same source reports noteworthy growth in library programs using motion pictures with the outbreak of war and the needs of propaganda. Government agencies including

philanthropic organisations also funded studies to consider the place of film in the library. Both the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Foundation pursued the possibilities.[45] During the war years some libraries developed sizeable film collections, lending to individuals and families as well as to groups. These services grew throughout the 1940s and 1950s along with 16mm film circuits spurred by government propaganda projects initiated during the war.[46] While commercial film libraries did indeed complain that free public library film exhibition constituted unfair competition, these anxieties seem to have been assuaged by the increased demand for projection equipment and other accessories. This was, in part, seen to have been stimulated by public availability of educational films, much as public access to books in libraries spurred book sales.[47]

If films cast light on the library's desire to remain relevant to the cultural activities of its patrons and to effectively educate them, then the library cast light on film, joining the other voices of uplift; film, indeed, could be used by respectable citizens to shape the social landscape. While these ideas took hold of small sections of the library community, widespread integration of films into public libraries would not take place until well after the war. Cost and general resistance to including films within the library

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the Office of War Information, the Office of Civilian Defence and the Co-ordinator of Inter-American Affairs provided films to public agencies for public exhibition. Munn reports that such films were exhibited as part of regular film screenings (364).

[45] In April 1940, the Rockefeller Foundation granted the American Library Association $5,500 to explore this question. The results are published as Gerald Doan McDonald, *Educational Motion Pictures and Libraries* (New York: American Library Association, 1942). The Carnegie Corporation funded experiments in setting up cooperative film circuits to help libraries cost-effectively integrate films into their services. These projects began in 1948. For more on this see Grace T. Stevenson, "Public Libraries," *Sixty Years of 16mm Film, 1923-1983*, ed. Film Council of America (Evanston, Illinois: Film Council of America, 1954) 123-129.

[46] Munn 366.

[47] Munn 369.

community generally persisted until at least the early 1940s. Educational, documentary, animated and industrial films were shown first. Feature films only trickled in. Meanwhile, commercial film libraries developed throughout the late 1920s and 1930s, demonstrating a more generic approach to commendable content, emphasising quality, entertainment, education and the novelty of films in the home. Hollywood features were an integral part of these larger film library services.

From early on, there is evidence that amateur film production grew with the new 16mm standard. In 1927 it was estimated that 30,000 amateur filmmakers were busy in the United States alone.[48] By 1937, Philip Sterling estimated that 100,000 home moviemakers were active in the U.S.[49] Throughout this period film libraries emerged. By 1928, only three years after Kodak established the first 16mm library service, David Pierce estimates there were 22 different rental libraries offering a mix of national and local services.[50] While this number may seem insignificant, it demonstrates that entrepreneurs and other business interests foresaw the beginnings of a sustainable technological infrastructure and that steady demand was creating a potentially lucrative market.

In the early stages of this developing field, the cost of projectors was prohibitively high, thus restricting market growth. These prices gradually came down. As this

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[48] Roy Winton, "Cranking Your Own," *National Board of Review Magazine* 2.6 (1927): 3.

[49] Sterling "Sowing the 16mm field," 3. Importantly, these figures are likely rough estimates that do not wholly account for the range of 16mm production and exhibition activity taking place. The emphasis on "home moviemaking" does not suggest inclusion of the professional filmmaking that sought to service the 16mm exhibition market, evident in the film libraries discussed on the following pages.

[50] David Pierce "Silent Movies," 38.

occurred, the high expense of film purchase and rental rose to the fore of the film library's concerns. They scrambled to make their films affordable to non-theatrical audiences by offering a variety of rental and block-booking schemes rather than outright sale of films.[51] By 1930, three systems were in place for securing library films in addition to outright purchase: (1) annual subscription methods that entitled the renter to a specified number of titles each year; (2) the temporary hire of groups of films for single performances over an agreed-upon time; and (3) film exchanges that functioned as film swaps, where films could be traded among owners, offsetting the expense of rentals.[52]

Despite the practical problems of supplying desirable films to customers and the setbacks caused by the depression, by 1937 Philip Sterling wrote:

> The presence of 8,806 projectors in local school systems and of thousands of others in churches, clubs, community centers and homes has given rise to a badly organized but hyper-active business. Through one of 500 sources, at an average rental of $1 a reel, one can rent anything from an out-dated Mickey Mouse to a microphotographic study of *The Life Cycle of the Oyster*.[53]

There is perhaps no better indication that the 16mm exhibition field had firmly established itself, at least as lucrative, than the Hays Office's announcement that it

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[51] One example of attempts to overcome these costs, exacerbated by the depression, is the National Film Library founded by the Leavitt Cinema Picture Company in 1931. Guido Rossi, an associate of the company, wrote that they set out to offer "wholesome instructive programs of 16mm films paid for entirely by a select group of advertisers instead of the National Film Library Members" (656). Rossi stated that the inspiration for this scheme was gleaned from the example of radio's sponsored programs. Their library reportedly contained films on natural science, history, the geography of races and peoples, travelogues and industrials. Sponsor's names were placed before and after the films. See Guido Rossi, "Publicity in the Service of Cinematography: The 'National Film Library' of America," *International Review of Educational Cinematography* 5.10 (1933): 656-660. See also "Library Progress," *Movie Makers* 4.3 (1929): 194.

[52] Examples of "film swaps" or exchange boards appear regularly in the journal of the Amateur Cinema League, *Movie Makers*.

[53] Sterling "Sowing the 16mm Field," 3.

intended to cooperate with a "group of distinguished educators on a plan for organizing the production and distribution of educational films" for the 16mm school circuit, estimated to be 278,000 in size.[54] The practice and the idea of portable projection had taken hold, attracting professional and amateur alike. Sterling continued:

> Should these prospects move toward realization, there is little question that the term 16-millimeter would become more than the designation of a standard film width. It would become, as well, a new cinematographic technique, based on a greater mobility and consequently wider versatility and ubiquity of camera—at a much smaller cost.[55]

While increased mobility and decreased costs etched away at previous material barriers to widespread non-theatrical film exhibition, the idea of mobility and versatility of cameras and projectors had crushed the imaginative barriers. Unfortunately, more precise figures for 16mm exhibition are difficult to establish as they require both figures for the number and location of projectors and also figures on the number and type of film rentals. Among the few sources remaining readily available to the researcher are the numerous traces left behind by film libraries in the form of advertisements, catalogues, film cultural journals, and educational literature. This evidence suggests the existence,

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[54] Sterling "Sowing the 16mm Field," 3. Interestingly, this announcement was made with the qualification that the films would be shot in 35mm and reduced to 16mm later. This not only supports Zimmerman's claims that there was a resistance to the "amateur" look of 16mm gauge but also supports the implicit aesthetic discrimination of many of the documentarians and newsreel makers, some of whom advocated for 16mm as a mode of exhibition but not production. Winston has also discussed this at greater length (63-69). There is also other evidence to suggest that the practice of expanding 16mm exhibition had captured the interests of studios. By 1948, Loews International, RKO Pictures, Paramount Pictures, Inc. and Universal Pictures Company Inc. had established either wholly owned subsidiaries or full-fledged departments dedicated to educational film production. Twentieth Century-Fox, Columbia Pictures Corporation and Warner Bros. Pictures announced investigations into the field. The Motion Picture Association of America struck a committee in 1936 to pursue the possibility of theatrical films in classrooms under the aegis of an Educational Services Department. See Roger Albright, "Education from the Theatrical Screen," *Film and Education: A Symposium on the Role of the Film in the Field of Education*, ed. Godfrey Elliot (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948) 407-421.

[55] Sterling "Sowing the 16mm Field," 3.

during this period, of many film libraries with diverse ideological mandates. Some were set up specifically to profit from the growth in non-theatrical exhibition catalysed by 16mm; others had a less clear relationship to the profit motive, tending to aesthetic, political or leisure-based concerns over pecuniary ones.

The following will outline the various types of libraries and consider their diverse mandates and functions. It will pay special attention to the way the film library was posed both as a repository of knowledge and an active site of learning, connecting spectators to filmic and other worldly phenomena. While a significant number of home film libraries must have existed, each designed (or not) according to the idiosyncratic habits of individuals and families, the next section of this chapter will explore no actual home film libraries; instead, it will briefly address the commercial libraries formed during this period and the idealised home film library as manifested in advertisements for these same commercial film libraries.

Kodascope Libraries, owned by Eastman Kodak and founded in 1925, was one of the largest commercial libraries, renting and selling films through its wide network of retail outlets and newly established libraries in major urban centres. Eastman Kodak was primarily interested in increasing its sales of film stock and its limited line of equipment. Unlike Pathé, it did not initially have a vested interest in recirculating its own films because it did not have direct production interests.[56] Thus, content became the question,

[56] This changed somewhat as Kodak commissioned a line of instructional films under the division Eastman Teaching Films, Inc. in 1928. This followed two years of research into visual education. The announcement was made boldly and the project was backed by a considerable capital investment. See "A Climactic Development in Education: Million Dollar Organization Formed by Eastman Kodak to Further Educational Films," *Movie Makers* 3.6 (1928): 380. Indeed, commercial entities had long been interested in the educational use of film. Pathé similarly funded research into this. Additionally, years earlier, Thomas Edison had advocated for the use of film in schools contending that films in the classroom would eliminate the need for costly

and soon after establishing the 16mm standard, Kodak set out to arrange for the 16mm distribution rights for Hollywood and other films. Kodascope Library was the name for a vast distribution system, circulating films "from all over the world" to locations throughout the globe. By 1934, Kodak had opened libraries in four Canadian cities, 40 U.S. cities and 34 international locations, ranging from Capetown to Cairo, Rio to Bombay. In addition, smaller collections of films were available in innumerable retail outlets long since established by the Eastman photographic empire. Using this network, Kodak made 16mm films available via both on-site rental and mail services. Using a reduction printer designed shortly after introduction of the standard by Victor Animatograph, Kodak possessed the basic building blocks for the proliferation of film libraries that eventually followed.

Kodak's distribution network was one of its clear advantages over other film libraries. The size of its collection was another and was often referred to in its literature and advertising. Its 1930 catalogue claimed to offer "the largest and most complete collection of entertainment, amusement and instructive subjects available—more than are contained in all other home libraries."[57] While Kodak's collection does appear to have been extensive, claims to comprehensiveness and size are common in catalogues and

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textbooks. Edison further suggested that the government organise a film library that would facilitate this revolution in education ("Edison Urges Educational Use of Motion Pictures, Says Government Should Start Film Library and Distribute Films to Schools," *School Life* 1 February 1919: 2). Singer has also documented some of Edison's efforts to advocate for the use of films in schools, noting that there were film projectors in schools from as early as 1910 (Singer 51-53, 54). The history of film in education should be viewed critically. This history clearly has as much to do with well-meaning pedagogues as with industry pundits eager for film stock and equipment sales. Education has long been intimately bound to profits.

[57] Kodascope Libraries, Inc., *Descriptive Catalogue of Kodascope Library Motion Pictures* (New York: Kodascope Libraries Inc., 1930) 1.

advertisements circulated by other companies as well.[58] Nevertheless, Kodak sold itself as the library of libraries: its collection and distribution spanned the world. Included in its wide range of film-types,[59] Kodascope had secured the rights to films featuring Felix the Cat, Mickey Mouse, Charlie Chaplin, Gloria Swanson, Constance Talmadge, Douglas Fairbanks, Pola Negri, Emil Jannings and many other stars of the silent screen. Striking a deal with Paramount in June 1927 and shortly thereafter with First National, the U.S. War Department, Fox Films, and Pathé, Kodascope added to its Warner Brothers titles as well as to its stock of film from defunct production companies such as Biograph, Triangle, World, Mutual, and Essanay.

The non-theatrical market offered production companies—prosperous and defunct—a method by which to extend the profitability of films whose "theatrical life" was deemed to have expired, a term which was then virtually synonymous with their revenue-generating life. To prevent the risk of competing with themselves or with exhibitors beholden to them, studios ensured a suitable delay between theatrical release and non-theatrical release. Much like the early video market, the non-theatrical market (especially the domestic market) came to be seen as the last leg of a film's run. While it is difficult to ascertain the full logic by which films were licensed to the non-theatrical market, it is clear that only some films were licensed and only some of the production

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[58] Such claims were common. Pathé featured "every type of subject," giving "an unequalled library" ("Pathegrams," [advertisement] *Amateur Movie Makers* 2.2 (1927): 49). Show-at-Home Movie Library, a division of Universal Pictures, similarly advertised a "complete, comprehensive, amazing variety of motion pictures" ("Show-at-Home," [advertisement] *Amateur Movie Makers* 2.11 (1927): 9). Famous Bray Library (NY) also announced "the most extensive Library of films in existence" ("Famous Bray," [advertisement] *Movie Makers* 3.6 (1928): 363).

[59] These include: educationals, industrials, instructionals, comedies, animated films and travel films, "reconstructed and modern history," dramas, features and shorts.

companies entered into agreements with Kodak and the other libraries. Notable holdouts were MGM and United Artists. Nevertheless, Kodak did succeed in obtaining the rights to some well-known films, including Cecil B. DeMille's *King of Kings* (1927), Paramount's *The Covered Wagon* (1923) and *Are Parents People?* (1925), and Warner Brothers' *Beau Brummel* (1924).[60]

The larger libraries such as Pathé's and Bell and Howell's Filmo Library did not look much different than the Kodascope Libraries, primarily targeting the middle-class market and offering a range of travel, sports, nature films, and comedies. Films were often chosen explicitly for their propriety and advertised as quality films appropriate for all.[61] In addition to size and polite content, some film libraries tried to distinguish themselves primarily by announcing specialised services such as Pathé's Pathegrams series, and Kodak's Cinegraphs series. These services were designed to bring the idea of connectedness and timeliness into the home film market, turning the parlour into a meeting hall. In 1928, as a part of the Pathegrams series, Pathé advertised "glimpses of the Democratic and Republican candidates for whom some 30,000,000 votes will be cast in the coming election. See your favorites in public and home life. Know and understand them better through their 'action' before the lens." [62] Kodak Cinegraphs were similarly designed to provide recordings of "the most important events of the world as they take

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[60] For more on the licensing agreements that were struck see Pierce "Silent Movies," 38.

[61] Pierce notes that Kodak often edited their films in order to fit them on a minimum number of reels. While most films seem to have been edited for length rather than content, there is some evidence that "racy" scenes were eliminated. It seems that Kodak actively tailored their films for "wholesome" audiences ("Silent Movies," 40).

[62] "Pathegrams: 'Political Story'," [advertisement] *Movie Makers* 3.9 (1928): 565.

place," keeping spectators in touch with current world news events.[63] The Cinegraphs series also included footage of Charles Lindbergh's flight, live action footage taken during World War I, and other topical events. These films were often shorter than regular library films, making them more affordable for outright purchase. They were also an important element of the next stage in the Film Library idea: the home film library. As the Cinegraph catalogue read: "Most Cinegraphs you will want to buy and keep permanently—just as you collect worthwhile books for your library. Others you will want to rent from your dealer for an evening's showing."[64] Advertisements for this service positioned Cinegraph films as a privileged link to distant and past events that could now be dramatically "lived" and "relived" in the home. They were a new kind of home knowledge, one derived from moving pictures of real-world figures. One ad for the *World War Movies* read:

> Here is history in the making. A pictorial record of what actually happened during five terrible years when madness ruled the world. A vast panorama of war...now revealed with stark realism. This is not a motion picture in the usual sense. It is a chapter of your life brought back to live over again. [...] Words simply cannot describe these pictures. You must see them to appreciate them...to understand their tremendous scope. They will become priceless 'heirlooms' to be passed on in any family...increasing in value as years go by." [65]

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[63] "Cinegraphs," *Amateur Movie Makers* 2.7 (1927): 30.

[64] Eastman Kokak, Inc., *Kodak Cinegraphs* [catalogue] (Rochester: Eastman Kokak, Inc., n.d.) inside front cover.

[65] "Cinegraphs: 'World War Movies'," [advertisement] *Amateur Movie Makers* 2.11 (1927): inside back cover. Advertisements for the war-films also clearly tried to appeal to a certain desire for "being thereness." They advertised: "Taken in action. Made under actual service conditions in France. Compiled and edited by military experts. A film in which you, yourself, or someone near and dear to you were probably one of the actors" ("Cinegraphs: 'World War Movies'," [advertisement] *Amateur Movie Makers* 2.10 (1927): inside back cover).

Kodak sold a new kind of historical experience, one that could be stored on a shelf alongside other "great adventures of modern times."[66] Cinegraph films were sold as valuable items for the home library—precious objects to be collected and cared for—an integral part of a proper family's pedigree, suitably expanding the family's wealth, in part, by expanding their worldly knowledge-as-visual experience. Moving pictures of the world-in-the-home were likened to the virtues of the library, a comprehensive store of living knowledge whose very possession increased the virtues of family and home. Moreover, an important aspect of *saving* these films in the home library was *seeing* these films in the home, on-demand. The benefits of seeing moving images—features, distant lands, war scenes— was foregrounded consistently in the advertising literature of these services. Potential audiences were invited to imagine sitting in their own living room, witnessing world "history in the making." Also important to note is the use of dramatic, if not hyperbolic, language. Historical images were accented by phrases such as "when madness ruled the world" and "stark realism." They were pictures that "words cannot describe." History and hyperbole were quickly matched.

Smaller companies also invoked the compelling idea of a world linked through moving images exhibited in domestic space. The William J. Ganz Company of New York advertised "Highlights from the News, the World in Your Home."[67] Peerless Cine News and Review offered short subjects from "all parts of the world." Their collection included films of national, international and historical interest. William Ganz also ran a "Reel of the Month Club" out of his New York offices, a subscription service modeled on the

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[66] "Cinegraphs: 'World War Movies'," (2.7): inside back cover.

[67] "Ganz: Highlights From the News," [advertisement] *Amateur Movie Makers* 2.7 (1927): 4.

"Book of the Month" Club. A typical advertisement read: "Latest up-to-minute releases reach you on the first of every month—the great world events for you almost as soon as they happen...a genuine contribution to the library."[68] The idea of being connected was not limited to news events, being connected to the world of Hollywood was also important. Show-at-Home Film Library, a division of Universal Pictures, advertised a "new era in motion pictures for the home." They promised to bring "the World's Greatest Stars to the Home," guaranteeing "the best and only the best for the American Home."[69]

The concept of connecting viewers to a broader visual world drew not only on ideas about nationally coordinated events, global consciousness or even simultaneity; it also drew on the idea of specialised, intelligent audiences. In a letter written by film critic and historian Terry Ramsaye to George Eastman, the Cinegraph Service was praised as the beginning of the "empowerment of the intelligent minorities." He continued:

> The theatre obviously must appeal to the millions and please a thousand or two at a time. But the Cinegraph, like a magazine or a book of limited appeal, can serve its audience in units of the individual. To me the Cinegraph idea is almost as strikingly important as though we had just discovered that the printing press need not restrict its output to tabloid newspapers and dime novels.[70]

The intelligent home was a home connected to the world by films, sold by commercial libraries and stored in the sacred domestic space of the priceless home library. To further integrate this idea into good family practice, many secondary film products were conceived to integrate the projector and screen comfortably into the home. Screens were marketed with ornate picture frames, pull-down "art" and recessed wall units. Projectors

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[68] "Ganz: Film of the Month Club," [advertisement] *Amateur Movie Makers* 2.11 (1927): 4.

[69] "Show-at-Home Film Library," [advertisement] *Amateur Movie Makers* 2.10 (1927): 3.

[70] Qtd. in "Tribute," *Amateur Movie Makers* 2.7 (1927): 18.

were designed in oak casings for companion cabinets. Leather faux-book exteriors were sold to house the growing number of film canisters on library shelves. Kodak even announced a self-contained unit, complete with screen, projector and "handsome walnut cabinet." The unit was appropriately titled the "Library Kodascope," and was designed to be a perfect and permanent contribution to the family den.

The film library is the imagined and material stage where the cinematic world comes together and is stored, reorganised and redistributed to future audiences. The home film library further privatizes these activities, linking them to familial and domestic activities. Seeing and saving films in the home was likened to the function of reading and collecting books, connecting the private sphere with a larger public one. The home film library was essentially sold as an extension of the film library, designed as a way to reign-in the world—the world of news, entertainment and travel—connecting the audience to places, events, natural wonders and even historical periods far away. The home film library fit perfectly within projects of social uplift prominent at the time.

Terms such as "quality," "family" and "education" were foregrounded and invited the association of film with private, middle-class edification rather than its bawdy, public incarnations. The home film library made the utopian promise of bringing the world into the home, preserving it on a bookshelf as a permanent living record of events, people and places elsewhere. One of the features of this library was the permanent accessibility of these visual records as information, to be referenced by family members in years to come, shown again and again. These are home archives of the world and much like encyclopedias, films were sold as storehouses of information—moving visual indexes to a world brought closer and made smaller by film.

It is clear from advertisements in *Movie Makers*, that the larger film libraries targeted the home in their advertisements, identifying it as the most lucrative market. There is, however, little information readily available about actual rental patterns. Judging from the cost of rental, home 16mm rental remained an activity for upper- and middle-class patrons. Home movie making, and therefore family film libraries, received a considerable boon from the introduction of the less expensive 8mm standard in 1932. With 8mm availability, 16mm became more generally identified with non-commercial, public projection. As the 1930s moved onward, 16mm increasingly became the gauge of choice for libraries, museums, schools, civic groups and film societies.

The Non-Commercial Film Library

While corporate entities such as Kodak, Bell and Howell and others attempted to capitalise on the development of less expensive 16mm equipment and stock by establishing film libraries, other less profit-minded groups also set out to capitalize somewhat differently on the advantages offered by 16mm. These were ideologically diverse groups who were interested in using film exhibition to further their activities or agendas, and they required methods by which particular kinds of films could be seen. Civic groups less interested in profit but more concerned with forwarding a particular world-view or fostering particular values set out to gather, distribute and/or exhibit films that would facilitate these goals. The Daughters of the American Revolution, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) the Firefighters of America, General Electric, and a variety of museums had film libraries, designed around vastly different principles but sharing the same basic premise: making selected films available to wide, non-theatrical audiences. Conversely, film libraries were also formed by particular groups interested in

securing access to certain kinds of films that would be collected, circulated and exhibited among their respective and more immediate communities. This is an integral part of the early history of specialised groups in film culture—groups such as the Amateur Cinema League, the Workers' Film and Photo League and, in part, the New York Film Society and Film Forum, all of whom who had clear and particular interests in seeing certain kinds of films that were otherwise difficult to access in an affordably. The following section briefly describes some of these libraries including those which maintained broader public mandates as well as those with more specialised mandates.

The service department of the National Council YMCA ran a Motion Picture Bureau, which held its own film library. Films "for your Church, School and Club" were either rented for a small fee or lent free of charge. The library featured "religious, historical, health, informative and school lesson" films.[71] The YMCA Film Library was a smaller part of its more general mandate of social uplift. Founded in 1851, the YMCA had maintained its own book libraries from early in its own history. Film programs run by travelling exhibitors were used as early as the 1910s.[72] Once films were accepted as viable tools in the social uplift movement, a film library was the next logical step.

The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) set out to build a library of films for schools addressing significant historical incidents, natural resources, geography, industries, and prominent cities native to each American state. Their goal was to improve "understanding between various sections of the country" in order to "break down

[71] "Y.M.C.A.," *Movie Makers* 5.9 (1930): 585.

[72] Singer 54.

whatever prejudice might exist."[73] When this library was finally established a year later in 1929 in Philadelphia, it was described as a collection of "prints of historical and special merit" which were intended to serve as a "permanent record." Their "vault" contained features as well as newsreels.[74] The idea of the library had crossed over into the territory of the archive.

One of the early examples of a museum-based film library was that formed by the Museum of Natural History, New York City. As early as 1930 it had organised a library of films gathered from sources such as the U.S. Bureau of Mines, the Canadian Government, the Motion Picture Bureau and industrial libraries. The films were supplied to schools and other non-profit groups free of charge.[75] The mandate was explicitly educational and concentrated on subjects falling within the general goals of the museum itself: natural history.[76] By the mid-1930s, the Metropolitan Museum of Art (N.Y.) also maintained its own film library, holding films whose production was sponsored by the museum itself. The museum either exhibited these films on-site or lent them to other museums and interest groups. Subjects reportedly included travel, history, biography and

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[73] "State Movies," *Movie Makers* 3.9 (1928): 592.

[74] "D.A.R. Film Vault," *Movie Makers* 4.8 (1929): 512.

[75] See "Motion Picture Film from the American Museum of Natural History," *School and Society* 31 (18 January 1930): 80-81. One article stated that in a 12-month period 3,300 film reels had been distributed to 122 schools ("Museum Service," *Movie Makers* 3.4 (1928): 256). Its holdings were published as American Museum of Natural History, *Motion Pictures (16mm Width) for General Circulation* (New York: Department of Public Education, nd).

[76] During the mid-1930s, this same museum would serve as a site for film exhibitions sponsored by the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art. The Museum of Natural History had an auditorium sizeable enough to house the growing audiences for the Film Library's programs.

art appreciation.[77]

The educational uses of film was a growing concern throughout the 1930s, as not only museums and civic groups but also schools themselves began to collect and distribute films to facilitate inter-school film exchange. Film circuits and film co-operatives were established to offset costs and facilitate distribution. As with many educational technology projects, private interests were prominent. The educational market had long been targeted by companies such as Pathé, Edison and Eastman-Kodak.[78] General discussions of film's educational utility date back to the first decade of the film industry.[79] During the 1920s and 1930s, the use of film for educational purposes in museums, schools and civic groups was also stimulated by the Progressive Movement, which was prominent in America during this period. A key element of its general political platform was education reform and social uplift through the arts. Further, the idea of using film to educate about art, history and general matters of culture was an idea whose currency rose not only because of the increasing availability of 16mm technology and the growing demand for moving pictures but also because of the idea that film was a

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[77] See Elias Katz, "Educational Possibilities of Motion Picture Art Courses," *International Review of Educational Cinematography* 6 (January 1934): 29-35.

[78] Pathé Exchange, Inc., *Pathé Educational Films (16mm)* (New York: Pathé Exchange, Inc., 1929); Associated Film Libraries of Chicago, "A Circulating 16mm Film Library," *Educational Screen* 12 (June 1933): 170. This library also funded the circulation of its educational and entertainment titles by attaching advertising to the films as well as charging a membership fee. Further, the field of medical films was particularly well-developed. Kodak had established a Medical Film Library by the early 1930s. This was an international repository of medical films for sale or rent in the U.S. and the U.K. This project had captured the attention of the international educational film community. See Adolf Nichtenhauser, "For the Creation of an International Film Archive," *International Review of Educational Cinematography* 6.4 (1934): 248-251.

[79] Ben Singer has traced such discussions back to 1907 in magazines such as *The Show World* and *The Moving Picture World*. Singer outlines the marked increase of these discussions from 1911 onward (51). For an example of attempts to service schools for the lowest possible costs see also

superior medium for communicating information and ideas. Film, therefore, came to be considered by some to be an indispensable element in projects designed to shape and improve a nation: to create educated and responsible citizens.

One example of these educational efforts was the University Film Foundation, established at Harvard in 1928. The Foundation set out to orchestrate the production, distribution and loan of films to educational and cultural institutions. Its goal was to create a central repository for films of educational and scientific value from all over the world. Description of the project was infused with utopian claims of universality and absolute vision, much like those discussed in the previous chapter. A spokesperson for the foundation stated:

> As a medium of education the motion picture offers even greater advantages than the photograph. It can present action continuously from beginning to end with the full illusion of reality. It can recreate life itself from any part of the world—whether it be plant, animal or human. The film is an international language, intelligible to all races of mankind, regardless of linguistic differences. Furthermore, it is the best means for the universal presentation of a subject. It is comprehensible, with fewer changes than any other medium, to people of all classes, ages and degrees of education.[80]

Rhetorically, film was infused with the power to "recreate life," to transport these living subjects from around the world and to present those subjects transparently to eager learners.[81] The archival idea—a central repository of images of everything—was alive

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Russell T. Gregg, "Experiences with a State Cooperative Film Library," *Educational Screen* 15 February 1936: 39-41.

[80] "The New University Film Foundation: A Center for Producing Educational Films is Established at Harvard," *Amateur Movie Makers* 3.5 (1928): 336.

[81] These claims to universality provide an excellent example of how film and other visual technologies have long lent themselves to claims about knowledge and therefore learning. Important work remains to be done in this area as the implications of this rhetoric and the social and political trends of which it is a part continue to resonate with the sweeping changes wrought by new digital technologies in the classroom. Questions about what kind of knowledge is

and well at the Harvard Film Library, promising unlimited access to, and comprehensibility of, anything to anybody.

Among other film projects to shape the social and political landscape were those launched by the Workers' Film and Photo League (WFPL), an association of cinematographers, photographers, intellectuals, and politicos joined under the aegis of the Workers' International Relief, itself an outgrowth of the Communist Party. Accompanied by other organisations active in theatre, dance and art, the WFPL set out to raise workers' consciousness regarding their common oppression by using films and photographs to either document worker activity, to propagate Communist Party values, and to agitate against capitalist domination generally, and capitalist domination of film particularly. Its manifesto, originally published in *Workers' Theater* in 1931 and written by Harry Alan Potamkin, was entitled "A Movie Call to Action!"[82] This document announced nothing less than the creation of a national, alternative film economy. Potamkin called for the creation of a chain of film audiences, to which the league would distribute documents of worker oppression as well as suppressed and neglected films of significance.[83]

Officially established under the WFPL banner in 1930, the league set out to overtly politicise film through both production and exhibition activities. They held public demonstrations against commercial films with right-wing, anti-worker or anti-Jewish themes. They made newsreels of worker-activities and strike actions. They also exhibited

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imparted, to whom, and to what end are crucial for fully considering the broader impact and function of this utopianism.

[82] Rpt. as Harry Alan Potamkin, "A Movie Call to Action!," *The Compound Cinema: The Film Writings of Harry Alan Potamkin*, ed. Lewis Jacobs (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1977) 583-586.

[83] Potamkin "A Movie Call to Action!," 585.

these and other (mostly Soviet) films throughout the United States, usually on 16mm film in non-theatrical settings.[84] Internal disputes over resource allocation and aesthetic strategies led to rifts in the activities of the league in the mid-1930s. Nevertheless, at their 1934 conference, 16mm was officially adopted as the basic stock for local and national exhibition and a national film exchange was established.[85] Even before their official adoption of 16mm, the exhibition practices of the league—primarily showing Soviet features and newsreel footage to workers' groups throughout the country—depended on 16mm exhibition equipment. Workers' camps, union halls, barns and homes often required the portability, versatility, safety and comparatively low cost offered by 16mm.[86] While the league itself had a library of films it distributed to unions, liberal clubs, social, literary and music groups, and YMCAs, the reach of this library was never as extensive as league members hoped it would be. Recognising that distribution was a serious challenge to extending this network of films, league-member Tom Brandon formed Garrison Films with the intention of expanding the distribution of league films and Soviet features. His project was reportedly moderately successful. Sixteen millimetre film

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[84] Russell Campbell, "Radical Cinema in the 1930s: The Film and Photo League," *Jump Cut: Hollywood, Politics and Counter-Cinema*, ed. Peter Steven (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1985) 127.

[85] Campbell 131.

[86] The screening notices are available in the Tom Brandon Collection held in the Film Study Center at MoMA. They do not for the most part specify which gauge was used. One flyer does announce the use of a 16mm projector for a screening held at the New School for Social Research in the early 1930s. Judging also from the film course offerings of the New School, which either do not specify gauge or specify 16mm, I have assumed that they did not have a theatre properly suited to 35mm projection. Few records are available of film screenings held at the New School. Course offerings are available on microfilm at the school's library.

networks were established in the midwest, comprised either of workers' clubs or smaller collections of farming villages and towns. [87]

Underlying the accumulation of a 16mm library and its relationship to expanded distribution and exhibition networks was the desire of the league to exhibit a certain kind of film otherwise unavailable to its constituents. The WFPL film library had no pretensions to universality or even to quality. It was a partisan and politicised tool, designed to effect a growing, critical public.

Unlike the overtly political goals of the WFPL, members of the Amateur Cinema League (ACL) comprised a loose collection of hobbyists and civic-minded individuals seeking to explore film form and technique usually for less radical and more leisurely ends. Nevertheless, the ACL had its own library needs and in 1927, only one year after its official formation, a film library was established. The library was intended to service league members, providing films deemed exemplary to local ACL clubs. Arthur Gale, a prominent member of the ACL, wrote that the primary purpose of the library was to "provide an adequate distribution of amateur photoplays, secure a dependable event for club programs and, as well, encourage new groups to undertake amateur productions." [88] The library was considered an active element in a growing amateur filmmaking and exhibition movement, importantly collecting films and securing exhibition sites for films otherwise lacking such a circuit. It was primarily confined to collecting and lending films that were recipients of the league's annual "10-Best" contest, many of which were

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[87] Alexander describes league members travelling the country with 16mm projectors-in-tow. For more on the League's exhibition practices which also included some silent 35-mm projection, see William Alexander, *Film on the Left: American Documentary Film from 1931-1942* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) 37-41.

[88] Qtd. in Horak "American Avant Garde," 2.

travelogues. Yet, some of these films have come to be considered early examples of American avant garde filmmaking. These include: *Lot in Sodom* (1933) and *Fall of the House of Usher* (James Sibley Watson and Melville Webber, 1928), *The Tell-Tale Heart* (Charles Klein, 1928), *H2O* (Ralph Steiner, 1929), *Portrait of a Young Man* (Henwar Rodakiewicz, 1931) and *Mr. Motorboat's Last Stand* (Theodore Huff/John Florey, 1933). Many of these films were screened throughout the United States, participating in one of the most extensive non-theatrical film circuits extant. [89]

The ACL library was also particularly useful for branches of the league that had set about on their own projects to discover the essence of film art through a study of "prominent examples of its various stages of development." [90] Some amateurs had become students of film form, eager to understand more about the essence of cinematic technique.[91] Hiram Maxim Percy, president of the league, suggested that amateur movie making began to involve discussions of the "what" of film rather than simply the "how."[92] Access to a library of films was important for amateur filmmakers pursuing such studies. While many amateurs remained primarily interested in making travelogues and personal documents or home movies, the movement was not entirely reducible to these subjects. Concern for film form and experimentation is also evident in articles published in the league's journal, *Amateur Movie Makers*, retitled *Movie Makers* in 1928.

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[89] Horak "American Avant Garde," 25.

[90] Harry Maxim Percy, "Hartford Amateur Movie Club," *Movie Makers* 5.3 (1930): 1-2.

[91] For more on the early American avant garde and its relationship to technological shifts and amateur film see Jan-Christopher Horak, ed., *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde. 1919 - 1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995).

[92] Percy "Hartford Amateur Movie Club," 2.

Early in the development of the league, formal experimentation was encouraged by left-leaning critics such as Harry Alan Potamkin, Jay Leyda, Gilbert Seldes and Herman Weinberg who wrote commentary and film reviews for the journal.[93] Running through the late 1920s to the early 1930s was also a series of reviews entitled "Photoplayfare: Reviews for the Cinetelligenzia." The films reviewed in this series were far-ranging and included German, Soviet, French and American films. In its earliest days, the amateur movement constituted one of the primary outlets for non-Hollywood dependent activities. This, by necessity, included exhibition outside of studio-dominated theatres. As such, the importance of establishing distribution and exhibition outlets for amateurs easily fed the idea of establishing little theatres, theatrical venues designed to show commercially unviable cinema: repertory, foreign, experimental, and political. These little theatres were, unsurprisingly, advocated for in the pages of the same magazine.[94] While the ACL library does not seem to have directly fed the struggling little theatres, its existence made the problems of collection, distribution and exhibition clear to those interested in expanding the function of cinema beyond Hollywood's offerings. Some aspects of league-members' interventions were aesthetically radical, and others not necessarily so. Members of the league brought diverse interests to bear on film-related activities. Ties to the industry were evident in regular announcements of corporate executive appointments, profiles of industry leaders and a general gung-ho enthusiasm about film technology. Ties

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[93] Harry Alan Potamkin, "The Close Up's the Thing," *Movie Makers* 4.9 (1929): 572, 597-8; and "The Magic of the Machine Films," *Movie Makers* 4.11 (1929): 722-3, 744. See also Gilbert Seldes, "The Intellectual Film," *Amateur Movie Makers* 2.3 (1927): 15, 38.

[94] See Roy Winton, "Photoplayfare: Reviews for the Cinetelligenzia," *Movie Makers* 4.12 (1929): 806, 818; and Marguerite Tazelaar, "The Story of the First Little Film Theatre," *Amateur Movie Makers* 3.7 (1928): 441.

to the critical and experimental community were evident in the same journal, featuring articles on film form, non-American films and aesthetic experiment. Important for the purposes of this chapter is the diversified system of film exchanges connected to league-activities. Collectively, league members comprised the largest audience for non-commercial film exhibition, which was supported not only by its lending library but also by swap systems conducted through the pages of *Movie Makers*.

Little evidence remains as to what became of this body of films, nevertheless, the specialised film collection would become an essential component in the development of film studies only several years later, with the establishment of film archives dedicated to film art and film history.

One early example of a library dedicated to a more properly art-orientation was planned by Julian Levy. In the early 1930s, 16mm exhibition became part of a growing community interested in film for its potential contribution to the traditional arts. From the early 1920s, small groups of cinephiles had begun to organise screenings and discussion groups in order to explore the cinema's aesthetic possibilities and its essence. Cinéclubs had long been established in France as early as 1923. The Film Society was established in London in 1925. The first "little theatre" in America was also established that same year, dedicated to developing a repertory program as well as exhibiting foreign and other art films deemed inappropriate for commercial film circuits. Many of these films were exhibited in 35mm but the cost of this often inhibited fuller development of this movement. Nonetheless, non-theatrical exhibition was an important element of this growing movement, with many surrealist, expressionist and Soviet films finding their way to 16mm prints.

Julian Levy was a part of the American modern art scene, establishing in the late 1920s one of the first galleries devoted exclusively to modern art in New York City. Levy conceived of a collection of films, printed on 16mm stock, designed around two purposes: accumulating valuable *objets d'art* conceived by famous painters and as a reference library of bio-portraits, depicting the lives and art of well-known modern artists. He wrote:

> Films conceived by such important painters as Duchamp, Léger, or Dalí should command much the same value as a canvas from their hand, and if a collector's market could be organized, I thought to persuade other painters to experiment in this medium. I had been making casual films of my own, hoping that these would add up to a small library of film portraits.[95]

Levy's portraits were intended to be dynamic and animated, combining biographical material on chosen artists, conceived according to the logic of their respective painting styles. Levy hoped to build this library in order both to exhibit such films in his gallery, alongside the paintings and sculptures, and to sell them to collectors. Little evidence remains of what this library came to look like. It is clear that Levy was successful in acquiring 16mm prints of Fernand Léger's *Ballet Méchanique* (1924), Marcel Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma* (1930), Salvadore Dalí and Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* (1928) and *L'Age D'Or* (1930), Man Ray's *L'Étoile de Mer* (1928), Kurt Wiell and G.W. Pabst's *Dreigroschenoper (Threepenny Opera)* (1931) and Jay Leyda's *A Bronx Morning* (1931). Only one artist's portrait was ever completed. Max Ernst was its subject. Portraits were begun on Constantine Brancusi, Fernand Léger, Mina Loy and Campigli.[96] Levy's library

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[95] Julien Levy, *Memoir of an Art Gallery* (New York: G. Putnam's Sons, 1977) 148. For more on Levy's plans to "display artistic films on request," see Lincoln Kirstein, "Experimental Films" *Arts Weekly* 25 March 1932: 52.

[96] Levy 48.

and gallery space also hosted some of the screenings of the New York Film Society, of which he was an active member.[97] However, his experiments with a film library and film exhibition were short-lived.

These screenings are significant because they mark a very early example of specialised art screenings in the United States and secondly, they also mark an early example of film's collection as, potentially, objects of high art. Moreover, those involved with Levy's early screenings went on to form the nucleus of the New York Film Society, and the left-leaning Film Forum, the first film societies in the United States.[98] Both of these organisations were peopled by those who were already, or went on to be, important figures in film culture generally, including the staff members at the then-nonexistent Museum of Modern Art Film Library and the co-existent Workers' Film and Photo League.

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[97] The activities of the New York Film Society will be discussed in greater length in chapter 6.

[98] While their broad mandates were somewhat different, many of the same films were seen by both groups. For more on this see Ben Davis, "Beginnings of the Film Society Movement in the United States" *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 24. 3-4 (1994): 10-16.

From Library to Archive

> The substandard libraries are going to be the repertory supply of the future.
>
> - *World Film News*[99]

Film culture did not diversify during this period simply because of the introduction of 16mm technology or because of the ideas and practices encompassed by the term film library. Many larger movements were underway nationally and internationally which fed the rise of film art, non-theatrical exhibition, political and subversive film activity, and the increasing historical sensibility that was to be attached to film during the 1930s. The 16mm film library does, however, reveal itself to be one small, integral part of these other movements. The possibility of various audiences seeking out particular kinds of films marks one point on the map of an audience aware of itself as having an explicit and conscious interest in seeing certain kinds of films in other than commercial, theatrical settings. Though this desire to see particular kinds of films was not necessarily new, the possibility of securing such films for exhibition was indeed catalysed by 16mm technologies.

Writers for early film journals readily recognized the importance of acquiring and securing the means of exhibition. An editorial in the first issue of *Close Up*, an early and internationally distributed film journal, stated:

> Before the full artistic possibilities of the cinema can be explored, it will be necessary to evolve an efficient and cheap projector for private use. The public of the future should be able to buy or borrow films as it now

[99] "Wealth of the Home Libraries," *World Film News and Television Progress* 1.5 (1936): 33.

> buys or borrows books...it is almost impossible to see any film over two years old, however important to the historian of cinematography.[100]

Close-Up was a politically charged magazine, featuring anti-censorship manifestoes and other radical critiques of dominant film culture. The survival on this kind of critique was, in part, seen as dependent on control of exhibition/projection. If films were to be integrated into an ongoing socio-aesthetic critical community (based on film production and reception), securing the very means by which such activities could be conducted was paramount.

Several years later a similar call appeared in *Cinema Quarterly*, a journal largely dedicated to models of civic cinema, linked close to the British documentary movement of the period. Sub-standard film, a generic term for non-35mm film of which 16mm was the most prominent example, was considered one solution to two ongoing problems in the development of non-commercial cinema: (1) the need for experimentation and (2) the problem of repertory. Norman Wilson, frequent commentator for *Cinema Quarterly*, suggested:

> If all the worthwhile films, after being fully exploited in the theatres, could be reduced to sub-standard dimensions it would be possible to form private and public libraries, so that the student or any owner of a home projector could obtain and see films which are now finally inaccessible after their commercial exploitation...It seems to have occurred to few people that the film, like the printed book, is a permanent record. Yet that is one of its main characteristics. That being so, it is reasonable that copies of films should be as readily accessible as books are.[101]

Developing a critical and artistic community around film required that films be available for general and studious viewing. The idea that film was a permanent record overlapped

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[100] "Comment and Review," *Close Up* 1 (July 1927): 51-52.

[101] Norman Wilson, "The Sub-Standard Film," *Cinema Quarterly* 2.1 (1933): 2-3.

easily with the desire to establish a permanent library that would both gather these records—old and new, aesthetic and photo-realistic—making them continually available to the public.[102] The very survival of the cinema as a vibrant expressive form was linked to this possibility. To further contribute to this project, journals such as *Cinema Quarterly* set out to review 16mm films in existing, primarily commercial, substandard libraries. In doing so, they came to more clearly recognize that just as desired films were difficult to locate and therefore exhibit, so too were old films and "film classics."[103] By 1934, the staff of the journals had taken it upon themselves to generate a record of available sub-standard films which were of a documentary, educational or experimental nature in order to facilitate 16mm film exchange. Even information about such films was at a premium, let alone the film themselves.

Importantly, calls for increased access to films had also acquired a historical dimension, as an expanding film culture increasingly looked beyond the current commercial offerings. While the example of *Cinema Quarterly* obviously reflects trends in British film culture of the period, their efforts bespeak a growing demand in film culture generally. Not only were these journals distributed outside of Britain but the film culture which was emerging internationally at this time faced similar challenges. Partly reflective of this was the contemporaneous emergence of film archives.

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[102] 16mm was particularly important in the United Kingdom as 16mm was not initially covered by its censorship provisions which fell under a "public protection" clause, initially designed to protect people from nitrate fires. As such, images that had been censored by government and county councils could gain entry on 16mm non-flammable film. Many Soviet films entered the country this way. For example see "Russian Classics on 16mm," *Cinema Quarterly* 2.4 (1934): 262.

[103] See "Reviews of Sub-Standard Films," *Cinema Quarterly* 1.1 (1932): 58.

The strong link between film libraries and what we have come to call early film archives is an important one as it serves to place the development of archives in a broader socio-historical perspective. Film libraries were a response to the expanding utility of film and the perceived need to make more films, more accessible as cultural objects which should not be entirely beholden to commercial and ephemeral distribution and exhibition. In many cases, this involved a highly selective library, cultivated along a variety of ideological interests. Nevertheless, these interests were diverse sometimes within, but often between, libraries. Meanwhile, this same period marks a significant turning point in the material and ideological history of collecting and saving films as broadly mandated film archives are generally understood to have also emerged. The ideas and practices crystallized by the archive movement have a considerably longer history, with roots in key film cultural issues—access to and distribution of films, the civic function of films, and extra-theatrical film exhibition—issues also bearing clear relation to those of the film library.

Not surprisingly, institutions we have come to understand as the first film archives largely took the name "film libraries," combining the project to save films with the aim of increasing access to certain kinds of films in non-profit, non-theatrical settings. For example, the libraries of the British Film Institute and the Museum of Modern Art similarly set out to solve distribution and exhibition problems by establishing active circulating libraries available in both 35mm and 16mm. The key difference between early archives and contemporaneous film libraries was that archives had significantly more funding and were separated more fully from commercial distribution activities. Eventually, film archives accepted the challenge of preservation as well. Yet, the pressing

nature of preservation did not immediately affect their first activities. Their initial goals were to recover a neglected film history, to collect films and to make them available to suitable educational and cultural organisations that qualified under the legal agreements established between archives and copyright holders.

Additional links between film libraries and archives existed during this period. One was that as various film libraries eventually proved to be unprofitable, their collections became an important source for archival collections. Moreover, both institutions shared the same technological infrastructure. Film archives and libraries primarily fed non-theatrical audiences which increasingly made use of 16mm equipment. The growing network of 16mm projectors was crucial to the success of these early archival projects as it was the easiest way to get library and archival films on screens. Establishing ongoing demand for these programs was also a crucial source of legitimation for these institutions. In other words, feeding and therefore expanding the 16mm circuit was the most feasible way of reaching the largest public. A key example of this is MoMA's Film Library's efforts to act as a broker for educational institutions interested in purchasing projectors, promising cost reductions and payment plans to those so interested.[104] Supplying this circuit with films, information about films and acting as a central point of contact and coordination for groups otherwise acting in isolation of each

[104] This is stated clearly in numerous Film Library catalogues and bulletins. In later years, Iris Barry would also admit that the bulk of travelling exhibits and circulating films were in 16mm largely because the schools, museums and film groups to which they lent them were only equipped for 16mm exhibition. This was noted with some regret because of the superior quality of 35mm-projection. See Iris Barry, "Why Wait for Posterity," *Hollywood Quarterly* 1.2 (1946): 131-137.

other were integral elements of MoMA's early archival plan.[105] These same goals were also integral to the work of the National Film Library as well. Within its official mandate, the National Film Library announced intentions to coordinate and amplify the work of specialist film libraries, to cooperate with film institutes and central libraries in other countries for the reciprocal interchange of films and to organise a local system for film distribution, through which the above entities might be supplied.[106] The National Film Library sought to feed the very film circuits which were largely made possible by 16mm film and the smaller libraries which preceded it, in effect, becoming the library of libraries.

It is important not to overestimate the similarities in film libraries and archives of this period. Each archive had its own specific mandate and function. There were many more film libraries than film archives, and the libraries served more diverse and specific constituencies. Nevertheless, the formation of archives and libraries during this period reflects a more general cultural shift toward integrating films into private, public and civic activities. Further, both libraries and archives were underwritten generally by the film-utopian sensibilities so prominent throughout the period: specifically cinematic qualities were uniquely conducive to building a better, modern world. Both libraries and archives also embodied the idea of access to a comprehensive store of moving images. Both were also explicitly linked to the continued survival of film as a relevant and integral medium to modern life, freed from purely commercial restraints that were often

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[105] John Abbott and Iris Barry, "An Outline of a Project for Founding the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art," Department of Film Series, Film Study Center Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art, 1935: 4.

[106] British Film Institute. *The National Film Library: Its Work and Requirements* (London: British Film Institute. 1935) 11.

associated pejoratively with entertaining rather than educational or civic functions. Importantly, film libraries and archives were linked the very utopianism of film itself. The film archive further integrated a utopian use of the past, as old films were construed as essential building blocks for the future. Thus, while the film library provided the promise by which various communities could be connected to events or movements or forms of expression currently unfolding around the globe or next door, the archive connected its community to events and expressions of the past. Both institutions played on a futuristic sensibility about why collecting, saving and seeing films in the present would impact upon the future.

More research needs to be done on these various film libraries in order to identify the films they contained, the audiences they served and the impact they had. My purpose had been to demonstrate that smaller shifts in film culture during this period were relevant to establishing the context for film archives during the 1930s, archives which were conceived by members of film culture who actively sought to ensure that more films would be seen. For many archivists, 16mm was an imperfect solution to a vexing problem: how to foster film appreciation, study and criticism with limited means. The quality of 16mm did not please film purists. Nevertheless, 16mm exhibition was better than no exhibition at all. The formation of film libraries was partly an effort to wrest control away from commercial exhibitors whose tastes did not suit smaller, more specialised groups determined to shape film to their purposes. At times, this activity was politically subversive, such as that engaged in by the WFPL: at other times it was more complementary to dominant industry trends, such as that of the educational movement, the ACL and, of course, the explicitly commercial libraries such as the Kodascope and

Filmo Libraries. Explicitly formal concerns also emerged at this time, appealing to aesthetes and politicos alike. For instance, Eisenstein's films were seen on 16mm both by members of the WFPL and by the New York Film Society with its high-aesthetic concerns. The one thing such screenings had in common was the feeding of a non-theatrical circuit of film exhibition. The film library was one link in a greater and more complex chain, a storehouse of knowledge that was subject to the seemingly contradictory pulls of capitalism—positioning film both as knowledge and as commodity—on the one hand, and the sprawling use of these conditions by a mobile public on the other.

IV. Chapter 3

Debating Film Matters: Alfred H. Barr, Film and Modern Art

> 70,000,000 people are said to attend cinemas each week in the United States. The very great influence of the motion picture in forming the taste and affecting the life of the large bulk of the population is well-known. This influence has been deplored and, occasionally, lauded...[yet] the situation is very much as though no novels were available to the public excepting the current year's output. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that had the novel since Defoe and Behn been known under circumstances similar to those under which the film is known, the repute of the novels and the level of creation in novel-writing would both have remained considerably lower than they are.
>
> - Iris Barry and John Abbott[1]

The Museum of Modern Art opened on November 7, 1929, nine days after the stock market crash that triggered the Great Depression. The museum was established at the behest of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Lillie P. Bliss and Mary Quinn Sullivan. Dubbed "the ladies," all three were wealthy patrons of the arts with tastes for painting and sculpture emerging from modern European art movements. America, they decided, needed a museum in which such works could be properly exhibited and appreciated. Thus, the first American modern art museum was born, a privately endowed institution. Criticised early on for its seeming status as a playground for the rich, it was nevertheless celebrated for its bold expansion of American aesthetic sensibilities.[2] Regardless of how MoMA was judged, it fits readily into a long history of American philanthropy and the arts and therefore into an ongoing dialogue about art, class and cultural value, a dialogue

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[1] John Abbott and Iris Barry, "An Outline of a Project for Founding the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art" 1935 (Department of Film Series, Film Study Center Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art) 2.

neither simple nor uncontested. Within the museum and without debates persisted about its aesthetic choices, its role in containing and/or catalysing critique and its attempts to ritualise and/or democratise art.

During the museum's earliest phases, the trustees were largely interested in the new forms taken by traditional artistic media in Europe, which ranged from impressionist painting to dadaist sculpture. Nevertheless, the trustees—comprised largely of bankers, academics and wealthy art patrons—soon began to accede begrudgingly to first-director Alfred Barr's unusual museological practices. They agreed to incorporate all of the modern arts into their museum: painting, sculpture, prints and drawings, architecture, commercial art (posters, advertising, packaging), industrial art (furniture, fountain pens, automobiles), movies, theatre design, and photography.[3] Toasters, postcards and Garbo would—in concept and in practice—accompany Picasso, Kandinsky and Renoir. This proposal broke considerably with the contemporaneous practices of other American museums, providing a challenging intervention into the high/low cultural distinctions that characterised the period. Additionally, the museum demonstrated a clear concern for making art accessible, partly by encouraging its application in American educational institutions. Supporting this sentiment were travelling exhibitions, circulated from 1931 to other museums, department stores and schools. The ideas of John Dewey and the progressive education movement influenced museum policies, and as early as 1937 a formal program was launched to integrate aesthetic values, American life and citizenship.

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[2] Russel Lynes, *Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Atheneum, 1973) 14.

[3] Alfred Barr Jr., "The 1929 Multidepartmental Plan for the Museum of Modern Art: Its Origins, Development, and Partial Realization," 1941 (Department of Film Series, Film Study Center Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art, New York) 4.

With its embrace of modern mass technological forms and everyday objects, MoMA fit readily into this movement.[4] Art, it was suggested, was all around and, therefore, everywhere accessible. This logic was intended to serve the ideal of making art and democracy complimentary rather than antithetical. Traditional conceptions of high art and its institutions were not liquidated; instead, their lines were redrawn in order that more people could ostensibly benefit from a new art in a new age.

MoMA's history and the project to build an American art museum around a diverse European-based aesthetic movement entails a study far more vast and complex than can be presented here.[5] Rather, this chapter will sketch what "modern" meant for MoMA in the 1930s, it will do so by focussing on the figure of Alfred H. Barr Jr., using him as a link between debates about modernism, the museum and film. The place of film in the overlapping development of ideas about modernity and modernism will first be addressed in order to situate activities of the museum within a broader, international debate. With this established, Barr's interest in modern art and in film will then be discussed and placed within the context of the new museum. The Film Library emerged from a widening divide in American film culture, one that more and more associated popular films not only with debased cultural standards but also with oppressive capitalist systems. Collectively, these debates suggest growing concern for the kind of role film would come to play in the field of socio-aesthetic critique. The Film Library's project

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[4] The educational programs of the museum are discussed more fully in Carol Morgan, "From Modernist Utopia to Cold War Reality," *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: Continuity and Change*, vol. 5, Studies in Modern Art (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1995) 151-173. John Dewey's ideas about art, the individual and civilisation can be found in John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1934).

[5] For general histories of the institution see Lynes and Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *Alfred H. Barr. Jr.: Missionary for the Modern* (New York: Contemporary Books, 1989).

will be placed alongside these debates and considered an overlooked intervention into them.

Modernism, Modernity and Film

European modernism was a vast movement spanning national, political and aesthetic borders. It is best understood as an umbrella term, encompassing a broad range of movements in literature and the performing and visual arts. The term groups together artists struggling adequately to express and respond to the changing conditions of modern life itself, often referred to as modernity: urbanisation, industrialisation, the rise of technology, the increase of leisure time, the rise of consumer capitalism and the reconfigurations of time, space and consciousness which resulted. In tracing the history of modernism, Raymond Williams has suggested that the modernist critique began with a need to manage a new kind of art which challenged the precepts of mimetic representation; this art required protection from art institutions unfriendly to its further development. The attack on traditional conceptions of art grew, splintering into many parts, travelling to the right and to the left. Some of the more radical elements of modernism, those that Peter Bürger refers to as the "historical avant garde," used the conditions of modernity and the unfolding precepts of modern art to question the very foundation of artistic practice itself.[6] That is, more than seeking inclusion in the established art world, they sought to challenge its foundational concepts—genius, aesthetic autonomy, creativity, tradition—which, they claimed, constituted and sustained the bourgeois institution. They also, therefore, attacked the institution of art itself, charging that it should abandon these ineffectual, hypocritical, and distasteful categories.

These categories were often linked to a critique of dominant systems of power as well, systems that refused to address and adapt to the conditions of modern life. The historical avant garde sought to place the artist at the forefront of a newly politicised movement that turned aesthetic practice into an attack "on a whole social order."[7] Appropriating the power of art—seeking to infuse it with elements of the prosaic, ephemeral, profane, and technological world—the avant garde attempted "to organize a new life praxis from a basis in art," forging a socio-political vision to art itself.[8] Art no longer fell simply within the domain of the beautiful and the sacred. Consequently, objects and forms emerging from urban mass culture became primary materials for many of these experiments.

As Andreas Huyssen has noted, there was a "vital dialectic between the avant garde and mass culture." The crucial place of technology in the very existence of mass culture as well as the imagery it yielded were, therefore, important in the avant garde's attempts to overcome the art/life dichotomy.[9] Importantly, the use of technology differed greatly across these movements. The Dadaists used it to critique bourgeois art culture and to invoke the senseless violence of World War I. The constructivists focussed on the fusion of technology, art and daily life in the spirit of building a new, revolutionary society. Futurism flirted with fascism, linking technology to a perfected, controllable social order. Regardless of the socio-political project, technology fueled the imagination

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[6] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw, Theory and History of Literature, vol. 4 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[7] Raymond Williams, "Introduction," *Visions and Blueprints: Avant-Garde Culture and Radical Politics in Early Twentieth Century Europe*, eds. Edward Timms and Peter Collier (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988) 3.

[8] Bürger 49.

[9] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) 4.

of particular modernist movements, including surrealism. The adoption of technology as a method and object of analysis also effected a new kind of aesthetic practice in the works of collage, assemblage, montage and photomontage, finding its most complete fulfillment, as Huyssen notes, in photography and film, art forms derived from and designed for reproducibility.[10]

Film played a readily identifiable role in modernist practice generally. The idea of film influenced other art practices and film itself was taken up as a method of experiment and mode of expression. The surrealists, the constructivists, and the dadaists each used film differently. The possibilities of abstract form-in-motion were explored in the works of Walter Ruttmann, Fernand Léger and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. Reality was reformulated and infused with subjective, unconscious experiences in the works of Salvadore Dalí and Luis Buñuel. Moreover, film was proselytized by a range of artists who asserted that film was not just a medium well-suited to expressing modern conditions, it was *the* medium for expressing modern conditions. If the experience of modernity is understood primarily as the experience of the fleeting, the fragmentary, sensorial intensification and spatio-temporal disjunction, a set of ideas set in motion by Charles Baudelaire,[11] then film's ability to condense and manipulate time and space, to juxtapose moving images and to make visible that which the human eye once found imperceptible made film a compelling and, at times, virtuous expressive medium.

A representative proponent of the idea that film was a crucial tool for exploring the spatio-temporal disjunction symptomatic of modernity was Soviet filmmaker and

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[10] Huyssen 9.

[11] See Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1965).

theoretician, Dziga Vertov. Likening the camera to a "mechanical eye," Vertov asserted that through the cinema the modern world was fully revealed; its perpetual motion, its fleeting moments and its misguided dependence on linear conceptions of time and space were made apparent. He wrote:

> I am eye. I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, am showing you a world, the likes of which only I can see. I free myself from today and forever from human immobility, I am in constant movement, I approach and draw away from objects, I crawl under them, I move alongside the mouth of a running horse, I cut into a crowd at full speed, I run in front of running soldiers, I turn on my back, I rise with an airplane, I fall and soar together with falling and rising bodies. This is I, apparatus, maneuvering in the chaos of movements, recording one movement after another in the most complex combinations. Freed from the obligations of shooting sixteen-seventeen frames per second, freed from the frame of time and space, I co-ordinate any and all points of the universe, wherever I may plot them. My road is toward the creation of a fresh perception of the world. Thus, I decipher in a new way the world unknown to you.[12]

Vertov's experiments with newsreels and actuality footage were driven by his belief in the power of the camera to reveal an "unknown" world and thus to forge a specifically modern, revolutionary politic to a specifically modern, revolutionary audience. He was primarily concerned with how these experiments might effect a new form of consciousness and hence social transformation, relocating his work in a methodical search for truth rather than what he deemed to be the fantastical world of dramatic art. His writing throughout the 1920s demonstrates a compelling and utopian belief in the ability of the camera to evoke a socially and politically vibrant form of cinematic knowledge in a world he understood largely in cinematic terms. Vertov deemed "leprous" films based on romance and drama. He therefore asserted that the future of cinema art could only exist by denying its present. The precision of the mechanical eye and its

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[12] Dziga Vertov, "The Council of Three," trans. Kevin O'Brian, *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) 17-18.

wrestle with motion, he asserted, would incite new precision for humanity itself: "Our path leads through the poetry of machines, from the bungling citizen to the perfect electric man."[13] Vertov's new society was intimately bound to the power and poetry of the machine, powerfully embodied by the cinema itself.

The idea that the cinema was a critical link between two seemingly irreconcilable phenomena—human creativity and machine precision—carried profound resonance across seemingly disparate film practices and social projects. One example of this was the work of documentary filmmakers active throughout the 1930s. The sentiment is readily apparent in the writing of Paul Rotha in 1932:

> Lingering contemplation of beauty, that attribute of the well-fed, has no place in the aesthetic of the cinema. This is an age of sudden emotions and instantaneous reactions. This science of the machine-cinema assails us, demanding the co-operation both conscious and sub-conscious of the audience. Shock values are the materials of dramatic construction.[14]

Rotha suggested that the cinema was the "perfect fusion between art and industry" and was therefore a link between the chaos of creativity and the reliability of the machine. These ideas were eagerly applied in the expanding social-democratic film movement, exemplified in the work of the British documentarists but carried on in the work of many American documentary filmmakers as well. Documentary filmmaking became, in Charles Wolfe's words, "a discovery procedure, an artistic practice, and a social act."[15] This was an act and an art gesturing toward the limits of traditional conceptions of human

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[13] Dziga Vertov, "We: Variant of a Manifesto," trans. Kevin O'Brian, *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) 8.

[14] Paul Rotha, "Approach to a New Cinema," *Cinema Quarterly* 1.2 (1932): 18.

[15] Charles Wolfe, "Straight Shots and Crooked Plots: Social Documentary and the Avant-Garde in the 1930s," *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Avant-Garde, 1919-1945*, ed. Jan Christopher Horak (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995) 236.

creativity, suggesting that it was necessarily augmented not only by the machine but also by a socio-aesthetic project—a quintessentially modernist proposition.

Film's aesthetic-intellectual ferment was not confined to the modernist avant garde nor to documentary film practice. Other modernist film movements emerged in France and in Germany. During the interwar period what has been termed "narrative art cinema" developed, exemplified by the films of Jacques Feyder, Abel Gance and Jean Epstein in France and by Fritz Lang, F.W. Murnau, and Robert Wiene in Germany. These films were also influenced by an exchange of ideas with modernist movements, most notably French impressionism and German expressionism. Artists working under these rubrics tended to be less concerned with attaching social and political change to aesthetic experiment and more concerned with pursuing cinematic art that would compete with other arts in seriousness and depth, using the cinema to pursue a new kind of psychological realism and beauty. These were qualities often derided by the non-narrative avant garde, as well as by filmmakers such as Eisenstein who were committed to reformulating narrative to politicized form and ends.

Concurrent with these developments was the spread of American cinema internationally throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, which impacted on modernist film movements. While some members of these movements self-consciously opposed the commercial cinema, others embraced it. The surrealists in particular favoured popular, "debased" forms of cinematic representation and exhibition. They heralded slapstick and spectacle, celebrating films such as *King Kong* (1932), the comedies of Mack Sennett, the Marx Brothers, W. C. Fields, Charlie Chaplin and Laurel and Hardy, partly because they

rejected simultaneously bourgeois norms of behaviour and representation.[16] The films of D. W. Griffith, Charlie Chaplin and Walt Disney also had considerable impact on the work of Sergei Eisenstein and the cultural and aesthetic criticism of Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin.[17] Examples of early American cinema were also often screened in the emerging circuit of European cine clubs and film societies.

While film (commercial, experimental, narrative, abstract and independent) had become part of the unfolding Euro-modernist scene, a growing number of U.S.-based intellectuals and critics were focussing their energies on the glut of commercial films. These critics, emanating from the left and the right, claimed that mass culture, of which Hollywood films were especially symptomatic, was responsible for the decline of crucial cultural categories that divided high and low, original and derivative, accomplished and debased. Critics such as Clement Greenberg, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Dwight MacDonald lamented the dissolution of these categories, asserting that mass culture, and in particular the great bulk of formulaic Hollywood films, had contributed inestimably to a state of cultural decline.[18] The very conditions that made art possible became threatened under the swell of commercial product. While each of these critics had different views of what they considered desirable alternatives to these conditions and of

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[16] J.H. Mathews, *Surrealism and Film* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1971) 11-50.

[17] See Jay Leyda, ed. *Eisenstein on Disney*, trans. Alan Upchurch (London: Methuen, 1988). See also Sergei Eisenstein and Sergei Yutkevich, "The Eighth Art: On Expressionism, America and, of course, Chaplin," [orig. 1922]; Sergei Eisenstein, "The Montage of Film Attractions"; Eisenstein called Griffith "the great old man of all of us," in "The Dynamic Square"; He also proclaims that Disney is the best director in America in Mason Ham, "Rin-Tin-Tin Does His Tricks for Noted Russian Movie Man," [interview, orig. 1930]. All of these have been published in *Eisenstein Writings, 1922-1934*, ed. Richard Taylor (London: British Film Institute, 1988) 29-32; 39-58; 217; 203-204.

[18] Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," [orig. 1939] *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961) 3-21.

what indeed "art" was, they shared strikingly similar disdain for the objects of consumer culture which Greenberg called *kitsch* and Adorno and Horkheimer reduced to standardised and numbing products of the "culture industry."

Greenberg argued that *kitsch*—mass-produced cultural forms—made culture itself impossible. Culture and art, according to Greenberg, demanded reflective and meditative responses from its patrons; *ersatz* culture demanded only money and immediate impressions. The true artist, according to Greenberg, "imitates God by creating something solely on its own terms," such that content is dissolved completely into form and the work cannot be "reduced in whole or in part to anything but itself."[19] He felt that kitsch—chromeotypes, magazines, advertisements, slick and pulp fiction, Tin Pan Alley music and Hollywood movies—imitates and therefore debases genuine culture by its sheer omnipresence:

> Kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas. Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations. Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same. Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in life of our times. Kitsch pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money—not even their time.[20]

Horkheimer and Adorno approached this problem somewhat differently, asserting that art needed to be free from the crushing imperatives of the culture industry so that it could retain its critical and expressive autonomy. Unlike Greenberg they did not seek an art that was autonomous and therefore supportive of the social hierarchies accompanying traditional aesthetic ones, they sought an aesthetic autonomy which removed art and the artist from social conditions which might prevent or inhibit creative and critical activity,

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[19] Greenberg 6.

[20] Greenberg 10.

part of the value of which is to differentiate among expressive forms. Like Greenberg's model, Horkheimer and Adorno's advanced the idea that aesthetic autonomy could only be supported by a cultural elite. Crucially different for Horkheimer and Adorno, however, was the function served by this cultural elite, which they believed could provide a radical and intellectual force to combat domination by oppressive political and social forces. Only "ruthless unity" resulted from the culture industries, through which the "whole world is made to pass" because of its powerful machinations. Moreover, this unity stunted the imagination and spontaneity of the spectator, disabling any capacity for sustained thought in the relentless rush of facts.[21] The very originality and autonomy of art would serve as a critique of bourgeois notions of art as well as of the broader conditions in which these notions circulated and through which the conditions were reinforced.

Important to mention also are the contemporary critics who celebrated the imminent affront that film posed to exclusive definitions of art, deemed hopelessly out of touch with its ideal role of social engagement. Most notably, writing in Germany and later exiled in Paris, critics such as Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer embraced

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[21] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry as Mass Deception," *Dialectic of Enlightenment* [orig. 1944], trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1982) 126-127. Variations on this critique had been mounting as American left-critics had been forwarding Marxist-inspired critiques of Hollywood in journals such as *Close-Up*, *The New Masses*, *Workers' Theatre* and *The Partisan Review*. Two noteworthy advocates of this critique are Harry Alan Potamkin and Dwight MacDonald. Both writers linked the content and form of Hollywood film to the broader goal of retaining and furthering the imbalance of social and political power. Some of this writing has been republished as Dwight MacDonald, "A Theory of Mass Culture," [orig. 1953] *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, ed. Bernard Rosenberg (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1962) 59-73; and Lewis Jacobs, ed., *The Compound Cinema: The Film Writings of Harry Alan Potamkin* (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1977). Rather than simply a critique of capitalism, some of the critical writing of this period also attacks the influence exercised over film production by groups such as the Catholic Legion of Decency and other conservative groups active in the battle for censorship. This is especially evident in Potamkin

the challenge of film to traditional notions of art. Benjamin's now-famous essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," suggested that because of its infinite reproducibility, its rearrangement of spatial and temporal relations and the new context of mass exhibition, the irrevocably damaged aura of art could no longer support the ritualised conditions in which bourgeois or high-art maintained itself. For Benjamin, film held the utopian hope that,

> by close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring common place milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action. Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go travelling. With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended.[22]

The radical potential of cinema was its ability to show the world as it had not been shown before. In doing so, Benjamin hoped, film would shock the masses into recognising the prison-world of modern conditions. The state of distraction invoked by the cinema was a key component of its revolutionary capacities. Benjamin believed that through the distraction of the cinema—which mirrored the distraction of modern life—a new form of engaged and politically charged consciousness might evolve. As a distinct visual form and a new kind of viewing experience, film suggested a radical form of vision; the world would be irretrievably changed. The utopianism expressed by Benjamin in this essay,

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"The Eyes of the Movie," 243-269; esp. 264-269. These groups also gain mention in Adorno and Horkheimer's famous essay "The Culture Industry," 127-128.

[22] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," [orig. 1936] trans. Harry Zohn, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) 236.

referred to by Huyssen as the last of the avant garde,[23] indicates the powerful imaginative hold film exercised over intellectuals of the time. Film's resonance with the very conditions of modern life convinced some that it held an important key to critiquing and perhaps escaping the dreamlike conditions that consumer capitalism had reintroduced to the world.

In his writing for *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Kracauer expressed similar opinions of film and its intimate relationship to modern life. Using film primarily to enact a kind of symptomatic cultural criticism, he read film and photography as phenomena emblematic of a particular material and historical condition. Film-as-phenomena and film-as-form upheld the possibility of unsettling dominant, dated and bourgeois conceptions of art:

> Enterprises that ignore our historical context and attempt to reconstruct a form of state, a community, a mode of artistic creation that depends upon a type of man who by all rights no longer exists—such enterprises do not transcend the mass ornament's empty and superficial shallowness but flee from its reality. The process leads directly through the center of the mass ornament, not away from it.[24]

Kracauer believed that art should address the "pressing needs of our time"[25] and that film held the most hope for invoking proper recognition of these needs, blurred as they were by a general state of existential distraction. According to Kracauer, the individual bourgeois genius and the traditional means of art could no longer speak to these conditions. The institutions of art and the concepts that supported it found a radically

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[23] Huyssen 14.

[24] Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," [orig. 1927] *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essyas*, ed. Tom Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) 86.

[25] Siegfried Kracauer, "Cult of Distraction: On Berlin's Picture Palaces," [orig. 1926] *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. Tom Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) 326.

reconfigured form in the ambiguous mass ornaments of consumer culture. They alone contained the truth and the lies of modern conditions.

While Kracauer and Benjamin have become important in recent work on the intellectual history of this period and the role of film in thinking through modernity, their philosophical fragments were not then published in America and likely had little direct impact on American debates about film and art. Their ideas do, however, resonate with those of the contemporaneously established Film Library. While film clearly did not eliminate the hold of idealist or institutional models of art, it did pose a challenge to the way these models would come to be thought about; contributing to the dialogue about the relationship of art to commercialism and popularity. Further, the ambivalence about film evident in the writing of Kracauer and Benjamin provides a somewhat refreshing approach to the vexed question: what kind of medium was film? Kraucauer and Benjamin did not wholly accept the business of film, but they were also unwilling to reject it outrightly. Both maintained that through cinematic phenomena, essential insights into modern conditions and mass psychology would be gained. The Film Library embodied a similar ambivalence as it sought to secure the material means through which such questions might be asked and also to supply a site wherein this ambivalence could be explored. In the 1930s, film was clearly a medium with many forms and functions with nuances easily lost in sweeping critiques embodied by concepts such as the "culture industries" and kitsch. Nevertheless, critiques then dominant in America at this time point to a widening divide between "properly" artistic cinema, which was ostensibly free from

commercialism, and the populist forms of American film deemed as democratic art by some and as crass and even dangerous by others.[26]

Within critiques of mass culture and its relationship to art, film (most often Hollywood film) found a special place in the perceived attacks on the status of this art, defined within the domain of an intellectual and cultural elite. This critique of film-as-mass-culture was based on two different but identifiable precepts; one was political and the other was related to hierarchies of taste and value. The former, represented by Horkheimer and Adorno's seminal essay, depends on the logic that the capitalist production base of film necessarily obliterated the possibility of both genuine cultural expressions (high and low) and of critical interpretations of them. The latter, exemplified by Greenberg, was undergirded by precisely the idealist models of art that many strains of modernism rejected. These models required and implicitly prescribed aesthetic hierarchies, rejecting cultural forms that did not emanate from sanctified and exclusive institutional processes of approval which were partly concealed by such concepts as purity and autonomy. Bourgeois tastes and radical Marxist critiques collided to support the high/low divide. Both often overlooked the complex interaction and cross-fertilization of high and low forms, especially as they manifested across film forms and styles, instead they favoured sweeping critique of basic cultural categories and systems.

This debate is an important backdrop for the Film Library's early years as well as the museum's. Film was increasingly associated with debased cultural standards (a longstanding sentiment in American culture) and with a broader socio-aesthetic

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[26] Gilbert Seldes and Vachel Lindsay are key examples of those furthering the view that film would both democratise the arts and that it was itself a new form of folk or democratic art. See Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture* [orig. 1915; 1922] (New York: Liveright, 1970); and Gilbert Seldes, *The Seven Lively Arts* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1924).

condition: the increasingly explicit fusion of politics, aesthetics and film. This association was evident in a wide array of film related projects, ranging from attacks on Hollywood as a site of high-cultural liquidation to the conditions under which films were being made and circulated in the Soviet Union, Germany, Italy and Spain. State control over production and exhibition had increased generally and dramatically throughout the 1930s. In America, the influence of religious and women's groups had resulted in an increasingly rigid enforcement of the industry's self-regulatory Hays Code. Internationally, film was characterised more by contestation and control than by the aesthetic and intellectual ferment ascendant only a decade earlier. American and European films made before this shift became models for a politically diversified cultural elite of what film *could* be, free from overly rationalized industrial imperatives and enriched by a vibrant European modernism; what film *could* be was, in part, based in nostalgia for what film *had been*. This sense of loss was further exacerbated by the industry's shift to synchronised sound during the late 1920s and early 1930s. The Film Library emerged from within the nexus of this perceived rise of commercialism and censorship in American film, the decline of European modernist film projects, and the technological and formal shifts wrought by sound. These shifts in film culture fed an increasing divide amongst cinephiles and critics alike, exacerbating existing prejudices and instilling a sometimes muted and sometimes clear sense of loss.

The American Museum of Modern Art

Alfred H. Barr, the museum's first director, is widely acknowledged to have been its most important early animating figure. Schooled in Art History at Princeton and Harvard, Barr was influenced by the ideas of Charles Rufus Morey, an Art History

medievalist, under whom Barr studied at Princeton. Morey's classes demonstrated an inclusive approach to medieval art by addressing a wide range of aesthetic objects, including illumination, wall painting, sculpture, architecture, handicrafts and folk art. Barr was impressed by the possibilities of this unconventional approach for understanding both the past and the present of art, persuaded that all visual forms of an era might be relevant for exploring its distinct contributions to art history and aesthetic development. This insight provided Barr with the first and perhaps most foundational of his assumptions regarding museological practice, manifested only a few years later at MoMA: the history of art is best understood as a cross-pollination of all aesthetic forms native to a period, including folk art, everyday objects, and commercial objects. Art need not necessarily subscribe to ostensibly ahistorical conceptions of reverential beauty. Art might also be useful, or at least be understood, as a dialogue between the creative and the utilitarian, the formal and the functional. In short, Barr practiced a particularly modern form of history. Integrating this perspective with the challenges of modern art in modern times, Barr organised his museological practice around the belief that "modern art" was a vast and complex movement whose products could be found across political and national borders, across aesthetic movements and, crucially, among the complex interactions of the machine and the human. These convictions, combined with a devout belief in artistic freedom and the importance of public accessibility to art exhibition and education, provided the basis for his activities at MoMA.[27]

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[27] Barr clearly expressed his belief in artistic freedom in an essay, appropriately entitled "Artistic Freedom," [orig. 1954] *Defining Modern Art, Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.*, eds. Irving Sandler and Amy Newman (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 1986) 220-225.

Lawrence Levine has characterised the practices of American museums during this period as reflecting a broad shift underway in American cultural institutions generally. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, concepts of "culture" and the more specific phenomena under this rubric (opera, theatre, libraries and museums) became increasingly associated with ideals of contemplation, reverence and seriousness, and were invoked alongside such terms as "worth," "purity" and "beauty."[28] Art museums as well as other institutions of culture had gradually come to embody the sentiment, inspired by Mathew Arnold's writings, that culture was the best of what had been thought, known or expressed.[29] As a part of this shift, museological practice moved from the general and the eclectic to the exclusive and the specific, focussing on the appreciation of great works rather than on a fascination with curiosities.[30] Moreover, as Levine notes, cultural institutions were construed as existing apart from the everyday, depending on an "exaggerated antithesis between art and life, between the aesthetic and the Philistine, the worthy and the unworthy, the pure and the tainted."[31] Complementing this imposition of distance was a coincident Eurocentric bias in American culture that served to further demarcate and fortify aesthetic hierarchies, marking art as something spatially and temporally distant. As Levine documents, Eurocentric biases were common among the American elite, who preferred the idea that what is truly cultural should be approached

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[28] Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[29] Levine 223; See also Mathew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

[30] Levine 146–160.

[31] Levine 232.

with "disciplined knowledge" and "serious purpose" and most importantly with a "feeling of reverence."[32] Additionally, looking back to the great European masters was also part of a conscious gesture towards models of culture that were intended to civilize Americans. In short, institutionalized Eurocentric high/low distinctions were part of a larger project to shape the social body—to civilize America by taming it. As such, art museums became more akin to shrines rather than the comparatively open, democratic spaces they were in the 19th century. Important here is what this established tradition implied for integration of the emerging generation of mechanical and industrial modes of expression by art institutions. Many of these modes—films, photography, design, advertising—found a comfortable home in American consumer culture, a set of relations antithetical to dominant conceptions of art. In short, if such objects were to benefit from and contribute to museological resources, they would have to compete with models of creative genius and authenticity in which there was little place for technology, mass marketability, popularity or function.

Alfred Barr occupied a complex relationship to this generalized condition. He shared the Eurocentric bias of many American elites, but he simultaneously rejected the aesthetically conservative form that had taken. His taste broke boldly with the almost exclusive emphasis in American museums and art history departments on the work of great dead European artists. Rather, he favoured the new arts emanating from European art circles—impressionism, cubism, dadaism, surrealism and constructivism—much of which implicitly or explicitly rejected traditional bourgeois models prescribing what art should be. Despite its European origin, the unconventional and often challenging nature

[32] Levine 146.

of this art did not sit well with those who comprised established American art circles. Many were skeptical and some were outraged by Barr's provocations.[33]

Before his arrival at MoMA in 1929, Barr had taught art history courses at Wellesley College. Through these courses he was able to experiment not only with his ideas about art but also his ideas about teaching art. In doing so, he adopted unorthodox pedagogical methods. Because of his conviction that art was an organic, cross-pollination of forms that changed with socio-historical configurations, Barr readily acknowledged the wide range of modern influences on contemporary aesthetic formations. For instance, he openly admitted to being influenced by magazines as different as *The Dial* and *Vanity Fair*.[34] In order to effect a pedagogical style that would accommodate his predisposition, Barr gathered course material from unlikely places ranging from dime-stores to glossy advertisements; he was hindered neither by the bawdy nor the prosaic sources from which they came. When teaching what Irving Sandler has determined to be the first course ever taught on modern art in America,[35] Barr examined posters, advertising, architecture, avant garde and documentary film, and theatre. He invoked a wide variety of examples in class including a wedding announcement designed by Herbert Bayer at the Bauhaus, a bookcase resembling a skyscraper, American Indian masks, fashion drawings from Marshall Field's department store and photographs from Paul Strand, Edward Steichen, Lyonel Fieninger and Man Ray. Barr further encouraged students to study the forms of their everyday worlds, inviting them to consider factory buildings, films,

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[33] For more on this see Marquis 35-46.

[34] Barr Jr. "The Multidepartmental Plan," 2.

[35] Irving Sandler, "Introduction," Newman and Sandler, eds. *Defining Modern Art*, 8.

Victrola records, automobiles and refrigerators.[36] Suddenly art was everywhere and no longer confined to dusty, foreboding art museums or to the imaginary domains of faraway, extinct traditions touted by the American establishment.

Barr actively proselytized his beliefs. Unafraid of mass media, he eagerly used them to forward his ideas about modern art, considering himself to be a popular educator as well as a scholar. An early example of this was the publication in *Vanity Fair* of a questionnaire he used in his courses at Wellesley, entitled simply "A Modern Art Questionnaire." Fifty questions invited the participant to access a remarkable range of aesthetic knowledge derived from contemporary movements in architecture, sculpture, painting, graphic arts, music, prose, drama, poetry, theatre, film, photography and commercial arts, emanating from American, German, Italian, Russian, French and British origins.[37] Specific subjects included: George Gershwin, Henri Matisse, Gilbert Seldes, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, surrealism, Saks-Fifth Avenue,[38] UFA (*Universum-Film Aktiengesellschaft*) and Alfred Steglitz.

Barr was also greatly influenced by art movements underway in Europe that sought to integrate art, artists and contemporary life into intellectually charged and socially relevant configurations that challenged the dominant bourgeois model of art-as-salon. The most marked of these influences was that of the Bauhaus, established in

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[36] Marquis 42.

[37] Alfred Jr. Barr, "A Modern Art Questionnaire," [orig. 1927] Newman and Sandler, eds. *Defining Modern Art*. 56-61.

[38] Saks Fifth Avenue was well known at the time for its window displays of modern art. It is cited here in recognition of its important contributions to popularising "modern mannerism in pictorial and decorative arts."

Germany in 1919 and disbanded in 1933 with Hitler's ascension to power.[39] Barr visited the Bauhaus in Dessau in December of 1927, meeting with Walter Gropius, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Wassily Kandinsky, Oskar Schlemmer, Marcel Breuer, Paul Klee and others.[40]

Barr's appreciation and application of Bauhausian principles reflects a surprising fidelity to the school's official purpose, articulated in its first manifesto,"Bauhaus Manifesto." Walter Gropius, the new school's first director, outlined a program that encouraged recognition of the composite character of art—its "architectonic spirit"—which is lost, he claimed, when it becomes merely a bourgeois "salon art." He asserted that artists of all media must work together to embrace the application of their creativity, and to forge a productive intellectual and material dialectic between form and function:

> Let us then create a new guild of craftsman and artist! Together let us desire, conceive and create the new structure of the future, which will embrace architecture and sculpture and painting in one unity and which will one day rise towards heaven from the hands of a million workers like the crystal symbol of a new faith.[41]

The Bauhaus was a utopian experiment in forging new relations amongst artists, means, methods and their socio-political applications. Its concerns, therefore, also came to include industrial design, graphic arts, stage design, photography and, important for this discussion, film.

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[39] Barr himself admits the profound impact of Bauhaus models on his thinking. See Barr "Multipdepartmental Plan," 2.

[40] Marquis 49.

[41] qtd. in Eva Forgacs, *The Bauhaus Idea and Bauhaus Politics*, trans. John Batki (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995) 27.

Ideas about film and photography developed at the Bauhaus are best known through the writing of Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, whose interest in light, space and kinetics drew him to film. Barr gained exposure to Moholy-Nagy's work while visiting the Bauhaus and explicitly mentions his book, *Painting, Photography, Film*, in the preface to the 1938 Bauhaus exhibition catalogue published by MoMA.[42] Through film, Moholy-Nagy explored the possibilities of lending material shape to non-linear, moving and overlapping visual forms in a way, he believed, that saliently reflected modern urban life:

> Every period has its own optical focus. Our age: that of the film; the electric sign, simultaneity of sensorily perceptible events. It has given us a new, progressively developing creative basis for typography too. Gutenberg's typography, which has endured almost to our own day, moves exclusively in the linear dimension. The intervention of the photographic process has extended it to a new dimensionality, recognised today as total.[43]

According to Moholy-Nagy, film was particularly suited to expressing even inventing new ways to embody peculiarly modern conditions, especially the phenomenological experiences of urban life:

> The visual image has been expanded and even the modern lens is no longer tied to the narrow limits of our eye; no manual means of representation (pencil, brush, etc.) is capable of arresting fragments of the world seen like this; it is equally impossible for manual means of creation to fix the quintessence of a movement; nor should we regard the ability of the lens to distort—the view from below, from above, the oblique view—as in any sense merely negative, for it provides an impartial approach, such as our eyes, tied as they are to the laws of association, do not give...Our vision has only lately developed sufficiently to grasp these connections.[44]

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[42] Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *Painting, Photography, Film* [orig. 1925] (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1969) and Alfred Barr Jr., "Bauhaus 1919-1928: Preface," [orig. 1938] Newman and Sandler, *Defining Modern Art*, 98-100.

[43] Moholy-Nagy 29.

[44] Moholy-Nagy 7.

The camera was a uniquely modern apparatus, endowed with the capacity to reveal truths previously imperceptible; the cinema expanded vision thereby expanding perceptions of the world. According to Moholy-Nagy, the camera did not merely reflect this world but was intimately bound up with it, implicating itself in shifts already underway in human cognitive and perceptual capacities. Its mechanical status was both a virtue and necessity. The role of the artist and therefore of art was to explore appropriate means by which to express this reality. For Moholy-Nagy, these means were decidedly cinematic, non-narrative and dependent on kinetic abstraction.

Barr was, however, taken not only with the writings and experiments of Moholy-Nagy but also with the whole of the Bauhaus experiment. In the catalogue preface mentioned earlier, Barr identified what were for him its most salient dictums: artists of the future should be concerned with industry and mass production rather than individual craftsmanship; art was an interaction and synthesis of various media, including painting, architecture, theatre, photography, weaving, and typography; conventional distinctions between the fine and applied arts should be disregarded; the creative and functional elements of design should work together; the artist should not take refuge in the past but should "be equipped for the modern world in its various aspects, artistic, technical, social, economic, spiritual, so that he may function in society not as a decorator but as a vital participant."[45] The Bauhaus model clearly impressed Barr. Its pursuit of the interaction between fine and applied, abstract and functional art, its heralding of a future-oriented utopianism, its integration of modern conditions and technologies into aesthetic practice, and the idea that the artist was a "vital participant" all struck Barr as compelling. They

[45] Barr "Bauhaus," 100.

are clearly manifest in Barr's plans for MoMA and, in particular, in his conviction that new technological forms occupied an important place in the unraveling world of modern art. It is difficult to determine how the Marxist undertones of the project or the affiliations of its members with the Communist party impacted on Barr. He focussed on unadulterated, vigorous explorations of form and function, machine and human. While he understood that these were inspired by various social and political visions, his writings do not reflect sustained attention to such matters. There is, however, no doubt that Barr's exposure to films of the Bauhaus and elsewhere impacted on his understanding of modern art. He used the names of Moholy-Nagy, Walter Ruttmann and other members of the non-narrative and narrative European avant garde active during this period to garner resources and support for a film department only several years later.

While Barr had a clear interest in contemporary vanguard intellectual and aesthetic experiments, he was equally interested in the relationship of the museum to these experiments. He believed that both the scholar and the museum played an important role in this world. The scholar elucidated the history of particular art movements, demonstrated links between and across artistic modes, and contributed to differentiating quality from mediocrity. The museum ideally became a site for the broader dialogue among critic, collector, artist and public by making art and information about art more accessible and visible. The museum was not a place in which art died. It should be, Barr contended, part of the living dialogue, popular and specialised. By asserting this, Barr hoped to rejuvenate and update traditional conceptions of art, believing that the category "art" was best understood as a dynamic, changing, and challenging set of ideas and practices through which forms high and low, new and old interacted. His passion for

history combined with a concern for the novel, suggesting that the museum should serve as what Kevin Sandler has called a "vast storehouse of ideas."[46] As such, it could provide a site from which living artists and critics could draw to create, renew and challenge assumptions about aesthetic form, content and history. Lastly, Barr actively set out to ensure that the museum served a broad and public educational mandate. He was determined that art and art historical practice would be linked to everyday objects and that art and its study might influence the everyday life of the average citizen. As previously mentioned, this conviction was supported by the museum with its circulating programs which were initiated in 1931, with its educational programs which were begun in 1937, and with its Department of Education which was established in 1951. The educational and ostensibly public mandate of the museum did not, however, resolve other fundamental rifts. Disagreements continued about what kind of museum MoMA would become and, therefore, about what kind of art would be made accessible and how accessibility would be accomplished.

Throughout his career Barr responded to critics, battled with trustees and continued his research. In doing so, he tried to strike a balance in museum practice resting somewhere between that of a traditional museum, a repository of great works, and a showplace, a venue for ever-circulating new and challenging work. Indeed, his efforts to achieve this balance precipitated one of the primary rifts within the museum's administrative bodies. Barr was often on one side; trustees, on the other.[47] Evidence of

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[46] Sandler 13.

[47] Barr's views were not always unconditionally accepted by MoMA's trustees who tended to be more conservative about exhibition programs and more interested in increasing the value of their paintings and sculptures. This disagreement also partly led to Barr's dismissal in 1943. For more on this rift see Sandler 28, 29; Marquis 203-210.

this ongoing struggle is readily apparent in both Barr's and the museum's activities. For instance, the first official announcement issued by the museum did not include the broad range of industrial, commercial or technological media of film, photography, design, typography, architecture, furniture, decorative arts, and stage design intended by Barr. His initial formulations for a multi-departmental museum were, he was told, too ambitious and unappealing to the first museum trustees. They were primarily interested in painting.[48] Instead, the publication stated that "paintings, sculptures, drawings, lithographs and etchings of the first order" would be exhibited, representing the "great modern masters—American and European—from Cézanne to the present day."[49] The trustees initially conceived of the museum primarily as a feeder facility, a temporary exhibition space in which new paintings and sculptures could be displayed for, and considered by, the art community and the general public: "Through such collections American students and artists and the general public could gain a consistent idea of what is going on in America and the rest of the world—an important step in contemporary art education," declared the original announcement.[50]

It is important to note that MoMA did not represent a simple democratisation of new, European art. Commanding respect for the art displayed in their museum implied not merely a legitimation of trustees' tastes, it also increased monetary value for the art many of them had been collecting. Garnering national and international recognition of American art institutions and especially of New York's art institutions was also a clearly

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[48] Barr "Multidepartmental Plan," 5-6.

[49] Alfred Barr Jr., "A New Art Museum," [1929] Newman and Sandler, eds. *Defining Modern Art*, 69.

[50] Barr "A New Art Museum," 71.

stated goal.[51] The museum's founders sought to modernise art, partly in their own images.

Nevertheless integrating the world of artistic experiment was an unusual undertaking for a museum of such visibility. Rather than simply celebrating the past, MoMA considered the novel and the challenging. Among other things, this also implied a new set of relations between living artists and art institutions, offering more than ever before a museum-site from which contemporary artists were more likely to benefit and against whose values and practices they were more likely to protest.[52] Moreover, mirroring Barr's earlier forays into the popular and literary press, MoMA's public image was aided by an astute use of the new cosmopolitanism ascendant in major cities, evident in the frequent displays of modern art in department store windows and in the pages of mass-circulated magazines such as *Time*, *Life*, *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker*.[53] By 1931 MoMA had hired a full-time public relations officer to manage and monitor these relations, ensuring that the museum would thrive on the public debate shaped, in

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[51] Barr widely propagated the importance of a modern art in popular and art magazines including *Art News* and *Vogue*. He asserted that such an institution was important for establishing America's impending progressive stand toward the modern arts. An example of these more popular and journalistic writings has been reprinted as Alfred Barr Jr., "A New Museum," [1929] Newman and Sandler, eds. *Defining Modern Art*, 73-76.

[52] Many of these attacks seem to have started in 1939 as tensions about the uropean situation grew. These attacks primarily focussed on MoMA's eurocentrism and their ostensible neglect of American artists. Many of these complaints also identified MoMA's emphasis on abstract art as ideologically suspect, offering socialist realist art as the preferred aesthetic choice (Sandler 15-17, fn 42). Attacks on the museum's policies continued throughout the post-war years as did defense of its practices from many political radicals who opposed aesthetic censure of any sort. For an overview of this debate see Sandler 24-27.

[53] Harris notes the influence of new forms of "modern" expression, which embraced technological and reproducible modes of expression (photography and film) rather than more traditional modes such as painting and sculpture. Moreover, machines were something of a fashion unto themselves. For more on this see Neil Harris, "Yesterday's World of Tomorrow," *ArtNews* October (1979): 69-73.

part, by the very conditions that catalysed its aesthetic undertakings: urbanism, cosmopolitanism, industrialism, and machine-chic.[54] MoMA was modern in more ways than one. It has been estimated that throughout this period MoMA received ten times more publicity than any other American museum.[55]

The dynamism of the early museum exhibitions can be read as another manifestation of the ongoing tension between aesthetic interests and the museum's relationship to its public. Even a cursory glance at the museum's exhibitions of the 1930s, a period characterized by one observer as a "process of experimentation, of trial and error,"[56] reveals a program of extreme diversity. MoMA was searching for its public. Exhibits were dedicated to single artists of varying aesthetic, social and political dispositions including Diego Rivera (1931), Vincent Van Gogh (1935), Fernand Léger (1935), Pablo Picasso (1939) and Walker Evans (1933); to art movements, bearing titles such as "American Painting and Sculpture, 1862-1932" (1932), "Cubism and Abstract Art" (1936), "Fantastic Art, Dada, and Surrealism" (1936) and "Bauhaus, 1919-1928" (1938); and to special theme shows featuring objects ranging from toasters to townhouses, with such titles as "Useful Household Objects Under $5" (1938), "Machine Art" (1934), "Subway Art" (1938) "The Town of Tomorrow" (1937) and "The Making of a Contemporary Film" (1937).[57]

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[54] For more on MoMA's public relations practices and their prescient mix of publicity and art exhibition see Lynes 129-136.

[55] Lynes 126; Harris 70.

[56] Allan Wallach, "The Museum of Modern Art: The Past's Future," *Journal of Design History* 5.3 (1992): 208

[57] This exhibit was arranged by John Abbott, Allen Porter and Fritz Lang. It used Lang's film *You Only Live Once* as the basis for an account of the processes involved in making a movie. Important to note is that this exhibit was held in the Film Library offices at 485 Madison Ave.

Film Department / Film Library

MoMA's eclecticism and embrace of industrial and technological forms owes much to Barr's determined efforts to expand the trustees' preferences beyond painting and sculpture. Architecture came first; a permanent department was established in 1932. Film was next. Barr was clearly influenced by films emerging from international film art communities of the time. Equally important was his affinity for organisations such as cine clubs and film societies that had formed in Paris, London and elsewhere to exhibit and discuss films difficult to see in commercial cinemas. His travels in Europe exposed him to these groups, to the Bauhaus, and also to the works of Eisenstein in Moscow (1928) and the ideas of Joseph Goebbels in Germany (1933). Barr's impression of Eisenstein and Goebbels were published as "Sergei Michailovitch Eisenstein" and "Nationalism in German Films."[58] Together, these articles suggest enthusiasm for film experimentation, dismissive skepticism regarding American film culture, and deep concern for the emerging role of the state in creative production and its increasing control of artistic freedom.

Barr was deeply impressed by both Eisenstein's ideas and his films, calling *The Battleship Potemkin* "epoch making."[59] Eisenstein further treated Barr and his travelling

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(CBS Building) rather than at the museum's primary site. This supports the claims made by Iris Barry and others that during these early years the Film Library was less than an equal and respected part of the museum's whole. This is discussed at greater length in Chapter 5. For a more complete listing of MoMA's exhibitions from 1929 until 1972, see Lynes 446-469.

[58] Alfred Barr Jr., "Sergei Michailovitch Eisenstein," [orig. 1928] Newman and Sandler, eds. *Defining Modern Art*, 142-146; Alfred Barr Jr., "Nationalism in German Films," [orig. 1934] Newman and Sandler, eds. *Defining Modern Art*, 158-162.

[59] Barr "Eisenstein," 142.

companion and colleague Jere Abbott to private screenings of footage from the then-incomplete *October* (1928) and *The General Line* (1929). Barr was also struck by Vsevolod Pudovkin's *The End of St. Petersburg* (1927), which he deemed "marvelously photographed and directed"; its propaganda themes giving "it dignity and punch." [60] Barr was moved by Eisenstein's work and unsettled by his ongoing struggle with Soviet systems of censorship that functioned so much differently than those in America. Barr mused that whereas Eisenstein would not be censored in America, he would surely find "timidity," "vulgarity," and "prudery" as well as "severe temptation to cheapen his art."[61] While Barr acknowledged that one system was not necessarily better or more highly evolved than the other, he nonetheless made flippant comments about American films and the corporate and moral interests in which they were so fully embroiled. Inclined to over-generalisation, his comments reflect a chauvinistic anti-americanism that resonates with his general Eurocentric leanings and with the emerging mass culture critique discussed in the previous section. He reduced American film to the "usual commercial manipulation [...] of super-slap-stick and the too-eternal triangle," while elevating Soviet film culture to the selective works of Eisenstein and Pudovkin and to "the stimulating requirements of propaganda, the intrinsic dignity of the subject-matter, [and] the extraordinary standards of a public trained in a progressive theatrical tradition."[62] The invigorating Soviet context contrasted—explicitly and implicitly—with the abysmal American one. In short, not only were American films quickly dispensed with as

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[60] Marquis 52.

[61] Barr "Eisenstein," 146.

[62] Barr "Eisenstein," 142, 143.

commercial and therefore inferior so were American audiences that supposedly paled in comparison to those Barr encountered in Moscow.

The second article Barr wrote on film resulted from his exposure to the ideas of the newly appointed German Minister of Enlightenment and Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels. In 1933 nearly five years after his tour of Moscow, Barr attended a convention of German film producers, distributors, theatre owners and executives during which Goebbels made clear the new, necessarily nationalist roots of all film activity. During this trip, Barr became keenly aware of the conditions under which art, including film, was being taken up as an instrument of the state in Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union. He observed the increasing practice of censorship as well as the expulsion of artists and intellectuals throughout the 1930s, most notably members of his beloved Bauhaus. Upon returning from Germany, Barr responded most strongly to what he termed "a cultural crisis—as distinguished from the political and racial one."[63] He dismissed German propaganda, coldly describing its vulgar use of film for the sole purpose of expressing national purity and power. He rejected the validity of German newsreels, citing their utter saturation with political matter.[64] Barr was incensed that film would be conscripted for overtly and objectionable political ends. To him, freedom of expression was paramount.[65]

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[63] Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY: Alfred Barr Papers: Archives of American Art 2174: 633, ctd. in Amy Newman "The Critic/Historian" Newman and Sandler, eds. *Selected Writings*, 101-102.

[64] Barr "Nationalism," 159.

[65] Barr's reliance on the precepts of freedom of expression fed his concerns for the unhindered exploration of aesthetic forms. This has led to accusations that Barr was overly dependent on formalism at the expense of social and political mechanisms linked to form. Some of his critics forgave this because of his general contributions to art historical knowledge; others have been less gracious. An example of the former can be found in a response to Barr's writing on abstract art which was crafted by Meyer Schapiro, a lifelong friend of Barr's. See "Nature of Abstract Art" *Marxist Quarterly* (Jan-March 1937): 79. For an example of less generous responses which

Only months before Barr traveled to Germany, he gathered his insights from his previous European travels and from the struggling little theatre movement in New York (which primarily exhibited European films) and in 1932, renewed his appeals for a film department. By this time, successful exhibits in photography and architecture indicated a loosening of the trustees' conservative grip on exhibition practices. That same year, the museum established the Department of Architecture, headed by Phillip Johnson.[66] Concurrently, Iris Barry was hired as the museum's first librarian. Shortly thereafter she began publishing brief film reviews in the museum's bulletin, first published in 1933 and distributed to museum-members.[67] Barr seized this momentum. He prepared a report and submitted it to the board, arguing that more resources be dedicated to the newly established architecture department, in part, so it could be expanded to include industrial design. Moreover, he implored, a film department needed to be established as soon as possible.[68]

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are primarily derived from Barr's relationship to the post-war emergence of abstract expressionism, see Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressioism, Freedom and the Cold War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983). For a thorough assessment of Barr's career and his shifting relationship to formalism see Sandler 7-47.

[66] Johnson later described Barr's negotiations over architecture, film and photography as persistent and passionate "pleading" (The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY: Oral History Project; interview with Sharon Zane, 1990: 27). Of these three areas, photography was the last to be officially accepted by trustees. Beaumont Newhall became the department's first director in 1940.

[67] It was also during this time that plans for the New York Film Society were underway. Several members of the society maintained close relations to the museum including Frank Crowinshield, Edward Warburg, Lincoln Kirstein, Nelson Rockefeller, Lewis Mumford, Julian Levy and, of course, Iris Barry. The Film Society is discussed at greater length in Chapter 6.

[68] Alfred Barr Jr., "Notes on Departmental Expansion of the Museum," 1932 (Department of Film Series, Film Study Center Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art, New York).

Revisiting the question of a film department, Barr highlighted the unavailability of films he deemed to be of unassailable "artistic merit" and the consequent lack of opportunity for a critical American film community to develop while documenting the existence of these communities in major European cities:[69]

> Many of those who have made the effort to study and to see the best films are convinced that the foremost living directors are as great artists as the leading painters, architects, novelists and playwrights. It may be said without exaggeration that the only great art peculiar to the twentieth century is practically unknown to the American public most capable of appreciating it.[70]

Barr fortified his argument by listing such filmmakers as Man Ray, Fernand Léger, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Walter Ruttmann, Ralph Steiner, and Luis Buñuel and by making vague references to films that have "been lost in the welter of commercial mediocrity."[71] Barr foresaw an exhibition program that would feed a creative and critical community and would feature amateur and avant garde films, including works by filmmakers now-identified as comprising the canon of narrative "art cinema" (Abel Gance, Mauritz Stiller, René Clair, E.A. Dupont, Jacques Feyder). Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Chaplin also earned mention. Barr called attention as well to the decaying state of many of "the great films of the past quarter century." He suggested, consequently, that a curatorial as well as an exhibition division might also be considered for the museum. In its earliest formulations, however, the Film Library resembled a cinema salon, designed to show great works by great, primarily European artists.[72] The need for this salon was punctuated by the absence

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[69] Barr "Notes on Departmental Expansion," 5.

[70] Barr "Notes on Departmental Expansion," 6.

[71] Barr "Notes on Departmental Expansion," 6.

[72] Chaplin provides the common exception to this.

of means by which a critical community might grow and thrive: the basic availability of suitable films. The curatorial mandate of the library was intended to be similarly selective—to preserve and secure access to films which fit within a particular (and perhaps only partially formulated) conception of properly artistic films. Concluding this report, Barr stated that a film department would not only expand the museum's public, increase its support and interest new members, it would be an opportunity to demonstrate a much needed intelligence and "influential leadership."[73] In 1932, the public envisioned by Barr was a somewhat limited one, imagined to include a professional audience of producers, directors, amateur filmmakers, critics and "other experts," art patrons and museum members. Potential interest by the general public was not anticipated.

Barr's rhetoric seems carefully crafted and highly strategic. Appeals to "capable audiences," "commercial mediocrity" and film "masters" catered somewhat shamelessly to board members' and trustees' skepticism regarding the popular and commercial taint of the medium, bypassing along the way the challenge which some of these films offered to these same notions. It is difficult to know whether or not Barr's general reliance on European directors and his quick dismissal of "commercialism" belies his own chauvinism, that of the trustees, or both. Regardless, there was an observable predisposition toward non-American films, valued partly because they were European and partly because they were produced outside of American commercial enterprises, which were seen by many cultural elites to be crass and incapable of expressing intelligence. Nevertheless, Barr was demonstrably determined to include film—even if a highly selective type—in the museum.

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[73] Barr "Notes on Departmental Expansion," 7.

Barr's efforts to convince board members of film's merit took some unconventional forms. In later years, Barr recalled escorting Lillie Bliss to the Little Carnegie to see Carl Dreyer's *Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (1928) as early as 1930. He also sent postcards to Abby Rockefeller and others with recommendations of current films "which seemed works of art." [74] Rockefeller eventually acquiesced to the idea of film art, though she continued to express concern about accepting films that contained sexual and therefore objectionable content, which she euphemistically termed "Freudian."[75]

Iris Barry's film reviews were another method by which it was hoped the stalwart anti-film sentiments of the trustees would soften. This was not always the case, however. The first of Barry's reviews discussed the sultry Mae West, calling her film *She Done Him Wrong* (1933) the "Hollywood product at its vital best—perfect pace, brilliant execution, robust approach to an attack upon a simple subject, and a perfect vehicle for that original screen personality, Mae West."[76] In doing so, Barry had succeeded both in discussing a controversial, female film figure as well as lending critical acclaim to *Variety's* top-grossing 1933-film in the museum's new bulletin. The popular clashed with the properly artistic, ruffling some museum members' feathers.[77]

Nevertheless, that same year a committee was formed to investigate the possibilities of a film department, with Edward Warburg serving as chairman and Abby

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[74] Barr "Multidepartmental Plan," 9.

[75] Marquis 128.

[76] Iris Barry, "Film Comments," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 1.1 (1933): n.p.

[77] Mary Lea Bandy reports that Abby Rockefeller's friends called her to complain about the museum's endorsement of the "vulgar" Mae West (77).

Rockefeller and John Hay Whitney serving as committee members. [78] Barry's services were solicited to conduct research and orchestrate experimental film screenings, which were held at the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford, Connecticut, in the winter of 1934-1935. A survey was conducted in which educators, college presidents and department heads, and museum directors were asked about their interest in educational film exhibition. The response was overwhelmingly positive. In April 1935, John E. Abbott (Barry's husband and Wall Street financier) and Iris Barry submitted what would become the foundational document for the establishment of a film department, now entitled the Film Library; the document itself was entitled, "An Outline of a Project for Founding the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art." The museum did not directly fund the preparation of this document and plan; it was funded jointly by trustee John Hay Whitney and the Rockefeller Foundation. Shortly thereafter, a full start-up grant was given by the Rockefeller Foundation, and the library achieved full institutional status. Barry was announced as curator, Whitney was appointed president, and Abbott was assigned the role of director. The library's official mandate read:

> The purpose of the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art is to trace, catalog, assemble, preserve, exhibit and circulate to museums and colleges single films or programs of all types of film in exactly the same manner in which the museum traces, catalogs, exhibits and circulates paintings, sculpture, models and photographs of architectural buildings, or reproductions of works of art, so that the film may be studied and enjoyed as any other one of the arts is studied and enjoyed.[79]

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[78] Whitney's presence on the Film Library Committee is important because of his strong links to the industry. He was a prime investor in Technicolor, President of Pioneer Pictures and co-founder of Selznick Internationl Pictures with David O. Selznick. This pairing had its most auspicious moment when it culminated in the success of *Gone with the Wind*, released in 1939. Whitney was not only interested in film but was also an avid collector of modern art. He went on to serve not only as the first chairman of the Film Library Trustee Committee but also as the Film Library's first president.

[79] Abbott and Barry "Outline," 3.

Sidestepping debates about high, low or mass cultural forms, the Film Library set out to include a comprehensive sample of "film art," a working concept non-observant of institutional, aesthetic or Marxist critiques of Hollywood film or bourgeois art. "Film art" was extended to include examples of modernist European cinema as well as narrative, documentary, spectacular, Western, slapstick, comedy-drama, musical, animated, abstract, scientific, educational, dramatic, amateur and newsreel films.[80] Like Barr's earlier pleas, the "Outline" asserted that the motion picture was the only great art peculiar to the twentieth century, significant not only for its "aesthetic qualities" but also its affect on taste and the lives of the "large bulk of population."[81] The library staff intended to collect such films and hoped to circulate them through the expanding film circuit comprised of museums, schools, film societies and civic clubs, making available "those films which the individual groups everywhere have found difficult to obtain."[82] Also included in the "Outline" was a plan to lend projectors, to compose and circulate film notes, to assemble a library of film literature, to act as a clearinghouse for information on all aspects of film, and to link interested groups to this information and to each other. Nourishing a film critical community was a conscious and carefully designed goal, avoiding contentious claims that film was simply an art like all others and also avoiding the association of the Film Library programs with entertainment—the proverbial poor cousin of educational and art films. The sweeping nature of this plan reveals more than Abbott and Barry's enthusiasm; it also marks a shift away from the exclusive Euro-cine-

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[80] Abbott and Barry "Outline," 3.13.

[81] Abbot and Barry "Outline," 1-2.

[82] Abbott and Barry "Outline," 21.

salon first envisioned by Barr. Amateur, avant garde and popular American films—old and new—would ideally take their place beside the works of European narrative art-directors, in part, so that American films could be more fully respected; in part so an increasingly diverse community could be supplied with the films it wanted.

Conclusion

During MoMA's formative years, film had been implicated in a range of modern artistic practices. Some of these challenged the basic precepts of art and the institutions that supported it; some staunchly upheld these precepts. Contemporaneously, commercial films were taken up by a mounting socio-aesthetic critique that sought to defend concepts of high art from the onslaught on formulaic, debased product. The trustees initially rejected the inclusion of films in their museum, deeming them unworthy of museum resources, thus also rejecting important elements of the modernist critique while happily collecting its more palatable paintings and sculptures. Alfred Barr struck a determined pose, arguing that particular kinds of films would be suitable for and would enhance the profile of the museum. As a film department plan slowly developed, its mandate became more expansive, growing to include a wide range of film types and activities. The proposal was cautiously accepted with little risk being incurred by the museum, as even the proposal for the project was funded by sources that did not draw on established museum coffers. Rather than bowing to the ascendant critiques of film, the Film Library adopted an expansive acquisition policy, thereby treating film's role in aesthetic and social critique more as a question rather than a foregone conclusion.

The early struggle to include film in the museum represents an important element of the modern museological dialogue. Films were primarily linked to formal innovations

and great artists. While this marked an expansion of the objects acknowledged by American art institutions, it did not break radically with assumptions about what art could be and what broader social role it played. However, the Film Library—since 1935 an integral museum department—emerged and sustained itself while implicitly and explicitly problematising film's status as art rather than merely conscripting it to bourgeois sensibilities. Film was deemed an expansive art, drawn from dramatically different film forms, extracted from equally diverse contexts. This diversity could not be wholly accounted for within discourses confined to concepts of originality, genius or reverence. Films were popular, bawdy, spectacular, informational, lurid and comical. They were dependent on technologies of mass reproduction and intertwined with commercial systems of distribution and exhibition. The traditional institutions and discourses of art could not wholly account for film's expansive character. Consequently, film would not wholly partake of the same economies in which more traditional *objets* were and continue to be circulated. Through the Film Library, an element of modernist debate survived that could not surface in quite the same form in other museum departments extant: the conviction that modernist art included a multi-faceted—popular, commercial, spectacular and informational—challenge to art itself.

MoMA marks a point in the history of American museums in which the gradually shifting lines of what constitutes "art" turned toward the problem of tracing the slippery interface between mass cultural, technological and industrial objects with traditionalist institutional and idealist models for what art should be. The Film Library further pushed and perhaps partially blurred these lines. The ensuing dialogue persists to this day.

VI. Chapter 5

Doing Something about Films: Iris Barry, the Film Society and Film Culture

> This is all so like the movies—miles of meaningless spaces without a covered wagon.
>
> - Iris Barry [1]

> Its social value is great: the cinema plays no small part in broadening the common horizon; its ubiquitous Pathé Gazette and travel films alone deserve credit for supplying a vicarious experience of contemporary events and foreign places which quite certain is evolving, gradually, countless men and women who are 'citizens of the world.' But, beyond all this, though the moving picture has affinities with the respectable muses, it is a substitute for none of them, but one of the phenomena for which our age will be remembered.
>
> - Iris Barry [2]

As with many film writers of the 1920s, Iris Barry was fascinated by the possibilities inherent in the cinema. Her cinephilia led her to speculate not only on the aesthetic possibilities of the medium—its reconfigurations of space, its animation of otherwise lifeless objects, its formal malleability—but also on its broader social and cultural implications. The cinema was creating citizens of the world, expanding consciousness on a global scale, democratising the arts, promising to bring beauty *and* information to all. The cinema, Barry and others recognised, was a peculiar phenomenon: a machine art born of the industrial age, made great by the distinctly modern combination of technology, aesthetics, spectacle, industrialism and mass popularity. To many, film was a convergence of ideas and practices rife with possibility. It was also, however, the object of tremendous anxiety, inviting active censorship, hostility from the established cultural

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[1] Iris Barry, "To Ivor Montagu" [postcard from Texas] 6 October 1927 (Film Society Collection, Ivor Montagu Papers, Special Collections, British Film Institute).

[2] Iris Barry, "The Cinema: Progress is Being Made," *The Spectator* 14 February 1925: 235.

and intellectual elite, and concerns throughout Europe about national contamination by American customs and habits.

When Iris Barry began writing on film in London in 1923, the question of precisely what kind of medium film would become was being played out on an unevenly supported, ideologically diverse field comprised of critics, artists, filmmakers, industrialists and state bodies. Relatively new to this dialogue was the growing body of cinema advocates—private citizens, filmmakers, critics and fans—who came together under various institutional guises to make something *more* of the cinema. They sought to generate institutional infrastructures and discourses that would influence the way films would be distributed, exhibited and thought about. For many of these groups, making something of the cinema implied building the means by which more types of films might be seen and also studied: film's history and future depended on it.

These institutions mark important shifts in film culture. Film societies, clubs and leagues became methods by which a growing number of people organised their public and private lives, often reacting against commercial and state control of the cinema itself. While these projects quickly adopted a wide variety of socio-political agendas, many shared private endowments, ostensibly public mandates and internationalist perspectives on film. For these reasons, the contemporaneous debates and film-institutional formations underway during this period are important predecessors to the Film Library as it was not only an attempt to build a similar organisation but also to catalyse and serve others like it. Importantly, many of these film cultural undercurrents were initially more prominent in nations which in one way or another were forced to address the proliferating number of American films on their screens.

The concept of "film art" was an important element of many of these groups. It is, however, necessary to complicate this concept by examining how it was invoked and by providing an example of how it was organised around. Film art was a complex and at times amorphous concept, used by those attempting to legitimate film as a high art, a popular art, a narrative form, an educational tool as well as a form of entertainment. Barry's film criticism provides an example of contemporary concepts of film art and cinematic value, as well as a link between key institutions that emerged during this period. Her writing will be discussed in order to lend character to the contention that film art and cinematic value were overlapping concepts. The Film Society (1925), of which Barry was a co-founding member, will be discussed in order to place the activities of the American Film Library in a broader, international and film cultural perspective.

The Figure of Iris Barry

To date, little of substance has been written on Barry's various activities at the Film Library and in American film culture generally nor has much been written on her role in British film culture as critic, writer or film programmer.[3] The bulk of writing about Barry was engendered by two impulses: the first was to honour her upon her death on December 22, 1969, which occasioned obituaries celebrating her accomplishments, her spirit and her unswerving dedication to film;[4] the second, was that shared by feminist

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[3] Biographical information about Barry is available in Ivor Montagu, "Birmingham Sparrow," *Sight and Sound* 39.3 (1970): 106-108; Marsha McCreadie, "Iris Barry: Historian and All-Round Critic," *Women on Film: The Critical Eye* (New York: Praeger, 1983) 96-102; and, Missy Daniel, "Iris Barry," *Notable American Women: The Modern Period*, eds. Carol Hurd Green and Barbara Sicherman (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1980) 56-58.

[4] See Ivor Montagu, "Birmingham Sparrow," 106-108; "Iris Barry," *The Silent Picture* Spring (1970): 16; and, Alistair Cooke, "To Recall Her Pluck," *The New York Times* 18 January 1970: D13. Short tributes to her have been collected and published as *Remembering Iris Barry* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1980).

scholars seeking modestly to rectify the omission from the historical record of Barry's remarkable contributions to film culture as a woman who struggled with the burden of her gender as much as with disrespect toward film. Collectively, this writing is comprised of rough biographical sketches, anecdotal recollections and exaggerated praise. Marsha McCreadie, for instance, describes Barry as "undoubtedly the most dynamic woman in the history of film scholarship." She credits her with "creating the entire film archive" at MoMA and with compiling and editing *The Film Index*, the first comprehensive film-reference source.[5] Missy Daniel writes in *Notable American Women* that "Iris Barry knew earlier and perhaps better than anyone the importance of motion pictures...it was her work that led to the serious consideration in the United States of film as art."[6] The exuberance of such commentary can be partly explained by the compelling nature of Barry as a historical figure. To a contemporary cinephile her passion for saving films rings heroic and her unswerving determination to serve this passion as a woman in a male-dominated environment is even more remarkable. However, only a casual glance at the period will reveal that "film art" was an ascendant and complex idea, supported by a range of American and international trends. Film's institutional recognition at MoMA certainly bolstered the establishment of film as a high art just as the resources made available by the library catalysed its consideration as an object of aesthetic, historical and

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[5] McReadie 96. *The Film Index* was indeed the first comprehensive index to film literature. It was, however, compiled by the workers of the New York City Writer's Project of the New Deal's Work Projects Administration. While the acknowledgements suggest a staff "too large to be listed," there are over twenty-five writers, researchers and clerical workers recognised in the acknowledgements alone. Barry is credited with supplying "invaluable suggestions" and for supplying a "gracious foreward" to the first index. See Harold Leonard "Acknowledgements," *The Film Index: A Bibliography, The Film as Art*, ed. Harold Leonard, vol. 1 (New York: Museum of Modern Art and W.H. Wilson Company, 1941) xxxiii-xxxiv.

[6] Daniel 56.

sociological knowledge. In short, the Film Library's approach varied as to the kind of object film represented, and Barry, though influential to the shape the Film Library took, did not work alone or without resources which themselves were often the product of negotiation and compromise that further shaped the library's mission. Her significance as an early, female film-worker should be placed within the context of her writing, her work and the broader conditions under which this work was conducted.

While overly simplified statements concerning Barry's achievements might be written off as casualties of the encyclopedic form, she has also been identified as a key player in the establishment of film as art by more scholarly and elaborate treatises on the history of film art, understood as an aesthetic, discursive and institutional formation. In his recent book, *On the History of Film Style,*[7] David Bordwell grants Barry a place of prominence in the development of what he calls the "Basic Story." Bordwell defines the Basic Story as the first loose consensus regarding the development and discovery of film art; he identifies it as a teleological process in which film art gradually discovered its essence, distinct from other art forms. Discovering this visual essence—generally construed as rhythm, motion, editing, and spatial manipulation—facilitated its evolving status as an art and therefore further guided its uptake by scholars and critics.[8] Barry is cited as a major influence on American conceptions of film art which conform to Bordwell's Basic Story. While it is true that Barry, at times, entertained a fairly typical conception of what film art was and therefore of how its formal trajectory should be understood, she also maintained a broad conception of film's general significance as a

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[7] David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

[8] Bordwell 13-20.

complex historical, technological and sociological object. These ideas were not just beholden to a simple examination of film form but also to broader questions pertaining to the nature of visual information, film function and the relationship between form and context. Though Barry worked within an institution of art, her concept of film's value was a complex one whose nuances are lost in a synchronic, formal history of film's essence such as Bordwell's or by references to a vague, ill-defined film art such as McReadie's.

While a reasoned assessment of Barry's accomplishments would certainly yield praise of her steady, determined, courageous and perhaps visionary career, it must be acknowledged that Barry worked at a time in film's history when resources were being allocated to archival projects internationally. In America, saving films and film-related materials, exhibiting such materials and encouraging the study of film were activities attracting both philanthropic and small amounts of state funding for the first time. Her position at the Film Library allowed her to channel these resources into projects that nourished emergent minor and film-scholarly communities. By fighting to establish the legal and material means by which films could be saved, seen and studied at one remove from corporate imperatives, she helped to catalyse one of the oldest, non-profit repertory theatres, film resource centres, travelling film programs and film education programs in the United States. These projects should be distinguished from "film art" projects, as they were also part of a more general shift toward the integration of moving images into daily, civic, educational and intellectual activities in America. Any adequate, general definition of "film art" during this period should be expanded to include questions about the nature

of visual information, the material challenges of non-theatrical and non-profit exhibition, the impact of film study and the intricate relationships between high/low dichotomies.

Writing the Cinema

Barry began her career as a film critic in the early 1920s, a period Rachel Low has characterised as the first in which "people started treating film seriously in Britain."[9] Sidney Bernstein employed her to write reviews of films playing in his chain of theatres. In 1923, John St. Loe Strachey, editor of the political/cultural weekly *The Spectator*—one of the first sources for regular, serious articles about the place of cinema in art and culture in Britain—hired Barry to write book and theatre reviews. Shortly thereafter, she joined her contemporary, C.A. Lejeune, in the early wave of women film writers, crafting polemical and poignant film criticism and commentary well before she had reached the legal voting age of thirty for British women.[10] Barry quickly became a visible mark on the British film map. By 1925 she became film editor for *The Daily Mail*, writing regular reviews and articles in addition to her responsibilities as co-founder of the well-known Film Society of London. In 1926, her first full treatise on the cinema was published as *Let's Go to the Pictures*,[11] later published in the United States as *Let's Go the Movies*.[12] The book was widely reviewed. A summary dismissal from her post at *The Daily Mail*

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[9] Rachel Low, *The History of the British Film, 1918-1929* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd, 1970) 15.

[10] Barry was born in March 1895 and was therefore twenty-eight years old when she began writing for *The Spectator*.

[11] Iris Barry, *Let's go to the Pictures* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1926).

[12] Iris Barry, *Let's go to the Movies* [orig. 1927] (New York: Arno Press, 1972).

for reportedly crafting an unfavourable review of a film distributed by the paper's owner prompted her move to New York in March 1930.

Barry's lack of interest in making films or in contributing directly to film production distinguishes her from other women film-workers/archivists active during this period: Germaine Dulac, Marie Epstein and Esther Shub. Her closest contemporary, Lejeune, began writing for the *Manchester Guardian* in 1922, one year before Barry began writing for *The Spectator*. Like Barry, Lejeune also wrote self-consciously to legitimate film as a worthwhile and distinct critico-aesthetic endeavour, often invoking concepts of national cinema and authorial influence in the process. Unlike Lejeune, however, Barry self-consciously set out to influence film distribution and exhibition in order to provide the material means by which other intelligible frameworks for classifying, discussing and seeing films might develop. This includes but is not limited to the possibilities of a properly national British cinema.

Collectively, Barry's writing is as much cinematic manifesto as reasoned and methodical critique of film content, form or function, ranging from ruminations on the nature of the image to practical advice on "kinema manners," from the phantasmagoria of Hollywood's artifice to the banalities of contemporaneous British film. As an early cultural critic as well as film critic, she was primarily concerned with the vast body of formulaic commercial cinema. She consistently argued that films—all films—could be better. As a critic for *The Daily Mail*, Barry was also tasked with writing brief, descriptive reviews of the many films circulating in London theatres. Her more elaborate commentary was often reserved for films she deemed to be exceptional either for their entertainment value, their probing humanism, their aesthetic innovation, or their extreme

distaste. Rather than considering film to be only capable of yielding fleeting consumer spectacles, Barry believed that films could be used to enlighten, inform *and* entertain. The problem, she contended, was that the cinema suffered for too long under the weight of its benighted status as a mechanical art and as a popular art—both attributes Barry refused to consider faults and preferred to see as merits.[13] Under the model of cultural stewardship, Barry sought to elevate tastes and, in doing so, to elevate film. In order to achieve this goal, she believed that the cinema needed to be more widely considered an expressive form and phenomenon capable of embodying intelligence. Accomplishing widespread recognition of the cinema in this light required an implicit contract between the cultural elite, the general public and the industry. She knew that making films required money. She was also skeptical of the fate of creativity and experiment in the machine of the great industry. She deemed the public that frequented the cinema to be intelligent and capable but undiscriminating. It was the job of the critic to mediate between these poles, to provide a critical vocabulary that might help to develop criteria by which "quality" could be assessed and therefore achieved. What did cinematic quality look like?

To extract a working definition of cinematic quality from Barry's writing, it is important to differentiate between a concept of artistic value and cinematic value. Barry subscribed to definitions of high-art which rested on traditional ideas about the "best" of intellectual and aesthetic product. She also believed that the powers of art could be used in a broader program of social uplift—that the "best" should also be widely accessible. Film art, therefore, was especially suited to this cause as the commercial film industry

[13] See for example Iris Barry, "The Cinema: American Prestige and British Films," *The Spectator* 11 July 1925: 51-52.

had already established the means by which such objects might be disseminated and appreciated: movie theatres. Barry maintained respect for traditional conceptions of art but was eager to expand the general understanding of what "acceptable" forms art might take and, therefore, also to expand the modes in which more people might benefit from it. She sought to democratise art without dissolving its particularities. Like other writers of the period, therefore, she sought to discover a definition of film that would serve to legitimate it as an art—to grant it entry into established art institutions and privileges. Common to other writers as well, she focussed largely on the distinctly visual characteristics of the medium that yielded to creative impulses, culminating in something more than a simple moving snapshot or a celluloid stageplay. Barry celebrated cinematic qualities such as camera movement and the use of editing to manipulate space, evoke rhythm, or create dramatic suspense; motion was valorised over stasis. These qualities were most meaningful when conscripted into visually inspired narratives—distinctly cinematic stories.[14] Barry and many others favoured the idea that film was essentially a narrative medium, most effective when used to tell stories of human emotion through moving pictures. Her review of Ernst Lubitsch's *The Marriage Circle* provides an example: "Everything is visualized, all the comedy is in what the characters are seen or imagined to be thinking or feeling, in the interplay, never expressed in words, of wills and personalities."[15] While Barry subscribed to the view that film was fundamentally a narrative medium, this view was complemented by a general fascination with visual form and the technological apparatus that supported it—cameras and screens. This more

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[14] For a concise discussion of a broad range of film writing that addresses the question of film art during this period see Bordwell 12-45.

[15] Iris Barry, "The Cinema: Hope Fulfilled," *The Spectator* 17 May 1924: 788.

sweeping fascination gave voice to many of her varied attempts to advocate respect for the cinema.

Nonetheless, established artistic modes provided a common point of comparison and legitimation for film spokespeople. In addition, therefore, to identifying specifically filmic properties by close examination of films themselves, the cinema was often compared and contrasted to the other arts. Partly because of the debt owed to theatrical forms by film and partly because of the perceived need to free film from these conventions, theatre provided a common springboard for distinguishing film. In her defence of cinema over the stage, Barry refused to cede an inch to the sceptics. For her, the cinema was a distinct aesthetic form, with a scope that not only rivalled but far surpassed that of the theatre. She maintained that unlike the stage, the cinema "alone can handle natural history, anthropology and travel" as well as more fully develop "parable, fairystory, pageant, romance and character-study." In fact, remarking on the cinema's seeming limitlessness, Barry said:

> It has infinite variety of scene, endless angles of vision and focuses, it can use for its own ends all the resources of landscape and architecture, and, very important indeed, it brings out an enormous significance in natural objects. Chairs and tables, collar-studs, kitchenware and flowers take on a function which they have lost, except for young children, since animism was abandoned in the accumulating sophistications of 'progress.'[16]

Important to note here is Barry's attention to animated objects and to the "infinite variety" of vision offered by the cinema which, according to her, lent a clear expressive edge over the theatre. While the use of these qualities for developing narrative form was important, it was not the only significance these qualities maintained. Natural history and travel films would benefit as much as parable and romance films. The fascination of

[16] Iris Barry, "The Cinema: A Comparison of Arts," *The Spectator* 3 May 1924: 707.

visual information—delivering pictures of things far away—worked in tandem with cinematic narratives. Each enhanced the value of the medium. Theatre did not stand a chance.

If cinema was an art, it was an art like no other: a machine art that not only magically animated the lifeless but also served as a unique and powerful informational medium. Discourses of knowledge and aesthetics often converged in Barry's writing. The significance of natural objects, places and things found new relevance under the eye of the camera and the eager audience.

Barry's raw interest in what film made visible is further evident in her frequent commentary on travel, nature and science films. The camera's slow motion capacities held particular fascination for her. Upon the occasion of the Film Society screening of the *Secrets of Nature* film "The Life of a Plant," Barry wrote:

> The Film Society recently showed one of these marvels of patience, *The Life of a Plant*, in which a nasturtium germinated, grew up, flowered, was cross-fertilized, languished, shot its seeds off and died in five minutes. Gigantic on the screen, this plant ceased to have any vegetable attributes and became the most temperamental of creatures, dashing itself about, waving its 'arms' like a prima donna in a rage.[17]

Barry joined the growing cine-enthusiasts of the time, including members of the surrealist and constructivist movement, who became enamoured with the protean, fantastical ability of the cinema to continually reconfigure the visual world and therefore bring expressive form-in-motion to otherwise abstract or invisible phenomena. Any object could take on renewed symbolic presence, greeting a malleability of form that went hand-in-hand with a new kind of aestheticised knowledge.

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[17] Iris Barry, "The Cinema: Lesser Glories," *The Spectator* 6 March 1926: 415.

In addition to slowing time and expanding space, the cinema also accelerated time and minimised space, endowing the cinema with the courage and cause of an explorer. According to Barry, the camera transported its audience, allowing the experience of otherwise invisible or previously distant, non-visible phenomena; the cinema democratised ocular discovery. The travel film *Epic of the Everest*, provided an example:

> The picture has magnificently that rare quality of communication through the visual sense which is one of the peculiar qualities of the cinema: it communicates an experience which almost none of us can ever have in fact. And it is good for human beings to see, as they do in their hundreds of thousands daily, the *appearance* of the remoter places, whether they be untouched African forests, the island homes of Papua, or the ghastly face of the Black Country.[18]

According to Barry, the cinema was capable of providing a privileged form of knowledge, which she rhetorically construed as transcendent not only of geographic space but also of historical time and national psychology. Of the "reasonably intelligent spectator," she remarked:

> He can see more clearly than if he were an actual spectator of race meetings, volcanic eruptions, eminent persons, and landscapes from California to Jerusalem. He can even see the past, whether it be the deeply moving past of reality as films like 'Ypres' recreate it, or the romantic past of an historical piece like 'Helen of Troy.' And if he be of a reflective mind he can learn as much of German, French, and American mentality as any other who has traveled widely.[19]

It was this quality of taking spectators out of themselves and immersing them in faraway and cinematic places which Barry called clear and straightforward, the "purest" and most "plainly socially valuable" qualities of the cinema; simplicity of form and clarity of thought combined with a myth of exploration and education. Importantly, she ascribed

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[18] Iris Barry, "The Cinema: 'The Epic of Everest' at the Scala," *The Spectator* 20 December 1924: 982.

[19] Iris Barry, "The Lure of the Films," *The Daily Mail* 9 October 1925: 8.

these qualities not only to travel pictures and documentaries but also to farces (in particular those of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton), film forms, she suggested, which sat at opposite ends of the film-spectrum but which shared this particular quality of simple beauty, clarity and therefore social value.

Barry's visual-technological utopianism and her clear fascination with film form fuelled her project to legitimate the cinema as an important if not indispensable medium: entertaining and informative, comical and dramatic. By what criteria, therefore, might the vast body of commercial cinema be evaluated? Barry readily acknowledged the cinema's debt to a complex of industrial, aesthetic, technological and national phenomena. In attempting to redeem film for those who rejected its value she, therefore, invoked some conventional and some unconventional methods. As mentioned above, articulating film's potential to illuminate and transport new forms of knowledge was one such method. Calling film "art" was another. The latter reflects the perceived need to justify film to an established cultural elite, thereby freeing the cinema from the taint of its technological, populist and commercial roots, which often fed a crude anti-cinema sentiment. Thus she set out to situate popular forms within high-artistic categories, arguing for their appeal as an enlightening aesthetic experience, making the idea of film art more intelligible to doubting bourgeois and to recoiling moderns alike. She championed Douglas Fairbanks, likening his swashbuckling to the grace of ballet.[20] She favoured slapstick and animation, calling Felix the Cat and Charlie Chaplin both distinctly high-brow.[21] She loved Western serials, celebrating their "great open spaces," proclaiming "horse operas" to be the best of

[20] She likened Fairbanks' swashbuckling to the grace and rhythm of the ballet ("The Cinema Laughter Makers," *The Spectator* 19 September 1925: 444).

[21] Barry *Let's Go to the Pictures*, 166.

American product.[22] More at home within traditional conceptions of art were her appeals to "genius" directors, including many now-canonized directors such as Fritz Lang, Ernst Lubitsch, Karl Grüne, Robert Wiene, Victor Seastrom, Charlie Chaplin and D.W. Griffith.[23]

If cinematic value was marked by an aesthetic and technological phenomenon which revealed more of the world to more people, then cinematic art was marked by visual narratives which invoked distinct and innovative filmic techniques often located in animating personalities. Nevertheless, there is often an elision in Barry's writing in which her excitement for cinema-as-art blends wholly with her enthusiasm for cinema-as-information and cinema-as-phenomenon. Upon surveying her writing, differentiating between these forms of enthusiasm becomes, at times, impossible.[24]

Barry's ability to aestheticise exotic places and people, extracting them from their social and historical contexts, points to the ethical and ideological challenges of the cinematic global village. Questions about the kind of knowledge being produced and its broader relationship to class, race and gender issues were not overtly or critically considered by Barry during these years. She did, however, understand that the cinema was implicated in broader political questions. As a result, she also demonstrated speculative interest in the relationship between cinematic form and political function, as evidenced by her early interest in newsreels, which readily transformed years later into her interest in documentaries and propaganda. After witnessing an early sound

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[22] Iris Barry, "Cowboy Films for 'Highbrows'," *The Daily Mail* 10 August 1927: 8.

[23] Barry "The Cinema: Hope Fulfilled," 788.

[24] Iris Barry, "The Cinema: Back to Simplicity," *The Spectator* 17 July 1926: 88.

experiment, Barry conjoined concerns for democratising high-artistic forms such as operas and symphonies with speculations about the possibilities of sound film as a useful medium for transmitting public information and inciting political debate:

> But it is not only artists who could be broadcasted visibly as well as audibly: the great disadvantage under which politicians have so long laboured through being unable to be in two places at once will be removed. Imagine, during a political crisis or before an election, how they might by this means visibly pour out eloquent promises, explanations and exhortations to interested or antagonistic knots of electors simultaneously all over the country!...Then, the application of this new process to the bi-weekly News Gazettes which form so constant a feature of all cinema programmes might be a considerable improvement.[25]

The cinema was a polymorphous form with the promise of a multiplying utility and exciting new forms of socio-political knowledge. The precise impact of such knowledge was, of course, unclear to Barry and to others during this period. However, what Barry's analysis loses in depth it makes up for in its indication of the remarkable exchange of aesthetic and informational film ideas then-circulating. Further, her writing underlines a basic, at times crude, fascination with film—an important aspect of film writing of the period and of Barry's career generally. She recommended documentaries, travel films and science films alongside the now-classic European art cinema as well as American popular cinema.[26] Her cinephilia and her status as a critic work against clean categorisation of her ideas. She variably and sometimes haphazardly discussed cinema as art, information, aestheticised information, information about aesthetics and, of course, a

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[25] Iris Barry, "The Cinema: It Talks and Moves," *The Spectator* 7 June 1924: 915.

[26] An excellent example of Barry celebrating the documentary form over the formulaic melodramas of the period can be found in "The Cinema: Back to Simplicity," 88. She cited *Moanna* and *Grass* as the only examples of worthwhile cinema currently in theatres, claiming they were exemplary of films the public wants. She wrote: "It is simplicity, sincerity, real force of emotions, a slice of life whether gay or grave, which the public want" (88).

mass form. Further, her writing was less a sociological analysis than a speculative, cinematic wish-list. She genuinely wanted cinema to fulfil the utopian wishes she had for it: to make the world smaller, to increase understanding, and to democratise the fine arts and worldly knowledge. Hers was a politic of uplift, challenging traditional modes of artistic and informational exchange but rarely questioning the deeper material and ideological inequities that underlay them.

Though Barry maintained romantic beliefs about the power of cinema to change the world, she also developed critical attitudes about American industrial imperatives inextricably linked to many non-American or international perspectives on film, then and now. In Britain, these concerns often became part of a more general dialogue about the importance of establishing a truly British film in the face of American domination of British film screens. As expected, Barry's meditations on these issues rarely took on a simple black-and-white form. Her relationship to American film is perhaps the most emblematic of this. For many film lovers of the period, American film was an omnipresent force in thinking and writing about film generally. For those concerned with establishing indigenous, national cinemas, Hollywood threatened this very possibility despite that fact that many American films were simultaneously celebrated and admired by European cinephiles.

Barry's attitudes about American cinema reflect a pull between distaste, envy, fascination and admiration. Her opinions on Cecil B. DeMille are particularly instructive on this point. When reviewing DeMille's *Ben Hur* (1925), she eloquently invoked a scenario depicting his directing abilities: DeMille standing behind camera, observing a

crowd scene, exclaiming through his megaphone: "More money!! More money!!"[27] In an article written several months later for *The Daily Mail,* titling him the "Prince of Hollywood," she continued:

> He more than any other man has provided the world audience with pictures which are glorified peep-shows. He it is who chiefly specialises in the making of easily thrilling, inconsistent and expensive films which reveal a world where riches always spell vice and vulgarity, and which always appeal to the 'gallery' with their second-rate ideas about Socialism, or religion, or reincarnation or any other big theme which it happens to occur to Mr. DeMille to cheapen....All the DeMille pictures are brilliantly photographed. Technically they are far above the average. Spiritually they reek of the producer's subterranean—and, one fancies, over-heated and over-scented—boudoir.[28]

Barry's feelings about DeMille reflect her attitudes toward the bulk of American film generally, an intimate love/hate relationship. Even in her scathing criticism of DeMille's excesses, one suspects that Barry enjoyed her distaste too much to dislike thoroughly the objects of it. Further, she believed that while American films are on the whole "deplorable, vulgar, sensational and even dismally stupid," she also claimed that "we owe the present vitality of the cinema as a whole to the Americans, and that their best films are the best in the world."[29] Moreover, America's commercialism fed an industrial and creative machine that, according to Barry, could not be easily disentangled.

While Barry recognised that the domination of American films was a problem for those concerned with establishing a British industry and a properly British film, she also acknowledged that British citizens were free to, and often did, use American films to criticise American values, mannerisms and even cinematic technique. The problem of the

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[27] Iris Barry, "The Cinema: Ben Hur at the Tivoli," *The Spectator* 20 November 1926: 898.

[28] Iris Barry, "The Prince of Hollywood," *The Daily Mail* 23 March 1927: 10.

[29] Iris Barry, "The Cinema: Of British Films," *The Spectator* 14 November 1925: 870.

British film, according to Barry, had as much to do with the complicity of British film distributors and exhibitors—happy with the comfortable profits they made exhibiting American films—as it did with lack of government action or unscrupulous American film companies. Barry believed that to rectify the British film situation, it must first be recognised that British "films are bad; and nearly all boring, poorly conceived, wretchedly directed, hopelessly acted, and abominably photographed and titled." [30] An injection of talent, intelligence, integrity and resourcefulness would need to follow. The challenges were many and few members of the industry were spared in Barry's writings, especially those published in *The Daily Mail*. One comment claimed that "the men who actually make films, write film-plays and title them are with horribly few exceptions abysmally untutored, ill-bred persons of inferior mentality." [31]

While Barry recognised that films were expensive and required a healthy commercial base, her conviction that British films were essential to the health of British national life was based as much on her belief that a national film culture was increasingly indispensable "for the sake of national morale and prestige."[32] Barry exclaimed that "films are to the country of their origin the munitions of peace" and that English films should, like English books, become "expressive of English life" and be sold to the world. English films were important, Barry believed, because they functioned as ambassadors for English sensibilities, propagating England to the English as well as to the international community:

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[30] Iris Barry, "The Cinema: American Prestige and British Films," *The Spectator* 11 July 1925: 51-52.

[31] Iris Barry, "The Bad Films of Wardour St.," *The Daily Mail* 20 May 1926: 9.

[32] Barry "The Bad Films," 9

> Our new films must be patently English, introducing to the world the spirit as well as the appearance of life here, and showing for the first time normal existence, heightened by drama or comedy, and discovering to audiences for the first time railways, towns, factories, playing fields, schools, shops, horse-shows, and seaside resorts in England.[33]

Barry's preferred form for the properly English film fits under the broad rubric of social realism, depicting everyday experience and human emotion in dramatic, cinematic form. She wrote that the public "wants to see unfamiliar aspects of life dramatised and the feelings of pity, avarice, loyalty, rebelliousness, and so forth expressed through stories which are simple and true to life—only differing from common experience by being heightened in a compelling way."[34] The dramatisation of common experience combined with cinema's ability to bring far away places closer, to visualise and disseminate phenomena otherwise invisible. Her raw enthusiasm for cinematic technology blended easily with nationalism and aesthetics. Moreover, Barry's writing presages the work of the British documentarians, officially begun in 1929 with the Film Society premiere of John Grierson's *Drifters*. Her writing therefore fits readily into a general European struggle to define a national cinema against the force of an internationalised American network of films and their powerful distribution systems: a cinema, which was in Britain, deigned with explicitly nationalist and civic functions. Barry's nationalism was, however, not easily categorised. She was an internationalist nationalist, unwilling to reject outright American or any other national cinema. Achieving a properly British cinema would be an ongoing dialogue whose resolution required, first-off, the open admission by industrial,

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[33] Iris Barry, "Films we do not Want," *The Daily Mail* 21 September 1926: 8.

[34] Iris Barry, "Film Fallacies," *The Daily Mail* 22 November 1926: 8.

state and public bodies not only that the cinema *mattered at all* but also discussion of *why it mattered.*

International Film Culture

The emphasis on self-consciously imbuing films with national consciousness became a common feature of film culture during this period and found a comfortable home in countries that faced the problem of American screen domination. Forces private and public sought to exert influence over film and how it would—or would not—become a part of national, cultural life. In Canada, France, Britain, and elsewhere minor cinematic cultures developed throughout the 1920s and 1930s, developing alternative means by which the cinema might function to foster indigenous and, as has been argued, at times hegemonic concepts of culture and nationhood.[35] By the mid-1930s, propagandic film use had become an explicit and integral aspect of controlled cultural projects to ensure or further state power in Canada, Britain, Germany, the Soviet Union, Italy and Spain. In some countries, this created an environment unfriendly to open and free film expression. For instance, the consolidation of Stalinist policies in the late 1920s brought an end to the aesthetic ferment and the internationalism of Soviet cinema embodied in the work of Dziga Vertov, Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin. In 1934, socialist realism was officially adopted as the requisite form for all aesthetic activity. In Italy, the production of newsreels and propaganda was nationalised under Mussolini. Severe censorship was

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[35] See Charles Acland, "National Dreams, International Encounters: The Formation of Canadian Film Culture in the 1930s," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 3.1 (1994): 3-26; Richard Abel, "The Alternate Cinema Network," *French Cinema: The First Wave, 1915-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 241-275; and, Kathryn Dodd and Philip Dodd, "Engendering the Nation: British Documentary Film, 1930-1939," *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema*, ed. Andrew Higson (London: Cassell, 1996) 38-50. For contemporaneous writing on these issues in Britain see Forsyth Hardy, ed., *Grierson on Documentary* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971).

instituted in Spain after Franco's conquest in 1939. Nazis exerted control over all cinema activity, requiring that films be of a properly nationalist character. Hollywood saw its foreign markets either shrink dramatically or shutdown completely. The rush of formal experimentation and intellectual ferment characteristic of the European modernist movement of the 1920s had incurred irreparable damage.

Even before the rise of fascism and Stalinism in the 1930s, the 1920s witnessed its own, milder forms of nationalist debates and various state interventions. The wider economic context for this is the clear domination of European screens by American films, facilitated by the constraints placed upon European production during World War I, the aggressive export tactics adopted by American production and distribution interests and the unmitigated popularity of American films. In addition to the aesthetic and intellectual ferment of modernist film culture discussed in chapter 3, as Tom Ryall has suggested, the national art cinemas which sprang up during this period can also be partly seen as a form of cultural—if somewhat elitist defense—against the seeming omnipresence of Hollywood product.[36] Collectively, economic, aesthetic and ideological concerns moved state authorities in Germany, England, Italy and the Soviet Union in particular to intervene in film matters. Production was nationalised in Lenin's Soviet Union in 1919. In Germany, actions consisted of a combination of barriers to trade (quotas on domestic films), incentives for exhibitors to screen films of artistic and cultural merit (German films), and direct production subsidies initiated in 1925. The intellectual and aesthetic ferment which characterises the late silent period and the early 1930s cannot, however, be entirely reduced to a reaction against elitist, nationalist or corporate reactions against American film. The intellectual ferment that characterised many cinematic innovations

and treatises of the time reflect film's implication in European modernist debates generally. German films had been influenced by expressionism, yielding deep plays of light and line. Soviet constructivists developed theories and practices of montage and from France emerged the work of the impressionists and the more challenging film work of the dada and surrealist movements. Further, while stylistically many of these production currents can be readily differentiated from contemporaneous American films, the styles were inevitably informed by them in some way.[37]

Discerning Films: The Film Society

In Britain, the perceived threat of America's film presence can be partly measured by debate about impending policy shifts, finally enacted in 1927. Generally referred to as the Quota Act, this legislation required exhibitors to increase gradually the number of British films on British screens.[38] Film critics and journalists commented on these issues from time to time and certainly Iris Barry herself, as her articles in *The Daily Mail* suggest, was fully engaged with the question of the British film and what it was to become.

Another important aspect of film culture during this period is the increased visibility of specialised film journals, which became another outlet for disenchanted cinephiles whose reactions to Hollywood cinema were widely discussed in their pages. One of the more important and widely circulated among them was the British-based journal *Close Up*, first published in 1927, featuring theoretical, critical and manifesto-like

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[36] Tom Ryall, *Alfred Hitchcock and the British Cinema* (London: Athlone Press Ltd., 1986) 9.

[37] This is discussed at greater length in Chapter 3.

[38] For a concise overview of British film policy see Julian Petley, "Cinema and the State," in *All Our Yesterdays*, ed. Charles Barr (London: British Film Institute, 1986) 31-46; esp. 32-34.

writings on formal and political film issues, censorship being key among them. *Close Up* reflects the impulse to integrate film into a broader intellectual-aesthetic project of radical critique. Accompanying the critique of commercialism, state control and the films exhibited as a result of their influence, was a general concern to explore the distinctly and essentially cinematic properties of the medium.[39] Collectively, these concerns inspired film societies and film clubs which proliferated at the end of the decade and facilitated exhibition and discussion of films and the growing body of film literature in Britain and elsewhere.[40]

The progenitor of British film groups was a collection of cinephiles, industry magnates and concerned citizens who set out to make more widely available films which were difficult if not impossible to see on British screens. Founded in 1925, this group became known as the Film Society. The core of the Film Society was constituted by Ivor Montagu, Sidney Bernstein, Frank Dobson, Hugh Miller, Walter Mycroft, Adrian Brunel and Iris Barry. Some of the early members of the society were children of the British establishment and graduates of either Oxford or Cambridge. The Film Society's roots in the cultural aristocracy seems to have developed naturally out of early amateur film production groups formed at the beginning of the 1920s at both Oxford and Cambridge.[41]

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[39] Issues of *Close Up* have been republished as George Amberg, ed., *Close Up, 1927-1933* (New York: Arno Press, 1972) and more recently as James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus, eds. *Close Up, 1927-33: Cinema and Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[40] For instance, Richard Abel reports that by 1925-26 a network of critics, cinema journals, cine-club lectures and screenings and specialised cinemas was well established in Paris. The first cine-club was formalised in 1921 by Ricciotto Canudo who dubbed the informal gathering of filmmakers, artists and writers, *Le Club des Amis du Septième Art*. For more on the alternative film circuit in France see Richard Abel, "The Alternate Cinema Network" 241-275.

[41] Low 34.

Still, it is important to note that there were many other members of the Film Society who were film technicians, writers, artists or simply film fans.

Ivor Montagu and actor Hugh Miller instigated plans for the Film Society. They were inspired by the Stage Society, an organisation founded in 1899 designed to produce plays that for reasons of censorship or unconventional design had been ignored by commercial theatres. These plays were performed on Sundays when theatres were closed and were administrated under the aegis of a *private* club, therefore exempting them from laws designed to protect the *public* good. Indeed, the Film Society was also chartered as a private club in the hopes that this would exempt them from the numerous regulations enacted upon film's exhibition. However, the nature of the film economy and the forces that sought to control it did not entirely accept the Film Society's proposal for exemption from these regulations; the battles were ongoing.

Established in 1925, the Film Society's official purpose was:

> To exhibit cinematograph films privately to the members of the Society and their guests, and to introduce films of artistic, technical and educational interest, and to encourage the study of cinematography, and to assist such experiments as may help the technical advance of film production...and to arrange lectures and discussions on the art and technique of film.[42]

The Film Society was administrated as a private organisation operating on a subscription system. Only members and guests could attend screenings of films that had been deemed "commercially unsuitable" or in other words films that had been rejected or neglected by distributors/exhibitors or by official censors for public, mass exhibition. Showing films to press and trade members was also an integral element of the Film Society plan,

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[42] The Film Society, *Constitution and Rules of The Film Society, Limited*, 1925 (Film Society Collection, Special Collections, British Film Institute).

demonstrating interest in expanding the audience and therefore the discursive horizons in which the films might be found.[43] Members of the society also hoped that British commercial and independent film production might be stimulated and improved through such activities.

The programs of the Film Society were broader than one might initially suspect, ranging from old American films to contemporary German features, from key examples of Soviet montage to French *cinéma pur*. In addition to various examples of national cinemas were numerous film types, including science and time-motion studies, nature films, avant garde narrative and abstract films, documentaries, features, animated shorts, slapsticks, westerns, advertising experiments and newsreels.[44] Regardless of their respective social or political affiliations, members of the Film Society came together as lovers of the cinema, seeking exposure to a diverse array of visual forms.

The Film Society founders knew that establishing the means by which non-current, non-commercial or banned films might be seen would require not only a shift in the means by which films were distributed but also a shift in the way films themselves were thought about. Equally important was that films individually and collectively could embody abstract phenomena like "quality," "nation," "cosmopolitanism," or "history." Moreover, the activities of the Film Society mark the point at which internationalist cinephilia intersected with the material and political conditions in which this love of films would have to be maintained. Showing films non-commercially to small, specialised

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[43] *The Film Society Programme*, 25 October 1925 (Film Society Collection, Special Collections, British Film Institute): back cover.

[44] These programs are available in the Film Society Collection held in the Special Collections of the British Film Institute. They have also been reprinted as George Amberg, ed., *The Film Society Programs* (New York: Arno Press, 1972).

audiences proved expensive. Censoring bodies did not readily cede authority over "private" film exhibition. The elitism of the society drew many critics. The trade was largely unfriendly to and suspicious of the idea.[45] Nevertheless, ideas about the cinema converged with institutional imperatives, each shaping the other. Raw cinephilia resulted in wide-ranging, internationalist film programs as well as ongoing battles with censors and customs officials which in-turn limited the activities and the wider impact of the society. More importantly, in this period, the notables of British society came to officially recognise the cinema as an acceptable form of activity. Royalty as well as select members of the more progressive intelligentsia, including Oxford and Cambridge professors and students, were willing to admit publicly that they attended, appreciated and, at times, enjoyed films.[46] The Film Society was bold testimony to the growing acceptance of film-as-activity by the upper crust of British society. This acceptance was, however, not complete. The Film Society's activities were also conducted amidst the increasing association, by a number of intellectuals, of the mass media, in general, and film in particular, with the breakdown of proper, traditional cultural values and therefore indicative of a broader social breakdown. These attacks came from the left and the right, variably casting film as an attack on the possibility of working class literacy as well as an attack on the necessary and desirable cultural domination of the elite.[47] The Film Society endured furrowed eyebrows as often as articulate critique or obstinate censors.

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[45] Some of these confrontations are outlined in Jen Samson, "The Film Society, 1925-1939," *All Our Yesterdays*, ed. Charles Barr (London: British Film Institute, 1986) 306-313.

[46] Low 17.

[47] For a cogent discussion of this development including writers such as Mathew Arnold, Wyndham Lewis, Aldous Huxley, T.S. Eliot, Q.D. Leavis and F. R. Leavis, see Peter Miles and

The Film Society was as much a fashionable affair as it was a specifically filmic intervention into public life or into what might now be called visual culture. The fur coats and expensive cars of the filmgoers attracted almost as much attention in the press as did the films being shown. While the society did entertain members of intellectual, corporate, creative and critical film communities, its activities were not unanimously celebrated by any one particular group: many members of the trade, censor boards and film critical community viewed them with disapproval. The Film Society responded accordingly. As Jen Samson has noted, the press releases for the Film Society were littered with the names of society notables in the seemingly desperate attempt to lend quick legitimacy to its endeavour.[48] Names such as H. G. Wells, Lord Ashfield, Lord David Cecil, Julian Huxley, G. Bernard Shaw, Lord Swaythling, John Maynard Keynes, Joe St. Loe Strachey and others graced both the list of founder members and the frequent press releases. These announcements officially marked the intellectual and social elite's endorsement of an innovative, ostensibly progressive cinematic experiment. Such ostentatious display of social respectability did not wholly expedite their efforts.

Despite the fact that as a privately licensed organisation the Film Society had presumably circumvented laws established to govern *public* film exhibition, thereby winning the right to Sunday screenings, battles with the censor continued throughout the

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Malcolm Smith, "'The Embattled Minority': Theorists of the Elite," *Cinema, Literature & Society: Elite and Mass Culture in Interwar Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1987) 81-101.

[48] Barry also used this strategy in attempting to legitimate cinema, proclaiming its acceptance amongst the cultural and social elite. She wrote: "Once more it is not only uneducated people who go to the pictures. You will find as many titles sitting in the Tivoli, Strand, and the Plaza, and the New Gallery in Regent Street, of an evening, as you will in any of the West End theatres. You will even find society hostesses giving evening parties to see special films, and you will see, when such bodies as the Film Society show a certain kind of selective programme in an intelligent way, that they can gather around the doors of the cinema where they meet as many

years. This battle was both an aesthetic and a more overtly political one, as not only films deemed subversive but also vaguely distasteful were being cut indiscriminately by the British Board of Film Censors. This was more than, as Rachel Low has acerbically written, "stupid cuts in stupid films for stupid audiences." Even "as more serious films began to arrive, they suffered the same fate as the saucy, the sadistic and the morbid."[49] Aesthetes and politicos alike were being denied. As a result, "uncut" and "uncensored" films "unavailable" elsewhere were a key feature and expense of the Film Society's program. Perhaps most importantly, the idea of the Film Society—showing films that could not be seen because of industrial and state initiatives—captured the imagination of the nascent film community.

Early response to the Film Society by British film critics was largely positive. Lejeune wrote almost rhapsodically:

> You will be able to snap your fingers at a censor's ban. You will see the sequence of the film uncut, as its maker conceived it. And if you find missing from the proposed repertory several of the films with the strongest claim to the title works of art you will at least be sure of a programme that shall challenge thought, waken imagination, and sweep you away from the stagnant peels of convention into the stimulating, breathless torrent of kinematic unrest. [50]

Lejeune linked the efforts of the Film Society to the development of little cinemas, exhibition outlets that would establish a "regular intercourse between the kinema [cinema] and intelligent people."[51] She celebrated the idea that membership in the Film

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Daimlers to the square yard as any play or opera can attract" (Barry *Let's Go to the Pictures*. 192-3).

[49] Low 64-65.

[50] C.A. Lejuene, "The Little Kinema Again," *Manchester Guardian* 12 September 1925: 9.

[51] Lejuene 9.

Society offered the right "to question, to criticise, and to suggest," cautioning that with membership also came a certain responsibility to keep criticism sane, to prevent over-stylisation and to speak for the poorer man or woman. Lejeune was enthusiastic about the possibilities of the Film Society but wary that it could become simply a site for leisurely socializing and bourgeois meditation. She concluded: "It is the duty of every member of the new Society to make sure that his Little Kinema is not little in understanding."[52] Upon learning of the cost of Film Society membership, Lejeune changed her mind about the Society. She is reported to have called members of the Film Society "bloated plutocrats," asserting that the expense of the society's subscription rate defied the "great heart" of film.[53]

On quite a different note, G.A. Atkinson, film critic for the *Sunday Express*, questioned how it was that the Film Society could improve the state of British films—one of the Society's expressly stated aims—by showing *only* foreign films.[54] He outrightly rejected the internationalist nationalism that lay at the foundation of the Film Society programs. Moreover, Atkinson also raised suspicions about the Film Society's ostensibly warm relations with Moscow, asserting that the Film Society was using "art" as a thinly disguised veil for a political agenda.[55] Showing Soviet films, some of which had been

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[52] Lejeune 9.

[53] Qtd. in Ivor Montagu, "The Film Society, London," *Cinema Quarterly* 1.1 (1980): 42-46.

[54] This claim is a tricky one as the Film Society did demonstrate a preference for non-British features in their programming. However, exhibiting contemporary British features would have been impossible as this constituted competition with the trade. More importantly, it would have been prohibitively expensive. The British films shown were most often documentaries, science and motion studies, or educational films which collectively had little mass appeal.

[55] G.A. Atkinson, "'Good Taste' From Moscow and Berlin," *The Sunday Express* 11 October 1925: 6.

banned from public exhibition, was taken to be a sign of disloyalty to Britain, regardless of the purpose or context of screening. Atkinson continued his reactionary accusations throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, fuelled by the Film Society's numerous though not disproportionate screenings of Soviet films that include Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925); Dziga Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera* (1928); Abram Room's *Bed and Sofa* (1927); and Vsevolod Pudovkin's *Mother* (1926) and *Storm over Asia* (1927).

Members of the Film Society were interested not only in direct satiation of their cinephilic desires; they also had a clear interest in forging links to a broader national and international community of independent filmmakers, distributors, exhibitors and otherwise specialised or non-commercial film groups. This linkage took many forms, including the sponsorship of lectures on film. Eisenstein and Pudovkin spoke at the Film Society during the 1929-30 season. Additionally, Hans Richter led a 1929-study group in the production of an experimental film. Vertov lectured in 1931. Some members of the Film Society actively sought to create awareness of their activities, inviting notable guests and film critics to their screenings and attempting to foster a more general dialogue about the potential of film experimentation as well as the condition of the British film. The Film Society also began to act as a distributor of the films they had imported and titled, developing a film library of its own and renting films to similar organisations in the attempt to recuperate costs, feed an alternative film circuit and support uncompensated filmmakers.[56] Its members actively participated in international

[56] Documents attesting to this can be found in Items 14 and 15 (Film Society Collection, Special Collections, British Film Institute). These films included *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919), *Bed and Sofa* (1927), *Rien Que les Heures* (1926), *The Seashell and the Clergymen* (1927) and a collection of science, abstract, comedy, curiosity and trick films.

film congresses of the day. One of which was the important Independent Film Congress held at Sarraz in 1929, the first designed to assist the coordination of independent film production.[57] Another was the meeting that led directly to the formation of the International Institute of Educational Cinematography, a subsidiary of the League of Nations, established in Rome in 1928. Yet another was the meeting which yielded the formation of the *Ligue Internationale du Cinema Independent* in 1929, which linked the activities of the Film Society within a European network of film leagues, societies and clubs. The Film Society had an international presence and was widely known in emergent production—and non-production—based film circles. Film groups and individuals from France, the United States and elsewhere looked to it as a model and a source of information about how to form similar organizations, how to obtain films and how to exhibit them.[58]

In Britain, the kernel of the Film Society idea spread, changing forms along the way. By the late 1920s, the idea and practice of private and specialised film exhibition had taken root amongst workers' groups, learned societies and leisurely amateurs alike. Importantly, the very establishment of these groups also served to highlight the privilege of the Film Society. For instance, workers' film societies encountered substantially more difficulties acquiring licenses for their screenings of 35mm films. The London County Council claimed that because membership costs were low, their screenings were too accessible to be classified as *private* events. The "private function" clause used to protect

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[57] J. Isaacs and Ivor Montagu attended this meeting. Also in attendance were leading independent and avant garde filmmakers of the day including Sergei Eisenstein, Bela Belazs, Leon Moussinac, Alberto Cavalcanti, Hans Richter and Walter Ruttman.

[58] See Correspondence Files (Film Society Collection, Special Collections, British Film Institute).

the Film Society's comparatively expensive programs would not be applied. The more affordable the screenings, the more accessible they became to working class spectators and therefore the more dangerous such screenings were perceived to be by state authorities. In short, the more affordable they were, the more censurable they were.[59] The classist implications of this pernicious definition of public and private could hardly be made clearer. Nevertheless, film societies were a distinctly modern public undertaking. Outside the purview of the state and domestic spheres, private citizens came together struggling to ensure that cinema become and remain an integral aspect of their public lives—whether to exercise relative privilege or to protest it.

The elitism of the society should not be overlooked but should be placed alongside its wider functions. For instance, as the practice of exhibiting films was costly, the wealth of the Film Society was a necessary precondition for screening films of diverse origins. Many of the films they showed required English inter-titles and therefore extensive editing and translation work. Often, full commercial duties were placed on society films as there was initially no duty exemption for non-profit, educational or cultural exhibition as no legal definition for these existed. One rate of duty was paid per foot of film as with all other commercial, imported films.[60] The longer a film, the more expensive it was to show. This discouraged the importation of any film not designed for mass distribution and exhibition and certainly mitigated against the importation of foreign features. Shipping expenses, programs, musical scores, and musicians also

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[59] See Don Macpherson, "Workers' Film Societies," *British Cinema: Traditions of Indepedence*, ed. Don Macpherson (London: British Film Institute, 1980) 108; and Ralph Bond, "Acts Under the Acts," *Close Up* (April 1930) rpt. in Macpherson *Traditions*, 108-110.

[60] This was a battle long waged by various Film Society Board Members. Film Society correspondence records suggest that duty exemption was finally granted in December 1935 but

contributed to mounting costs.[61] Privilege also implied other benefits, including the outright elimination of certain expenses. For instance, the New Gallery Kinema (Regent Street) and later the Tivoli Palace (Strand) were both lent free of charge to the Film Society because of friendly contacts with theatre owners. Further, the extensive travels of members often doubled as film scouting missions, pick-ups and deliveries.

The social privilege of the Film Society seems to have made the very project, in its earliest forms, possible at all. A brief overview of their activities-in-context points to a lack of the most basic infrastructure supporting non-commercial exhibition, in particular, of non-British films. Their closest institutional siblings, little theatres which sprouted-up after the Film Society's initial formation, struggled similarly under such burdens though they had the benefit of repeat screenings, fewer audience restrictions and, albeit limited, box-office receipts. The Film Society was undoubtedly as conducive to exploring the eccentricities of fashion as it was conducive to elaborating the eccentricities of critical cultural practice. Yet its activities are an important marker of significant shifts in film culture underway generally throughout this period; namely, the uptake of film viewing by private citizens in the name of national, aesthetic, intellectual and political concerns. The amorphous structure of the Film Society also suggests the complex forms such

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only on a performance-by-performance basis. See Correspondence Files (Film Society Collection, Special Collections, British Film Institute) 4B.

[61] Costs were largely covered by membership fees but these were never wholly adequate. Indeed, the material demands of the project may also partly explain the heavy reliance upon British instructionals, science and early silent films as their comparatively low cost would have balanced otherwise prohibitively expensive, imported programming. While the Film Society did initially set out to screen old films of significance, the rate of duty on new, non-British films surely increased the attractiveness of this—a duty applied indiscriminately to all imported films regardless of their intended use.

configurations have yielded, forms with links to commercial and independent film, dominant and radical political interests.

The impact of the Film Society should not be discounted. While it cannot take credit for the spread of repertory or "little cinemas" in London and throughout Britain, inasmuch as international and domestic currents also supported their spread, the society did precede and contribute to the survival of these theatres both by providing institutional models and feeding a nascent, specialised audience. Particular members of the Film Society also sought to use it as a forum to argue for other things. Ivor Montagu is a telling case. Generally considered the animating spirit behind the society and a typical "champagne socialist," Montagu used the society's activities as a kind of test-case against censorship and their programs as an internationalist intervention into the course of British films, actively engaging in battles with censors to secure Soviet and other films.[62]

Montagu resigned from the Film Society late in 1929, taking a position as vice-chairman of the Workers' Film Federation, an overtly leftist intervention into film culture, formed to feed the burgeoning field of workers' film production, distribution and exhibition. This was a trend whose precedent was partly established by the Film Society itself. In the 1930s, John Grierson, Basil Wright, Alberto Cavalcanti, Thorold Dickinson, and Paul Rotha—notable members of the British documentary movement—were active society-participants, showing and discussing their own and other films under the Film Society's banner. Some critics used the Film Society to deride the "highbrows," while others used the programs as a welcome addition to the British screen, allowing as it did

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[62] These activities are well represented in Ivor Montagu, *The Political Censorship of Films* (London: Victor Gallancz, 1929). For more on Montagu and the Film Society see Ivor Montagu "Interview: Ivor Montagu," *Screen* 13.2 (1972): 72-73.

for a more diversified cinematic experience and enabling increased consideration of film form and function. Many London film critics of the time attended these screenings usually by invitation, and the programs of the Film Society were often reviewed in film columns of such newspapers as *The Daily Express*, *The Times*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Telegraph*, and *Film Weekly*. The writers of the film-political journal *Close Up* also used the Film Society screenings as material for their anti-American and theoretical film treatises. In other words, the Film Society's screenings became a small part of a larger discursive whole.

The Film Society marks a compelling configuration of modern phenomena. While it was clearly elitist and fashionable at one level, the practical, material and legal precedents for which they fought sparked an infrastructure that facilitated a healthy and diversified film society movement throughout the late 1920s and 1930s. Their programs and other film cultural activities implicated them in a growing, primarily European network of cinephiles and aspiring independent filmmakers and workers, linking commercial interests in British film within a broad network. The Film Society is one link in a much larger process that demonstrates the gradual uptake of film as an integral aspect of how public life and civic interventions would be understood through the cinema—a complex convergence of technological, spectacular, commercial, aesthetic and political phenomena.

Iris Barry was invited to join the Film Society at its earliest stages of conception by Ivor Montagu and actor Hugh Miller. She was an active member in the society's early years and remained a council member until it folded in 1939, despite her departure in 1930 for New York. Few details remain as to Barry's precise role on the Film Society

council. Her media-savvy was evident in efforts to publicize the society's screenings and her networking skills, so effectively exercised years later at the Film Library, are manifest in the society's wide British and international network. The range of film programs also suited the scope of her interest in film as information, art, formal experiment and as popular entertainment. The elaborate film notes that accompanied these screenings bear her stylistic imprint but are reported to have been written collectively by the council members.[63] Surviving members of the society recall her dedication and spirit. Referring to the considerable resistance against the Film Society by the press, the trade and the censor, Montagu noted years later that Barry had "flung herself into the thick of the battle." [64] No evidence suggests that she was not treated as an equal and valuable member of male-dominated council, although it should be noted that her stylish dress, blue eyes and seductive charm are mentioned almost as often as her sharp wit, ambassadorial skill and knowledge of film.

The Film Society should also be seen as a response to the question of what cinema was to become generally and what the British cinema was to become particularly. The activities of the Film Society, therefore, inform those of the Film Library in several important ways: (1) the Film Society was a distinctly British, yet internationalist, response to the problem of establishing the British film as well as exploring film's broader aesthetic and sociological potential; (2) it was a non-commercial, material and intellectual intervention into non-commercial *and* commercial film culture and; (3) it was

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[63] This was made clear in a corrective written by Sidney Bernstein to George Amberg, editor of the Arno Film Literature Series. Amberg mistakenly identified Barry as the sole author of Film Society Programs. Bernstein notes that these were written collectively by Film Society Board Members.

[64] Ivor Montagu "Birmingham Sparrow," 107.

a clear attempt by society notables to endow film viewing with style, sophistication, educational value and class-based respectability. The Film Library reflected these concerns though they changed somewhat given the different nature of financial support and nationalist debate. The Film Library was a distinctly American response to the general state of film culture, funded philanthropically and deeply informed by ideas about the cinema and the nation. It was similarly a non-commercial intervention into dominant and alternative film culture. Linking spectatorship to ideas about *intelligent* film viewing was consciously designed to appeal to projects to improve film quality by reflecting middle-class tastes and concerns. In doing so, both organisations developed into somewhat sprawling, internationalist centres whose very existence became part of an expanding discursive context in which film's value was elaborated, celebrated and contested.

Conclusion: From the British Future to the American Past

When Iris Barry arrived in New York in 1930, the sound revolution was well underway. Commercial theatres had begun to re-equip themselves for the next generation of cinematic experience: synchronised sound. Silent films were fast becoming strangers to commercial screens. More importantly, the visibility of conscious efforts to shape film's particularities to serve social and political causes was increasing dramatically. Film art was embraced by nation-states not only as an expression of national culture but as a method by which to explicitly consolidate and spread state power. The aesthetic ferment of European modernism had been quelled by the rise of fascism in Europe. Film art became clearly enmeshed not just in international aesthetic-industrial movements but also explicitly entangled in international politics. Film groups that had formed in the 1920s

adjusted to this changing situation, some by studying the products of this change and some by vocally lamenting the loss of what had come before; film archives emerged internationally during this period.

Barry's conviction about film's significance did not waiver in its magnitude but the primary characteristics of this significance did shift somewhat upon her arrival at the Film Library. While her film work would remain consistently outside of the commercial domain, her British nationalism would be supplanted by an American one (at least rhetorically), and her concern for the future of film would be largely channeled toward an interest in film's past: saving films for the future. This shift reflects the importance of context for establishing the shape that the general concern for film took during this period. Further, it demonstrates the crucial role played not only by animating figures in film history but by the availability and unavailability of resources for essentially unprofitable undertakings.

Barry's American efforts to build an archive, and to feed a growing non-commercial film circuit, found a comfortable home in ongoing American film trends. Her understanding of the significance of these efforts grew out of a specifically British context: the efforts of private citizens to address the impact of crushing commercial and often foreign interests. These undercurrents are readily reflected in Barry's early film writing and the activities of the Film Society which itself slowly built up a collection of films, old and new, to feed the growing circuit of film societies throughout Great Britain. The collection and distribution of films was inevitably linked to assumptions about the cultural value of film and the essential need for increased access to the growing store of

films old and new, foreign and domestic, popular and not. Each of these were important elements of the modern phenomena collectively grouped under the title "cinema."

The Film Society provides important insights into international film culture of the time. In their earliest phases, critical, political and bourgeois film cultures unassociated with large commercial or state interests needed to build their own distribution and exhibition circuits, not only because seeing particular kinds of films was materially challenging but also because these networks would serve to constitute the spaces needed for fostering such communities: non-commercial film venues. The Film Society was, therefore, a precursor for what the Film Library became: a highly strategic organisation comprised of intellectuals, critics, filmmakers, scholars, socialites and activists converging on the site of noncommercial, privately funded film resources. Through their film exhibitions, both institutions mark primarily internationalist interventions into film culture and early attempts to foster the development of minor film cultures. Both entities also institutionally straddle the longstanding tension in film culture between the aesthetic and the political, the public and the private. Finally, Iris Barry is a figure whose career spans this key period in film culture, articulating clearly the interchange of ideas characteristic of the period and linking concretely the emergence of film societies, film archives, and film's relationship to concepts of the nation, the past, and the future.

VI. Chapter 5

MoMA's Film Library: Film Art/Film History

> Hundreds of motion pictures are made each year, tons of newsprint commend them, millions of people see them. And there in a sense the whole thing comes to an end: the films disappear from sight, leaving behind little more than the wholly incalculable effect they have had on their multitudinous audiences. Astronomical numbers of tears have been shed, pulses have quickened, unrealized associations have been set up, but a medium that bears so transient an appearance does not readily enjoy respect or provoke reflection, since it is about as difficult to compare one dream with another as to measure film against film in recollection.
>
> - Iris Barry [1]

> Before you can show an old film, it has to exist—that is, it has to have been 'conserved' (in the archival sense). And in order to conserve it, first it has to have been 'collected' (in the going-out-of-one's way-to-rescue-and-save-what-others-discard sense).
>
> -Henri Langlois[2]

When Iris Barry took up her role as Film Library curator at MoMA, her work was just beginning. Barry did not share the deep scepticism about film's value that pervaded the museum's board of trustees. Neither did she share the Eurocentric leanings of the museum's first director, Alfred Barr. Barry was a dedicated cinephile who even in her distaste for particular films betrayed her general love of all things cinematic. Although the Film Library had gained official status and an adequate—if temporary—operating budget, the debate about "film art" within and outside the museum was mounting. In short, an even more daunting task remained: selling the value of "film art" to numerous

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[1] Iris Barry, "Preface," in Lewis Jacobs *The Rise of the American Film: A Critical History* (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1939) xix.

[2] Qtd. in Georges Langlois and Glenn Myrent, *Henri Langlois: First Citizen of Cinema*, trans. Lisa Nesselson (New York: Twayne, 1995) 37.

and strikingly different communities of interest. Populists and elites alike variously rejected the idea outright or accepted it only in a highly selective manner. While the trustees had allowed the Film Library a home within the larger institution, its status was not uniformly embraced nor was its survival guaranteed. Further, in attempting to build the Film Library, the constituency of parties with vested interests grew to include not only art patrons and trustees but also individual filmmakers, producers, celebrities, state agencies, film collectors, critics, exhibitors, and, of course, the general public. "Film art" had come and would continue to mean many things to many people. Skilled rhetorical maneuvering was required to ensure widespread approval for the Film Library's activities, thereby guaranteeing its survival.

Upon establishment, the Film Library quickly became a sprawling institution whose operations are usefully categorised under the broad headings: archive, resource and study centre, and lending library/film exhibitor. This chapter describes library activities which fell under the first two categories—archiving and film study—and considers how Film Library staff legitimated its project to two particularly important interest groups: the museum trustees and the film industry. The fact that a broadly mandated film archive and study centre was housed in an art museum inevitably shaped the rhetorical strategies and the activities adopted by the Film Library's staff. More precisely, while the Film Library's place within an institution of modern art made its project possible at all, the institutional association of film with art caused its staff as many problems as it solved.

With the establishment of the Film Library, film art had come to be implicated in a range of institutional mandates not the least of which was addressing a sense of urgency

about the vast number of films that had been lost to public and private view. Indeed, in the face of the often vague but also divisive proposition that film was an art (Which films? In which circumstances? What kind of art?), saving films as valuable pieces of a lost history became the most common and general explanation for the Film Library's activities during these early years. For instance, there were crucial, cultural traditionalists who needed to be convinced that film was remotely worthy of the resources supporting the majesties of art. There were equally important filmmakers, financiers and film producers who smugly rejected the very idea that film should be associated with what they deemed to be the objectionable and highbrow term "art" at all. The pretension and elitism of things cultural were considered distasteful to the democratic and/or populist spirit of film. Not only were such associations misplaced, they were also bad for business. The former asserted that film was undeserving of "art;" the latter suggested that art was undeserving of film. The term "art" was then used by library staff loosely and variably, sometimes not invoked at all and sometimes foregrounded in library documents and press releases. The proposal that film had a history that had been lost and, if found, would come to be an indispensable form of knowledge, became an umbrella strategy under which legitimating film as a high/low art or as a sociological document could be situated. In short, old films were construed as historical films. Within this umbrella a variety values were attributed to films—aesthetic, popular, informational and sociological—depending on the context in which the staff found themselves and in which films were being discussed. The Film Library is, therefore, a telling site upon which these discourses converged, overlapped and also, at times, differentiated themselves, gesturing toward the diverse interests and concepts which informed film's archival environment.

Nationalism/Internationalism: Saving/Studying

As explained in chapter 3, the Film Library was privately funded by a combination of Rockefeller Foundation grants and a significantly smaller amount of (often anonymously) donated money. With this somewhat tenuous funding base and an ostensibly public mandate the Film Library staff proposed: "to make possible for the first time a comprehensive study of the film as a living art."[3] They set out "to trace, catalog, assemble, preserve, exhibit and circulate to museums and colleges single films or programs of all types of films." [4] As years passed, the library's selection criteria acquired a somewhat more developed character. Reflecting on the library's initial acquisition activities, Barry noted "there are patently many kinds of films, as well as simply good ones or bad ones." She continued:

> Considerable effort has been made all along to collect propaganda films, and film of opinion of all kinds—pacifist or Nazi as readily as the others. Such vanished fragments of the past have also been dug up and preserved as glimpses of "Pussyfoot" Johnson, suffragettes, Rudolph Hess, the Charleston, while particular care has been taken to acquire works by cinematic experimenters like Man Ray, Fernand Léger, Luis Buñuel.[5]

To this list must also be added popular films, films which capture a "vanished moral judgement or mode of thinking," "great performances," bad films which stand-in for an important phase of technological development as well as timeless masterpieces. In short,

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[3] John Abbott and Iris Barry, "An Outline of a Project for Founding the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art," 1935 (Department of Film Series, Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art) 1.

[4] Abbott and Barry "Outline," 3,13.

[5] Iris Barry, "The Film Library," *Art in Progress: 15th Anniversary Exhibition* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1944) 177-179.

a rather wide net had been cast; a broad range of film-types was included within the archival and exhibitory goals of the library. Film had clearly acquired various forms of archival and therefore historical significance. Importantly, the Film Library's general plans, and its archival plans in particular, were staunchly internationalist. These films needed to be acquired from across borders national and international, companies extant and defunct, collections organised and scattered. Under these same conditions, exhibition rights as well as resources for storage, preservation and exhibition also had to be obtained. Ongoing access to the collection was considered almost as important as the collection itself.

From the beginning, therefore, the Film Library staff forged links with a national and international community. Even before the library was given official status, copious letter writing was conducted in an attempt to establish contact and resource exchange with organisations of a wide variety of socio-political and aesthetic concerns throughout the United States, Europe and elsewhere. These included the fledgling National Archives (U.S.); the Department of Agriculture (U.S.); the Harvard Film Foundation; the National Board of Review; the Art Institute of Chicago; the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America; the Workers' Film and Photo League; the journal *Experimental Cinema*; the Film Society of London; the International Institute of Cinematography (Rome); the British Film Institute; the Women's Motion Picture Society of Japan and many more.[6] An internal report submitted in 1937 claimed that contact had been

[6] John Abbott "to Mrs. Rockefeller" [memo] 26 February 1935 (The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY: Early Museum History: Administrative Records 12.0). These files also contain reports describing the initial responses of individuals and organisations approached with the Film Library plan. One notable respondent was Will Hays, a later supporter of the Film Library. Hays was first "luke warm" to the project though he is reported to have changed his mind upon

established and maintained, and materials exchanged, with organisations in the United States, England, France, Germany, Cuba, Romania, Japan, Belgium, Sweden and the Soviet Union.[7] Importantly, by 1938 library staff oversaw the founding of the *Federation Internationale des Archives du Film* (FIAF), the first attempt to coordinate film archiving internationally and to foster the sharing of resources amongst archives. The federation's other founding members included The National Film Library (British Film Institute, London, 1935), the *Cinémathèque Française* (Paris, 1936), and the *Reichsfilmarchiv* (Berlin, 1935).[8]

Many of these relations were ratified during a trip taken by Barry and John Abbott, Barry's husband and director of the Film Library, in the summer of 1936. The two set sail for Europe in order to acquire original, uncensored, undamaged prints representative of national production histories. They visited London, Paris, Hanover, Berlin, Warsaw, Moscow, Leningrad, Helsingfors and Stockholm. In these locations other film archives had recently been established or were in the process of being established. Barry and Abbott met with officials from these organisations, discussing films, institutional plans and international strategies. They negotiated with members of

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learning that the library staff was interested in circulating films only to colleges and museums in order to foster serious study. He is reported to have offered the "active cooperation of his office."

[7] The Film Library, "Film Library Report (1937)," (Department of Film Series, Special Collections, Film Study Center, Museum of Modern Art).

[8] Other archives were also formed at around this time, including a Swedish archive in 1933 and an Italian archive in 1935. For more on these early archives see Raymond Borde, *Les Cinémathèques* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1983) 79-80. Also important to note about this emerging international community of film archives is the prominent position often granted to Iris Barry by this first generation of archivists. Even Henri Langlois, individualist curator of the *Cinémathèque Française*, proclaimed his debt to her, as did others. Jacques Ledoux, a contemporary of Langlois, furthered this by stating that while all archivists are in some way

the newly established National Film Library of the British Film Institute. They struck agreements with officials from the well-funded, newly established *Reichsfilmarchiv* in Berlin who proved to be generous and forthcoming with materials. Barry was relieved to learn that many films made by recently exiled artists and filmmakers had not yet been destroyed.[9] The *Cinémathèque Française* was forming at this time, and its curator, Henri Langlois, enjoyed a cordial meeting with Barry and Abbott. The French, Barry later reported, were extremely eager to have their films kept elsewhere, as the threat of another war loomed large and memories of films sacrificed for their nitro-glycerine content during the previous war continued to haunt French cinephiles.[10] Indeed, Barry reported cooperation and enthusiasm at all stops except in the Soviet Union where officials expressed concern and suspicion about a private organization collecting films for the "public" good. It was also here that Barry and Abbott met for the first time with Jay Leyda, now considered a pioneering Soviet film scholar and then a researcher also funded by a Rockefeller Foundation grant. Leyda returned with Barry and Abbott and continued his work and research on film at the Film Library.

Films obtained on this trip include: *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919), *The Golem* (1920), *Variety* (1925), *Faust* (1926), *Metropolis* (1926), *M* (1931), *Italian Straw Hat* (1928), *Fantomas* (1914), *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1927), *Le Chien Andalou* (1929), *Étoile De Mer* (1928), *A Colour Box* (1935) and *The Private Life of Henry VIII*

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children of Langlois, he is himself "the child of Iris Barry" (qtd. in Penelope Houston, *Keepers of the Frame: The Film Archives* [London: British Film Institute, 1994] 59).

[9] Iris Barry, "The Film Library and How it Grew," *Film Quarterly* 22.4 (1969): 11.

[10] Iris Barry, "Film Library, 1935-1941," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 8.5 (1941): 8-9.

(1933).[11] Some films— Germaine Dulac's *The Seashell and the Clergyman* (1929)— were donated personally by their makers. Others were indirectly donated. For instance, Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* (1926) was obtained in Berlin, while René Clair's *Paris Qui Dort* (1923) was given by its British distributor J. S. Fairfax-Jones, Esq.[12]

Partly because of the mounting political situation in Europe during these years, the eager acquisition of Soviet and German films throughout the 1930s did not go entirely unnoticed or uncriticised back home. Barry reported that

> the acquisition of foreign material of this kind gave rise to a whispering campaign (originating, it seemed, among small groups of film enthusiasts with axes to grind) that the Film Library of the Museum as a whole, perhaps even the Board of Trustees (!) was infiltrated with Nazi principles (this was in 1937 or 1938) or with Communist principles (this was in 1940) or at best with some 'un-American spirit.'[13]

Such rumours persisted despite the common claim made by Film Library staff that the motion picture is "triumphantly and predominantly an American expression."[14] Interestingly, it was partly this very political turmoil and environment of suspicion that allowed for the relatively easy acquisition of so many European films. This was true not

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[11] The Film Library staff participated in ongoing negotiations with customs officials. By 1937, it successfully secured an exemption from commercial duties for foreign films if their intended use could be deemed to be of "non-theatrical and educational" value. Film exchange with Canada was expedited by a similar agreement established in 1936. The French government offered the Film Library use of its diplomatic pouch for the transport of films to and from Paris. This reportedly had as much to do with concerns about the fear of war as with the love of films ("Film Library Report (1937)" 27, 39, 40).

[12] Barry and Abbott also began to collect an extensive assortment of printed materials, catalogues, stills, production notes, and scripts. Some of these acquisitions are listed in The Film Library, "Film Library Report (1936)," (Department of Film Series, Film Study Center, Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art).

[13] Barry "The Film Library, 1936-1941," 10. All inflections and commentary belong to the original author.

[14] Barry "The Film Library, 1936-1941," 10.

only because particular filmmakers and cinephiles feared the destruction of beloved films but also because the Film Library promised recognition and an audience for films that otherwise had little chance of reaching American screens. Moreover, films, like literature and painting, served a vaguely propagandic function, providing markers of national accomplishment. Barry herself further speculated that in Germany, for instance, even the small amount they paid in American currency for film prints was a much needed boost of "hard currency."[15]

Another manifestation of the Film Library's internationalism was its active program of visiting scholars, filmmakers and researchers. Throughout the first ten years of the library's existence, scholars and artists as wide-ranging as Paul Rotha, Fernand Léger, Luis Buñuel, Siegfried Kracauer and Jay Leyda were funded to lecture and/or research at the Film Library, making use of the site and the growing collection of books, films and film-related materials housed in the study collection.[16] Also important was the growing body of American film scholarship generated partly by these same resources, including the work of Gilbert Seldes, Lewis Jacobs and the pivotal publication of the first index to film literature, funded largely by the Writers Program of the Works Progress

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[15] Iris Barry, *Autobiographical Notes* (Iris Barry Collection, Department of Film Series, Film Study Center Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art, New York, n.d.).

[16] Kracauer's residence at the Film Library culminated in the publication of his seminal book *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947). Jay Leyda's research in Russia and his later work at the Film Library resulted in the translation and publication of Sergei Eisenstein's writing, *The Film Sense* (1942) and *Film Form* (1949), published together as: *Film Form and Film Sense*, trans. and ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Meridian Books, 1957). In 1937, Paul Rotha visited the Film Library on a Rockefeller Grant, delivering a series of lectures on documentary film methods and "the creative presentation of facts as we find them in everyday life." He advocated that film could and should be used for combining aesthetic and civic experiments: fusing the cinematic with the citizen. A lecture he gave at the National Board of Review during his stay was published

Administration.[17] The growing body of film writing which accompanied the library's exhibition programs represented a similarly expanding literature. Film notes were written by Iris Barry, Jay Leyda, Alistair Cooke and Richard Griffith and became early, important resources for film societies and clubs throughout America.[18]

From 1937 through 1939, Barry and Abbott collaborated with faculty at Columbia University to conduct a comprehensive course on the motion picture, entitled "The Development, Technique and Appreciation of the Motion Picture," under the University Extension, Department of Fine Arts. Lectures were promised by prominent scholars, producers, actors and directors, including Eric Knight, Lay Leyda, Erwin Panofsky, Paul Rotha, Gilbert Seldes, James Cagney, King Vidor, J. Robert Rubin and Iris Barry.[19] Further, the library also became a widely accessed resource center for public inquiries

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as Paul Rotha, "The Documentary Method in British Films," *The National Board of Review Magazine* 12 (November 1937): 3-9.

[17] Lewis Jacobs, *The Rise of the American Film* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1939); Gilbert Seldes, *The Movies Come From America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937); and *The Film Index: A Bibliography, The Film As Art*, ed. Harold Leonard, vol. 1 (New York: Museum of Modern Art and W.H. Wilson Company, 1941). While at the Film Library Iris Barry also translated Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach's treatise on film history which was published as *A History of Motion Pictures* (New York: Museum of Modern Art and W.W. Norton & Co, 1938). In 1940, she researched and wrote *D.W. Griffith: American Film Master*, which was published that same year by the museum.

[18] Some of these notes are readily available as Eileen Bowser, ed., *Film Notes* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1969). The Film Study Center of the Museum of Modern Art holds complete and original versions of these. Importantly, David Bordwell has identified the strong influence of the Film Library's Film Notes on one of the oldest film societies in America whose own programs and notes drew heavily on MoMA's. See Arthur Lenning, ed. *Film Notes* (Madison: Wisconsin Film Society, 1960) and *Classics of the Film* (Madison: Wisconsin Film Society Press, 1965). These are cited in David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) fn 31.

[19] "Film Library Report (1937)," 34-35. Jay Leyda and Iris Barry also lectured at New York University during this period.

about film history, how and where to find films, production trivia and so on. One library report claims that in the year 1937 they received 75 calls per day requesting such information.[20]

The library also corresponded with or serviced a wide range of institutions including schools, universities, and museums but also newly formed film societies, hospitals, Works Progress Administration projects, prisons, Jewish centers, YMCAs, and the American Civil Liberties Union.[21] Lectures and speeches were also given, in part, as educational services and, in part, to advocate for support of the library itself. All members of the staff participated, though Barry and Abbott bore the brunt of this public relations work. Speeches were given at meetings of the National Board of Review, the American Association of Museums, the American Library Association, Cooper Union, New York University, the American Federation of Women's Clubs, the Resettlement Administrations, Brown University, the Society of Motion Picture Engineers and the Washington Film Society, an important venue for Film Library programs. Radio appearances were also made, with information given about everything from camera tricks to the development of the star system. This was complemented by numerous published articles that appeared in a range of magazines and journals.[22]

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[20] "Film Library Report (1937)," 7.

[21] "Film Library Report (1937)," 7.

[22] Iris Barry's publication record alone is surprising in its size and diversity. See for example "Films for History," *Special Libraries* October (1939): 258-260; "Motion Pictures as a Field of Research," *College Art Journal* 4.4 (1945): 206-208; "Hunting the Film in Germany," *The American-German Review* June (1937): 40-45; "Challenge of the Documentary Film," *The New York Times* 6 January 1946: 1, 17; "The Film of Fact," *Town and Country* September 1946: 142, 253-256; "The Museum of Modern Art Film Library," *Sight and Sound* 15.18 (1936): 14-16; "Why Wait for Posterity," *Hollywood Quarterly* 1.2 (1946): 131-137; "Infant Days of the Movies," *Radio*

Advocating Film

Throughout these activities, the Film Library staff made appeals to the increasing presence of films in daily life, their high-cultural and broad social influence, and the dearth of resources available for their study. They reiterated a basic statement:

> The motion picture is unique in three important ways. First, it is the one medium of expression in which America has influenced the world. Second, it has had a marked influence on contemporary life. And third, it is such a young art that we can study it at first hand from its beginnings: the primitives among movies are only forty years old.[23]

The prominence and the various implications of American film (politically, economically, nationally and internationally) was rhetorically simplified to a vague notion of influence. The proximal yet fleeting nature of its youth was invoked to pair "influence" with the sense of both a pressing need and a passing opportunity. These basic strategies took on greater nuance when faced with specific audiences. To the trustees of the museum, film needed to be constantly legitimated as a medium deserving the prestige and investment of museum resources. As such it was often aligned with other high-cultural forms as well with the need to develop a critical and responsive public. To the industry, rather than emphasize the importance of film art as a distinct aesthetic category, old films were construed as popular historical documents, markers of American accomplishment and, most importantly, as part of an honourable and non-profit venture that would lend prestige to film generally. Each of these constituencies were essential to the success of the Film Library: the trustees pulled the strings and opened doors; the

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City Music Hall Weekly 1.22 (1936): 4; and, "The Museum of Modern Art Film Library: Last Year and This," *Magazine of Art* 30 (1937): 41.

[23] Iris Barry, "The Motion Picture," *Art in America in Modern Times*, eds. Holger Cahill and Alfred Barr Jr. (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1934) 91.

industry owned copyrights and marshalled vast resources; celebrities brought glamour and public endorsements.

As mentioned above, throughout the literature generated by the Film Library, there are notably vague uses of powerful concepts such as art, influence and history. For instance, at times the influence of film was linked to its popularity and, at others, to its impact on high-cultural concerns. Precise definitions of "film art" are never offered. Barry and the library staff carried these seeming contradictions through many of their lectures and publications. The tension resided not only in the idea that the same medium might yield both high and popular art-objects as well as sociological documents but that the same film-object might also embody these various forms of value. This conundrum—which points to the different idealist, institutional and populist methods by which an art may be identified—was simply not addressed in the great bulk of Film Library publications. This tension is, however, implicit in its early programming, film notes and other publications which collectively presented films that had set popular fashions and caused moral panics alongside films it considered markers of aesthetic development and achievement. What kind of art was film? This was posed as an open question best understood within the broader rubric of film's significance as an historical object. This tension and the attempt to resolve this tension through invoking the more generally palatable concept of "historical significance" will be explored by examining the ways in which library staff appealed differently to museum trustees and members of the film industry.

Untrusting Trustees

When the Film Library was first established, its offices were located in the Columbia Broadcasting Building, blocks away from the museum's main site. A storage closet served as a screening room. The library's operations would not be integrated into the museum's until four years later, when in 1939 a new, larger building was opened at its current location, 11 W. 53rd St. This spatial dislocation only furthered what, in later years, Barry described as a general perception by members and friends of the museum that the Film Library lived a somewhat "mysterious existence." The relationship of its work to the rest of the museum seemed "rather remote." She further likened the early character of the Film Library to the "slightly ambiguous position of an adopted child who is never seen in the company of the family." [24] The Film Library was not accepted as an equal and legitimate part of the museum's greater whole.

Largely ignorant of things cinematic, museum trustees were not generally friendly to the idea of "film art." This was, in part, due to the fact that many of the trustees did not see films and, in part, because film was plagued with low-status in established art circles. Punctuating the efforts to gain the support of trustees and board members, many of whom purposefully avoided seeing films, was the regular forwarding to them of movie tickets, film recommendations, and criticism.[25] Responding to this scepticism, the Film Library

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[24] Iris Barry, "The Film Library," [1944] 175. It should be noted that this was an official museum publication which suggests that Barry's words were carefully chosen. It is quite likely that their position was seen as far more suspicious than this passage fully connotes.

[25] Russel Lynes, *Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Atheneum, 1973) 111; Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr.: Missionary for the Modern* (New York: Contemporary Books, 1989) 128.

staff presented numerous internal reports in the continued attempt to legitimate the organisation's very existence, providing a wide range of reasons why its unorthodox project should continue. The source of film's most prominent value was radically different from high art objects—a value not conventionally found in the rarefied film-object itself but in its mass exhibition. Films could neither be hung on walls nor did they accumulate monetary value over time. As such, film required a form of value that would be both intelligible and appealing to doubtful trustees. The project to make film art palatable to board and museum members took two primary forms. The first was the identification of single filmmakers/creators such as "Pabst, Sennett, Clair, Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Griffith, Chaplin or Seastrom."[26] Concentrating on "great" artist-directors made the creative process of film production more familiar to those invested in the idea of singular, creative genius, anchoring cinematic creativity in an individual rather than an industry or a technology. This was a strategy mentioned earlier, invoked in Alfred Barr's early attempts to justify a film department. However, with the bulk of responsibility for convincing trustees placed on Abbott and Barry, this strategy expanded. In addition to asserting the importance of popular American films, Barry and Abbot loosened the association of film with only high-cultural forms and began linking films to other expressive forms which had benefited either from technologies of mass reproduction (such as novels) and/or also from public institutions such as libraries and museums. Widespread accessibility, they argued, did not necessarily condemn any particular medium to an ill-desired fate. In fact, the opposite could indeed prove true. According to Barry and Abbott:

[26] Abbott and Barry "Outline," 1-2.

> The situation is very much as though no novels were available to the public excepting the current year's output. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that had the novel since Defoe and Behn been known under circumstances similar to those under which the film is known, the repute of the novel and the level of creation in novel-writing would both have remained considerably lower than they are. To draw an even closer analogy, the situation is as though there existed a great interest in painting on the part of the public, but that almost no paintings were ever exhibited save those executed within the previous twelve months.[27]

Likening them to novels and paintings, Barry and Abbott sought to denaturalise film's unavailability outside the largely ephemeral and restrained context of commercial exhibition. In doing so, they invoked a very particular set of values: a classically liberal faith in democratic forms combined with assumptions about the role of art in uplifting the human spirit and improving moral-aesthetic and critical standards generally. Supplementing this rhetoric was the mandate of the museum itself, conceived in its ideal sense as an educational institution which made art more accessible, intelligible and, therefore, more beneficial to a needy and deserving public—a project of cultural stewardship. Under the wings of this stewardship the Film Library sought protection for old films, attempting to extract film from its more common, popular and commercial contexts and also from its increasingly specialised, little-theatrical or exclusive settings. The unavailability of films on such terms was highlighted. Further, cultural stewardship through film not only involved saving films or making them more widely available; it also involved the development of "critical standards" so that the quality and experience of film would be elevated.[28] That is, Barry and Abbott argued to trustees that films could and should be implicated in a socio-aesthetic project of analysis and criticism.

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[27] Abbott and Barry "Outline," 2.

[28] "Film Library Report (1936)," 9.

The Film Library also needed to prove that there was a demand for the services it set out to provide. Public demand was evidenced by elaborate lists of institutions that had been served by library resources. A 1937 Film Library report indicated that 1,520 such organisations had corresponded with or been served by library staff.[29] The list includes universities, colleges, high schools, film societies, public libraries, YMCAs, educational groups, hospitals, prisons and other civic-minded cultural groups. Internal museum documentation consistently foregrounds the range and quantity of services supplied to these groups, emphasising not only the versatility of the Film Library but also the gap they had filled.[30]

Trustees also heard broad appeals to the importance of the Film Library within an international context, further giving nationalist form to ideas about film heritage and history. The fact that archival movements were underway in other countries not only served to legitimate the activities of the Film Library but gave an American archive added importance for establishing American presence in emerging international cultural institutions. Gestures toward the essential "Americanness" of film art and film history were dramatised still more by the absence of American films in critical film circles. Internal reports complained that it was easier to see foreign films than it was to see great,

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[29] "Film Library Report (1936)," 7.

[30] Evidence suggests that reports about attendance were made frequently to particular trustees, testifying to the appeal of the library's programs. Memos about early screenings were sent regularly to Abby Rockefeller. These documents confirmed that the auditorium was filled to capacity with "50 people at each screening left standing or on the floor with even more turned back at the door" (Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY: Early Museum History: Administrative Records: I.12i).

old American films. Of non-current releases, only Soviet films were readily available to film societies and study groups[31]:

> Such study as has therefore been possible has created an entirely wrong impression about the history, development and tendency of the film because students of the film in the United States have come to consider the foreign film with disproportionate respect and to disregard or underestimate the domestic product, especially the older and all-important American films of 1903-1925 from which most of the admired foreign films stem....Americans generally underrate this peculiarly American contribution to the arts, and the prestige of the American film as a whole is disproportionately low in America for exactly these reasons....The Secretary suggests that a proper appreciation of this peculiarly native expression and a proper understanding of and pride in it on the part of intelligent movie-goers would ultimately influence the quality of films to be produced.[32]

Accessing long-gone Hollywood films was construed as an essential step in rectifying an imbalance in film resources and, therefore, in the writing of film history. Serious study of the motion picture would remedy the misconception that valuable films came only from abroad, helping to establish a native artistic tradition and to trace American influence on foreign film traditions. Barry and Abbott confronted directly the anti-commercial and, therefore, anti-American film sentiment they knew to be symptomatic of cultural conservatives' approach to film generally. Rather than stepping down from this position, they asserted boldly that not only was film quintessentially modern, it was also quintessentially American. Its development was a point of nationalist pride.[33] The "Americanness" of film may have been seen as a way to quiet critics of the

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[31] Abbott and Barry "Outline," 8.

[32] Abbott and Barry "Outline," 15.

[33] Abbott argued similarly in other contexts. See John E. Abbott, "The Motion Picture and the Museum," *National Board of Review Magazine* 10.6 (1935); and John Abbott, "Organization and Work of the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art," *Journal of the Society of Motion*

museum's internationalist acquisition policies that were interpreted by some as overly intellectual, Eurocentric and anti-American.[34]

An important aspect of valuing the claim that film was a distinctly American expression was linking this to American influence on European filmmaking. In other words, tracing American influence abroad served to legitimate an ostensibly indigenous tradition, one they argued had been neglected by an emerging generation of American film scholars. The clearest example of this strategy rests in the "Exhibition of American Art, 1609-1938," held at the *Musée de Jeu de Paume* in Paris, April-May 1938. Included in this exhibit were representative American paintings, sculptures, architectural models, prints, photographs and films. Overall response to the exhibit was lukewarm. Many of the paintings and sculptures were deemed poor derivatives of their European predecessors. Importantly, film and architecture proved to be the exceptions to this criticism; both exhibits met with unqualified enthusiasm. One commentator went so far as to claim that he would "give all the paintings in the United States for a few meters of American films."[35] American films had won critical continental recognition; they had also won

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Picture Engineers March (1937): 295-299. In this latter article, Abbott asserted that the lack of due praise and consideration to American films, and the corollary view that only foreign films were art films was "wholly untenable" and that MoMA organised its programs, in part, to rectify this misconception (297).

[34] These critiques are outlined in Lynes 229; Guilbault 59. It appears that despite the Film Library's role in elevating American film to a greater place of prominence, they were not immune to charges of anti-American behaviour. Iris Barry answered accusations that she had "packed her staff" with English assistants by providing detailed citizenship statements for each of her staff members, assuring her critics that 15 of 19 staff members were native Americans. See Iris Barry, "letter, re: staff," 26 March 1940 (Correspondence Files, Department of Film Series, Film Study Center, Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art).

[35] Qtd. in A. Conger Goodyear, *The Museum of Modern Art: The First Ten Years* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1943) 79.

critical valuations that placed them well above their more traditional and established art-world counterparts.

The *Jeu de Paume* film program was a sweeping overview of American film history divided into three periods: (1) "From the Invention of Films to 'The Birth of a Nation';" (2) "Progress and Close of the Silent Era;" (3) "The Sound Film." Three 50-minute anthologies were made. They included brief clips of popular figures such as Fred Astaire, the Marx Brothers, Rudolph Valentino, Mickey Mouse, Mary Pickford, Buster Keaton, Al Jolson and more.[36] The program must have seemed a flurry of visual cues and memories distant. Such anthologies, while commonplace now, were a new and unusual genre, used powerfully by the Film Library to gesture toward film's past.

With the *Jeu de Paume* exhibit, the Film Library had earned the international legitimation so important to the trustees. Barry, long aware of the American influence on French film and the familiarity of the French public, artists and art patrons with American film, quickly capitalised on these circumstances. Referring to the Film Library's success in articles published in the museum bulletins, Barry continued to further substantiate the importance of the Film Library within the museum community. She firmly reminded museum members that with its achievements in film and in architecture, "the United States was seen at its most original, most exuberant, most enjoyable, [and] most understandable." The film, she claimed, was the liveliest and most popular of

[36] Iris Barry, "Films," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 5.4-5 (1938): 10-12. Program notes to this exhibition are published as Iris Barry, "A Brief History of the American Film 1895-1938," *Trois Siècles D'Art aux Etats-Unis* (Paris: Museum of Modern Art/ Musée du Jeu de Paume, 1938) 97-101.

contemporary arts and one in which the United States is "supreme." [37] She argued not only for the importance of film in the international modern art scene but also for the importance of specifically American, popular films within that scene. Barry's continued pleas suggest that the general resistance to film among museum trustees and patrons persisted. The Film Library, at least during these crucial early years, remained the awkward, "adopted" museum child.

While it is important to note the persistent calls for recognition within the museum by resorting to traditional assumptions about aesthetic worth and high-cultural validation, several trustees did openly support the Film Library and its acquisition of popular films. The contributions of John Hay Whitney have already been mentioned. Additionally, in a radio show entitled "Why a Museum of Modern Art has a Film Department," aired on an NBC affiliate in 1935, Edward Warburg attempted to explain the project to a wide public. Two years before the Film Library was established, Alan Blackburn addressed the National Board of Review, stepping down from the predominant mode of high aesthetic justification for the library by announcing: "We are not primarily interested in the so-called artistic pictures; we are not primarily interested in 'arty' photography. We are interested in the picture you see every time you go to a motion picture house, in the commercial product mainly and chiefly." [38] These instances, however, provide the exception that proves the rule. Trustees, on the whole, remained suspicious about the very basic idea that film could indeed be an art worthy of their time

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[37] Barry "The Film Library 1935-1941," 11.

[38] Alan Blackburn, "Creating Motion Picture Departments in Museums of Art," *National Board of Review Magazine* 8.8 (1933): 8.

or attention. As a result, they were largely addressed with elaborate treatises on nascent critical communities, American international influence and instances of authorial/directorial genius.

First Catch your Hare!: Hollywood, Art and Classic Consciousness

> I've never had a goddam artistic problem in my life, never, and I've worked with the best of them. John Ford isn't exactly a bum, is he? Yet, he never gave me any manure about art.
>
> - John Wayne[39]

> Let Rembrandt make character studies, not Columbia.
>
> - Harry Cohn[40]

> Film executives have been known to speak rather grandly now and then about preserving films for posterity, in the spirit, presumably, of those who seal up cans of Spam, phonograph records, and newspapers in the foundations of new buildings. For, though the producing companies all scrupulously preserve their negatives, since in their physical possession and through the copyright act the legal ownership of story rights is thus assured, nothing has ever been done by the industry itself to make it possible to *see* the screen classics of the past.
>
> -Iris Barry[41]

If popular American films were to be included in the Film Library's project, they first had to be obtained. From early on, the Film Library staff sought to establish links to the industry and to those who might generally lend the project legitimacy and resources. One of the ways this manifested was in the solicitation of support and advice from prominent personalities and invitations to them to serve on the Film Library advisory committee. The first committee was composed largely of industry notables including Will

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[39] Qtd. in Leslie Halliwell, *The Filmgoer's Book of Quotes* (London: Granada Publishing, 1978) 228.

[40] Qtd. in Halliwell 68.

[41] Iris Barry, "Why Wait for Posterity," *Hollywood Quarterly* 1.2 (1946): 131.

Hays, Stanton Griffis (trustee of Cornell and chairman of the Executive Board of Paramount Pictures, Inc.), Jules Brulatour (Eastman Kodak Hollywood representative) and J. Robert Rubin (vice president of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer). Also on the committee were David H. Stevens (director of Humanities, Rockefeller Foundation), and Erwin Panofsky (professor of Fine Arts, Princeton). Stevens was a well-known figure in the philanthropic world. The Rockefeller Foundation, for which he worked, had a long record of funding film research, in particular, research into film-as-propaganda.[42] Panofsky was by this time a well-known art historian by this time with a noted interest in film aesthetics. The remaining members of this committee were all prominent figures in the film industry.

One reason for keeping the industry close to the Film Library's activities was to make them seem less suspicious and more complementary to rather than competitive with standard industry practices. Moreover, if American films were to be collected and exhibited, the cooperation of film producers who held copy- and exhibition rights was essential to the Film Library's success. While celebrities would lend public appeal and glamour to its activities without legal consent from film producers, the Film Library had little chance of succeeding. In August 1935, Abbott and Barry travelled to Hollywood seeking this support. John Hay Whitney, then-president of the Film Library and member of the museum's board of trustees, supplied letters of introduction. Mary Pickford hosted

[42] This aspect of the foundation's work is documented and discussed in David Culbert, "The Rockefeller Foundation, MOMA's Film Library and Kracauer," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 13.4 (1994): 495-511. The Rockefeller Foundation also funded Grierson's research on the press, public opinion and social psychology during his stay in America, 1924-1927. In the 1930s, recent emigrés to the New School for Social Research, Hans Speier and Ernst Kris, also conducted research funded by the foundation on the use of radio for propagandic purposes.

a party at Pickfair, the famous estate she once shared with Douglas Fairbanks. Attendees included: Harold Lloyd, Samuel Goldwyn, Mrs. Thomas Ince, Jesse Lasky, Walt Disney, Walter Wanger and others. Will Hays, then-president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, also attended. Hays supported the Film Library from early-on and later served as first chairman of the Film Library's advisory committee mentioned above. Hays, Barry and Pickford made speeches. The event was widely reported in well over 40 newspapers, including the papers of major urban centres.

Barry screened a carefully chosen series of excerpts from early American films. Of the seven excerpts shown, two featured or were conceived by guests in attendance: Mary Pickford in *The New York Hat* (1912) and Walt Disney's *Pluto's Judgment Day* (1935). Other films featured were *The May Irwin-John C. Rice Kiss* (1896); *The Great Train Robbery* (1903); a historical pageant produced by Colonel Selig entitled, *The Coming of Columbus* (1911); and Charlie Chaplin's *The Gold Rush* (1925). The printed program distributed to guests included the then-unusual practice of registering production dates beside the film's titles. These films were then subsequently projected in chronological order. Most significant, however, was the screening of *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), a film in which the recently deceased Louis Wollheim appeared. Barry wrote: "There was a tiny, shocked gasp at the first appearance of Louis Wollheim in the program's brief excerpt from *All Quiet on the Western Front*: he had been dead so very short a time. Was fame so brief?"[43]

Many players were extras in the films and had since become famous: Mae Marsh, Lillian Gish, Lionel Barrymore, and Broncho Billy Anderson. Many were personally

[43] Barry "Film Library, 1935-1941," 6.

known to those in the audience. Many had fallen out of the public light. Playing on the ephemeral nature of film exhibition—silent and sound—Barry appealed to the audience's intimate attachment to film images. Their own youth flashed before them on the screen as did fellow actors recently deceased. Fame suddenly seemed inextricably linked to the images themselves, many of them long unseen by the people depicted in them. Barry described the screening as invoking tears and deep reflection, suggesting that the audience had been shocked into realising the ephemeral nature of their own relationship to film.[44] They were reminded of a time and a place forever gone; both seemingly passed as quickly as these films. Bringing the unnecessarily short life of films into relief, projecting film-time onto real-time, Barry suggested that film-time need not be so brief. By exhibiting a selection of silent films, the Film Library also became a way by which the fame engendered by the silent cinema might be preserved, a fame proven fleeting if not utterly eviscerated by the sound revolution of several years previous.

Linking film to mortality and to vanity, Barry provoked a few pledges of support and even more raised eyebrows. Despite the fanfare and announcements of unconditional support made by some members of the industry upon leaving Hollywood, Barry later admitted that they had not put their case to one of the big producer-distributor companies. Louis B. Mayer—noted for his priorities, business over culture—proved to be particularly evasive. Moreover, no directors or actors could help them gain access to films except for the very few who controlled the rights to their material.

Barry wrote years later:

> This visit proved vastly agreeable but was, in a sense, a wild goose chase. We soon realized that, perhaps understandably, no one there cared a

[44] Barry "The Film Library and How it Grew," 22.

> button about 'old' films, not even his own last-but-one, but was solely concerned with his new film now in prospect. Some thought we wanted to do good to long-suffering children by showing them things like *The Lost World*, which of course was not the case. Some certainly thought that we stood for some kind of racket. And what was 'modern art?' [45]

Barry evoked the suspicion roused by the Film Library's activities. Film was a product. Old films were objects of oddity, charity, or get-rich-quick schemes. The relationship of film to questions of (high) culture remained unclear; the Film Library's relationship to the emerging body of non-representational modern art made them doubly suspect. Despite the well-documented appropriation of foreign film styles and filmmakers steeped in European art movements, Hollywood executives on the whole resisted associating their work with "art." This would have been compromising to the mass appeal sought for their films. Moreover, if "art" was antithetical to properly democratic, American cinematic values, then foreign art was an anathema.[46] Further, exhibitors were also initially unfriendly to the Film Library idea, fearing encroachment upon their lucrative territory.[47] Saving films was one thing. Exhibiting them was entirely another.

In her more candid moments, Barry summarised the Pickfair event somewhat more directly. She wrote:

> We had learned our lesson. Potentates and powers were based in strict law and real money. The true heart of the industry (not an art but an industry) [sic] resided in the banks and/or downtown New York. We had been ignorant, perhaps slaphappy, but now we knew, had got the idea. Hollywood was simply the place where films were manufactured but as

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[45] Barry "The Film Library and How it Grew," 22.

[46] There is an apocryphal story that circulates throughout secondary literature on the Film Library that some studio executives sent large contributions to the museum during this period, stipulating that none of the money could be allocated to the Film Library.

[47] "More Trouble for Theatre Men Seen in Film Library Setup," *Showmen's Trade Review* 29 June 1935 [Film Library Scrapbooks, Film Study Center, Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art].

> merchandise—and they were in that sense no more than that—the trading place and the real guts of the business was in the eastcoast.[48]

Barry recognised that the bulk of control of feature films rested with studio lawyers in New York. Access to old films required a legal agreement ensuring that no infringement would be made on studio coffers and that the Film Library's exhibition practices would not in any way detract from commercial exhibition revenues. Old films had to be first divested of their profitability and second attached to a vague public or civic purpose. As such, in October 1935, Barry succeeded in establishing the first North American legal definition of non-profit, feature film exhibition. The studios agreed that after two years a film's commercial run would no longer be threatened by the Film Library's project. Once this period had passed, a film would be allowed to enter the archive and, upon negotiation, the Film Library's exhibition programs. For the cost of a print made at the library's expense from negatives held by the respective studio, these films would be used for purposes educational and non-commercial. Any formal group whose expressed mandate was to study films for one purpose or another could access this collection on the condition that admission to films was gained by virtue of membership rather than purchase of tickets.[49] Copyright holders reserved the right to pull the film from the museum's circulation program if it deemed fit. A non-profit arrangement for the supply of raw materials and services was made with Eastman Kodak for film stock, with RCA-

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[48] Barry "Autobiographical Notes."

[49] Film Library Bulletins, circulated throughout this period, offered advice on how to become eligible for film rental under the legal arrangements struck by them with various copyright holders. This led to encouraging the formation of film societies that would be funded by membership fees rather than a fluctuating base of cash customers. Such entities satisfied the legal agreement. No other formal institutional affiliation was necessary. See "Conditions of Rental," *Film Library Bulletin, Museum of Modern Art* (1940): 21-22.

Victor Manufacturing Company for sound recording and with DeLuxe Laboratories for film processing.[50] Establishing a body of films stored at one remove from copyright holders came with heavy constraints, high cost and considerable compromise.

These negotiations did, however, expedite the acquisition of films. Despite the uneven experience at Pickfair, some films had been procured as a result of the event. These include a selection of Harold Lloyd and Warner Brothers films. Shortly thereafter, those of Samuel Goldwyn, Metro Goldwyn Mayer, Twentieth Century-Fox, Paramount and Disney followed; some were more forthcoming than others. Ironically, one of the most celebrated figures in the Film Library's pantheon, D.W. Griffith, outright refused to support the library's project, exclaiming that nothing could convince him that film had anything to do with art.[51]

Shortly after the visit to Hollywood grand statements of support were issued by several studio executives including Samuel Goldwyn, Carl Laemmle (President of Universal Pictures) and John Otterson (President of Paramount) through Film Library press releases.[52] Upon donating a copy of King Vidor's *Stella Dallas* (1925) and *The Night of Love* (1927), Samuel Goldwyn announced:

> Apart from the purely entertainment side of motion pictures, they have become for this century, as have books and paintings in the past, a living picture of the world and as such should be guarded zealously as a Gainsborough portrait or a Gutenberg Bible. They are an accurate portrayal of contemporary times, presenting as they do not only the factual

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[50] "Film Library Report (1937)," 5.

[51] qtd. in Iris Barry, "Film Library, 1935-1941," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 8.5 (1941): 6. Chaplin was also a notable holdout though the reasons for this are not made clear in either Film Library literature or its internal documents.

[52] Film Library press releases are held in the Museum Library, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

> evidence of modern existence, but presenting it in visual form. I am very proud indeed to have my pictures included in this splendid movement and feel that the Museum justifies my contention that really fine motion pictures are not only great entertainment but also graphic pages in the living history of a great era.[53]

Often avoiding the association of their films with art, those who made such statements aligned donated films with an explicitly historical rather than an aesthetic project, neatly avoiding the taint of "art." Feature films were described as "accurate portrayals," "factual evidence" and "graphic pages in living history." Importantly, films could be both entertaining and valuable pieces of historical evidence simultaneously. Both characteristics worked together, their association was designed to lend credibility not only to the library's project but also to the industry itself.

It seems that Barry was aware of the propensity among industry members to emphasise the historical over the artistic. While actively advocating for support of the Film Library in industry publications, she explicitly adopted this rhetoric. Cleverly titling an article in *Screen Guild Magazine* "So You Are in a Museum," she wrote: "The chief purpose of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library—established in 1935 through a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation—is to create an awareness of tradition and history within the new art of the film."[54] In this article, film art is a vague and loose sub-concept of the more general and less objectionable idea of "film history and tradition."

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[53] Samuel Goldwyn, qtd. in Film Library Press Release 19 November 1935 (Museum Library, Museum of Modern Art, New York).

[54] Iris Barry, "So you are in a Museum," *Screen Guild Magazine* November 1936 [Film Library Scrapbooks, Film Study Center, Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art]. A virtually identical phrasing was used in a speech delivered by John Abbott to the Society of Motion Picture

Despite some of the fanfare emanating from Hollywood itself, little real support was granted. A report entitled "The Case for the Museum of Modern Art," compiled by Iris Barry and submitted to the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) in 1948, claimed that only one donation had ever been made to the Film Library by the MPAA or the major studios from the inception of the library to the date of the report.[55] Elsewhere, Barry bemoaned this situation, at times using it to confront industry apathy directly. In the pages of *Hollywood Quarterly* she declared: "No gift of money had ever been made, nor has even one $1,000 life membership ever been subscribed by anyone in films, and in ten years only two contributions have been received from any film organization."[56]

The American film industry cautiously supported the library's activities. Usually this support came in the form of non-profit exchange agreements. As the 1930s progressed, studios increased the number of films available to MoMA. In addition to their commitment to posterity, studios also had their eye on the expanding market for 16mm exhibition.[57] The Film Library's considerable inroads into nontheatrical exhibition likely gave studios cause to speculate on the increasing fashionableness and newfound utility of old films. The consequent increase in their value suggested that perhaps old films, once deemed liabilities

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Engineers, see John Abbott, "Organization and Work of the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art," *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* March (1937): 295-299.

[55] In 1939, under the instruction of Will Hays, the Motion Picture Association of America granted the Film Library $33,333.33, which was made in four quarterly instalments (Iris Barry, "The Case for the Museum of Modern Art Film Library" 1948 [for the Motion Picture Association of America] [Department of Film Series, Film Study Center Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art, New York]).

[56] Barry "Why Wait for Posterity," 133.

[57] Philip Sterling, "Sowing the 16mm field," *The New York Times* 25 July 1937: sec 10, p3, c7.

rather than assets, with a minimum investment of capital might become part of a lucrative new market. One example of this was the expanding educational arena in which old films were finding new functions as lessons in foreign languages, geography, historical events, important personalities and for generating classroom discussion about moral and ethical issues.[58] Television was also just around the corner and would prove to be the second major technological innovation to increase the utility of old films. Content was needed. Furthermore, the industry had gained a library, a storage facility and assurance of increased specialised attention free of charge. Further, it had a laboratory that might even succeed in proving that old films were worth something more than heritage value—or, that in establishing historical aura, a new form of profit might be found in selling Hollywood's history itself—an inevitable by-product of film-historical consciousness. The technology companies such as Kodak, which were also interested in expanding the film market, would also enjoy increased demand for 16mm and other screening equipment.

Conclusion

Film Library staff did not accept the proposition that film, in particular Hollywood films, deleteriously affected the very conditions in which art was possible at all. Nor did they accept the proposition, increasingly posed by American film critics and groups, that European films were art films and American films were categorically inferior. Nevertheless, other sensibilities about film's value and its troubled association

[58] See Film Council of America, ed., *Sixty Years of 16mm Film, 1923-1983* (Evanston, Illinois: Film Council of America, 1954) esp. Jack C. Ellis, "Theatrical film on 16mm," 176-182.

with particular definitions of art shaped a discursive project that cast these films differently to different constituencies. Film Library staff crafted a lost American tradition couched in the majesty of international influence; it was offered proudly to museum trustees. Industry members found a mix of nostalgia and civic values, invoked partly by showing them films that had passed quickly or had been long unseen. In the meantime, library staff slowly acquired films. The publics in which the Film Library implicated itself grew. Its resources facilitated an increasing amount of film scholarship. Within the convergence of strikingly different interests, the material traces of film's past surfaced. The Film Library serves as a site of negotiation, compromise and dialogue, demonstrating how these interests were accommodated in institutional form and how seemingly irreconcilable conceptions of film's significance were sustained through the real and imagined activities of the archive. In these early days, configuring the means by which films might be saved at all was paramount.

VII. Chapter 6

Exhibiting the Old, Seeing the New: The Film Library's Circulating Programs

> Valentino and Sarah Bernhardt move once more across motion picture screens in this country. So do Mabel Normand and Pearl White, Sessue Hayakawa and Wallace Reid, Theda Bara and the little Gish girls. To some, these names are only a legend. There are people who thrill to see these former idols again, while others smile at the outmoded clothes they wear or the now unfamiliar style of their acting. Some faithful souls even weep secretly in the darkness because film fame is so fleeting. Yet it is neither for laughter nor for tears that the old favourites of the screen have returned. Their films cannot be seen in the cinema theatres. The showing of these older films is part of a movement originated by the Museum of Modern Art in New York to create an interest in the history and development of the film, since, among all the arts, that of the film is not only the newest but the most characteristic of our era.
>
> - Iris Barry[1]

> Despite all that other countries have contributed to the steady stream of film production since 1895, the film has become essentially an American expression and its history is part and parcel of the national life.
>
> -Iris Barry[2]

Collecting films and facilitating film scholarship mark important but specialised functions performed by the Film Library. The great majority of American filmgoers would neither visit the archive at MoMA nor would they peruse its growing collection of printed materials. To them a film archive or a film museum, as it was sometimes called, remained a novel if not odd idea—a largely unknowable and thus imagined space. This idea was, however, coupled with an aggressive and successful circulating program of films. Indeed,

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[1]Iris Barry, "The Film Library," *Delineator* 1937 (Department of Film Series, Film Study Center Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art).

[2] Iris Barry, "Preface," *The Rise of the American Film: A Critical History*, in Lewis Jacobs (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1939) XX.

through its circulating program as well as its considerable public relations campaigns, the Film Library soon found a national and international audience. While distinct from the library's archival and scholarly activities, these programs were intimately linked to them; films were culled directly from the library's collection as well as accompanied by film notes written largely from resources held by the library. Moreover, the programs themselves bore the stamp of the Film Library and all it symbolically entailed. Through these programs and the press surrounding them, old films were subjects of discourses infused with nostalgia, American heritage and, most notably, the aura of lost relics discovered. The goals of critical study, aesthetic appreciation and establishing a body of film-historical knowledge were subsumed by a vague sense of American tradition, popular memories and the uncanny experience of seeing the old anew.

Following a cursory outline of programs the Film Library circulated throughout its first four years, this chapter will examine the library's role as a film exhibitor, placing its activities in the context of contemporaneous specialised and non-commercial film culture and its exhibition practices. Focus will then turn to the first two circulating programs assembled by library staff, programs which featured old American films, followed by consideration of reception of the programs in the popular press. How were old films presented and received in 1936?[3]

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[3] The term "old films" may strike the reader as flippant and reductive as a term used to describe all films of another historical period. This connotation is purposeful as it was used consistently in literature of the period. It accurately suggests a very different kind of historical consciousness regarding films but also a kind of un-consciousness regarding films not-of-the-present. It is my contention that from the mid-1920s onward awareness of film's historical significance—popular and specialised— became significantly more widespread. Select old films became historical films, classic films, art films and national treasures. It is this very transformation I seek to explore.

Even before the Film Library had acquired proper storage facilities, its staff was busily organising screenings in makeshift theatres and auditoriums throughout the greater New York City area. Long the awkward, mysterious cousin of other museum departments, the Film Library conducted its activities from an office, blocks away from the primary museum site, using a storage closet as a screening room. Yet, only one year after being officially established they had circulated film programs to interested groups throughout the United States and Canada. By 1937, they had reportedly screened 546 two-hour programs to 288,904 spectators.[4] With no theatre of its own until the summer of 1939, the Film Library created a sprawling, mobile theatre constituted largely of pre-packaged film programs. These were designed to illustrate the history of the motion picture and were comprised of films gathered from defunct production companies, scrap brokers, private donations, a European treasure hunt and humble American studio offerings.

Because it did not have its own theatre and also because access to films was prioritised from the beginning, the Film Library quickly organised its film holdings into discrete packages designed to appeal to groups who qualified under the provisions of the legal agreement struck with the industry and various copyright holders. The first circulating programs required broad appeal as the value of the library's undertaking would partly be measured by public demand for them. Further, trustees and museum members would be closely monitoring the library's activities. There were also other concerns. The

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[4] The Film Library, "Film Library Report (1937)," (Department of Film Series, Film Study Center Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art): 15.

museum was seen by some as an exclusive salon where the wealthy were served caviar with decadent, *foreign* art as backdrop. As the decade wore on, the conflicts between American and European art and their respective relationships to American values became sharply evident. With the museum's exhibition policies accused of being centred in a largely European art movement, American artists and institutions dedicated to more traditional and "properly" American art attacked MoMA for their Eurocentric if not anti-American practices. While the bulk of these attacks focussed on the museum's more prominent painting and sculptural holdings, film was not entirely exempt from these attacks. The library's acquisition of German and Soviet films invited suspicion within and outside of the museum.[5] Therefore, while the Film Library sought to collect and preserve many kinds of films, the public nature of its exhibition programs did not allow for the same catholicity. In short, even in the library's earliest planning stages, there was a general concern about showing films deemed to be overly controversial for fear of internal and public rebuke. Partly to protect its acquisition practices, the Film Library programmed films cautiously, hoping to pre-empt unwanted controversy which might jeopardise its already tenuous position with trustees and industry members alike. A memo written by John Abbott to board member Abby Rockefeller documents these concerns:

> The international character of the programs, will, I think, prevent any complaint about the inclusion of certain films with a marked national or political flavor—such as some Russian or German ones—which if shown singly might produce comment....As for the very few films which alone among all those of any real interest could be considered objectionable—

[5] See Iris Barry, "Film Library, 1935-1941," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 8.5 (1941): 3-13, esp. 10.

> such as the Buñuel-Dali 'L'Age D'Or'[6]—while we might perhaps wish ultimately to have a copy of them stored in our library, we should very definitely be opposed to any idea of circulating them as part of our programs.[7]

The Film Library planned to camouflage films of particular nations under the more generic guise of "internationalism," assuaging concerned trustees in the process. Indeed, in its first four years the Film Library succeeded in circulating films from France, England, Germany, Sweden, the Soviet Union and, of course, the United States. Its emphasis was largely on the narrative film, though it did include early actuality films as well as examples of the non-narrative avant garde.[8] Overly controversial films were simply not shown publicly.

It should also be noted that the Film Library hosted small, one-time screenings of experimental films or films we have come to know as properly avant garde. Fernand Léger's *Ballet Méchanique* (1924) and Rene Clair's *Entr'acte* (1930) were both shown in October 1935. Léger was in attendance and delivered a lecture on the relationship between modern painting and film. Interestingly, the notes to these programs emphasise the influence of American trick films (Chaplin

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[6] *L'Age D'Or* created a scandal when first released in 1930. Funded by the art patron Vicomte de Noaillies, the film depicts the decadence, hypocrisy and repression of the French bourgeoisie. Luis Buñuel and Salvadore Dalí directed the film. Its script was collaboratively written by a group of prominent surrealists including Aragon, Breton, Dalí, Tzara, Éluard and others. The film was subsequently banned by French authorities after the theatre in which it was showing was attacked by a group of right-wing objectors.

[7] John Abbott, "memo to Abby Rockefeller," 7 June 1935 (Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY: Early Museum History: Administrative Records, I.12i).

[8] For a readily accessible but incomplete description of films included in these programs see Eileen Bowser, ed., *Film Notes* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1969).

and Sennett in particular) on the French enthusiasts of *cinéma pur*, understood generally as the aggressive pursuit of the essentially cinematic.[9] The Film Library also held larger one-time screenings such as that in May of 1936 at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C. The program featured documentary films, including the recently completed *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (1936) as well as excerpts from *The Face of Britain* (1934-5) and Leni Riefenstahl's *The Triumph of the Will* (1934).[10] These screenings were exceptional however. The bulk of early public attention to the Film Library did not be relate directly to the idea that film was art, or to the idea of exclusive screenings, but to the novel idea of the relationship of old American films to various forms of history. Grouped under the titles "A Short Survey of the Film in America" and "Some Memorable American Films," old American films from the archive were arranged in historical narratives, generating diverse and telling commentary.

There is no doubt that as the years passed and more films were acquired, the Film Library's exhibition practices became more international and more comprehensive. Few records remain which indicate in any detail when precisely particular films were acquired or what kinds of rights were acquired along with them, thus hindering a rigorous analysis of the material and legal factors which contributed to archiving and programming

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[9] Iris Barry, "A Lecture and Two Films" 1935 [program notes] (Department of Film Series, Film Study Center Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art).

[10] The Film Library, "A Program of Documentary Films," 10 May 1936 [Grand Ballroom, Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D.C.] [program] (Department of Film Series, Film Study Center Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art).

decisions. Sufficient corroborating evidence suggests, however, that the first two circulating programs were not only a result of resourceful programming from the slimmest of pickings; they also reflect the library staff's early concern with industry and public approval. The reasons for their choices are further explained by a resonant strain of American populism present throughout many of the discourses generated by staff during these first crucial years. Before examining these programs more closely, this chapter will turn first to concurrent trends in non-theatrical and non-commercial film exhibition in order to place the Film Library's activities within a broader film cultural context.

Film Culture and Alternative Exhibition

With the introduction of synchronised sound in 1927, silent films quickly became yesterday's news. Indeed, within only a few years it became difficult if not impossible to see silent films on the vast majority of American screens. An entire style of filmmaking and film-viewing seemed threatened with extinction in the rapid transformation of the industry. Important to note is that the coming of sound only dramatised the plight of the large majority of films, many of which left cinema screens and became invisible regardless of technological change. Yet, even earlier, a small community of cinephiles had become dissatisfied with dominant commercial practices and therefore sought to create means by which particular kinds of films might be seen outside of commercial circuits. Many contemporary cinephiles were also concerned with the complementary task of creating the means by which cinematic potential could be more fully explored. Resulting from this was the proliferation of amateur and experimental production clubs. Little cinemas emerged around the same time, dedicated to developing the means by which films otherwise

unavailable in commercial theatres might be exhibited.[11] Indeed, critical writing and cultural practices crystallised generally during this period, and other film institutions, which defined themselves in opposition to, or at least sought to be distinguished from, commercial film (Hollywood), took on clear form.

A critical film community had matured and played an important role in generating alternative ideas about the way films could look and the ways in which they could be seen. In his history of American film criticism, Myron Lounsbury has traced these ideas to critics writing for such publications as the *Theatre Arts Monthly*, *The New Republic*, *The New York Times*, *The Nation*, *Exceptional Photoplays*, *The National Board of Review Magazine*, *Close Up*, *The Dial*, *Hound and Horn* and *Movie Makers*. These writers were not only dissatisfied with standard theatrical fare; they were also inspired by examples of European, primarily German but also Soviet, silent cinema which appeared intermittently in America throughout the 1920s.[12] These films include, among others, Ernst Lubitsch's

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[11] Douglas Gomery reports that some foreign language theatres, particularly in the late 1920s and early 1930s, subsisted on an eclectic program of non-American films that included both what have become art films and what would be considered standard commercial fare assembled to appeal to the widest possible ethnic or non-English speaking communities. In fact, in 1931 it was thought that foreign language cinemas would become a regular part of film exhibition in the United States as producers struggled with the problems presented by synchronised sound and multi-ethnic and multi-lingual audiences. While most studios ceased active production of foreign language films only a few years after the shift to synch-sound, a small number of imported foreign language films could still be seen largely on urban screens throughout the 1930s. Gomery notes that an estimated 200 theatres regularly presented foreign films; this represents approximately one percent of American movie theatres. Of these, only half showed foreign films exclusively. On rare occasions major distributors would distribute important or successful foreign films such as *The Battleship Potemkin* (1926), *The Cabinet of Dr.Caligari* (1919) and Jean Renoir's *Grand Illusion* (1938). This, however, remained highly unusual. On the whole, foreign films were a primarily urban and limited phenomenon (Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, [Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992] 174-8).

[12] Such critics include Seymour Stern, Gilbert Seldes, Ralph Block, Alfred Kuttner, and Herman

Passion (1921), Friedrich Murnau's *The Last Laugh* (1924), Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1926) and, importantly, Robert Wienne's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919), which was revived regularly throughout the twenties. Each of these films provided notably different, stimulating, innovative and perhaps exotic examples of cinematic potential; each was in some way informed by the aesthetic ferment of European modernism.[13] Moved by these films, writers of the period contended that Hollywood was transforming American film from spontaneous, exhilarating and rhythmic to contrived, trivial and derivative. Moreover, the industry was vertically integrating. Production, distribution and exhibition practices became more tightly linked and more regimented throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Additionally, the voices of censorship were mounting, punctuated by the establishment of the Hays Office (1927) and the increasingly rigid enforcement of its Production Code thereafter.[14]

One of the strategies used to underpin film criticism during this period was that of defining the specifically cinematic: What were the essential properties of the medium and

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Weinberg. For an excellent overview of American film criticism during this period, see Myron Osborn Lounsbury, *The Origins of American Film Criticism, 1909-1939* (New York: Arno Press, 1973) 150-195.

[13] *Battleship Potemkin* premiered in New York in 1926. Reviews or articles about the film appeared in *Photoplay Magazine, National Board of Review Magazine, The New Yorker, The New York Times, The New York Herald Tribune* and elsewhere. These articles have been collected and published as: Herbert Marshall, ed., *The Battleship Potemkin* (New York: Avon, 1978). For a thoughtful examination of the American and international exhibition, reception and revival of *Caligari* and its importance for the formation of alternative or art cinemas, see Kristin Thompson, "Dr. Caligari at the Folies-Bergère," *'The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari': Texts, Contexts, Histories*, ed. Mike Budd (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990) 121-170.

[14] Richard Maltby, "The Production Code and the Hays Office," *The Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-39*, ed. Tino Balio, vol. 5 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 37-72.

how might they be used as a point from which to comment on commercial films? This exercise began to manifest itself in an emerging divide characteristic of film writing of the period—a divide between those who believed commercial film could embody distinct and accomplished aesthetic principles and those who condemned commercial film as the inevitably flawed product of a corrupt system.[15] Many critics grew dissatisfied with polite, bourgeois narratives and nostalgic for the early days of cinematic discovery, arguing that American films might be rejuvenated by capturing elements of their former youth. Others began to object to Hollywood's aversion to social and political commentary, linking its films directly to more widespread ideological projects. This marks the rise of impending mass culture critiques, prominent from the late 1930s onward.

Dwight MacDonald is emblematic of many of the critical shifts taking place during this period. His comments also signify the confluence of ideas about art, industry and film that were actively circulating:

> The movies were definitely Mass Culture, mostly very bad but with some leaven of avant gardism (Griffith, Stroheim) and folk art (Chaplin and other comedians). With the sound film, Broadway and Hollywood drew closer together. Plays are now produced mainly to see the movie rights, with many being directly financed by the film companies...And what have the movies gained? They are more sophisticated, the acting is subtler, the sets in better taste. But they too have become standardized: they are never as awful as they often were in the old days, but they are never as good either. They are better entertainment and worse art. The cinema of the twenties occasionally gave us the fresh charm of folk art or the imaginative intensity of avant-gardism. [16]

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[15] Lounsbury 159.

[16] Dwight MacDonald, "A Theory of Mass Culture," [orig. 1953] *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, ed. Bernard Rosenberg (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1962) 64-65.

According to MacDonald, the sound film and the changes it wrought eliminated the potential sustained by silent cinema to become a vibrant art form: avant-garde or folk. Films were more standardised and as they moved closer to pre-planned business deals, they moved increasingly further away from the possibility of art.

Summarising the bulk of film writing from the period, Myron Lounsbury suggests that it was the critique of commercialism and censorship that gave American film literature its first international and historical perspective.[17] Looking back and abroad, a small group of film writers looked elsewhere for ideal cinematic models. Old films and foreign films were seen as less problematic alternatives to unsatisfying, undistinguished or objectionable film programming. The nostalgia for old films in particular—partly embodied by the impending archive—must be expanded, therefore, to include not only a longing for the pioneering outlook of a distinctly visual or purer aesthetic that had been lost but also to a context of production (national and international) that had held the hope of intellectual and socio-political explorations. As these discussions continued throughout this period, the exhibition of old and foreign films would become an integral element of emerging movements in film culture, formations we have come to understand as among the first properly film art and film critical formations in America.[18] These films would also be

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[17] Lounsbury 149.

[18] I have also been able to locate one proposal for a "little picture house" which was less concerned with non-American or unusual films per se and more concerned with creating a "civic cinema," one that provided a public space for all films that did not find room in commercial cinemas. This theatre was designed to exhibit educational films, records of daily urban life, gardening films and amateur films. Films were intended to be scheduled according to audience interest as it changed throughout the day. The plan exclaimed: "We have civic music, a civic repertory theatre and a town hall for civic lectures, but where is the civic picture house?" (Elizabeth Perkins, "The Civic Cinema: A Unique

drawn into an increasing divide which opposed them to the great bulk of contemporary, American cinema.

One early institutional response to these conditions was the small but visible emergence of "little theatres" or "little cinemas." By the mid-to-late twenties the problem of access to films of the past and to non-American fare was taken beyond written pleas and the disinterest of large commercial interests to the material realities of systematic and purposeful exhibition. These theatres intended to exhibit old and new European, old American, amateur, experimental, and feature films. Little cinemas were partly inspired by European cine-clubs and societies, organisations that set out to exhibit unconventional, experimental and non-commercial films.[19] Similar organisations had long existed for theatrical drama and, as such, they provided an institutional model. The ideals of the little cinema were supported by a range of notable film critics, including Gilbert Seldes, Herman Weinberg and others associated with such journals as *Exceptional Photoplays*, *Motion Picture Classic*, *The New York Times* and *Amateur Movie Makers*.[20] In their earliest formulations, American little cinemas were often linked to concerns for the future health and vibrancy of the cinema.[21] Advocates associated the idea of seeing revivals and

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Movie Move Planned for Manhattan," *Amateur Movie Makers* 3.4 [1928]: 254).

[19] For a contemporaneous indication of the internationalism of the little theatres and the awareness of similar movements in France and England see Margeurite Tazelaar "The Story of the First Little Film Theatre" *Movie Makers* 3.6 (1928): 441-442

[20] See for example, Gilbert Seldes, "The Intellectual Film," *Amateur Movie Makers* 2.3 (1927): 15, 38.

[21] See in particular Symon Gould, "The Little Theatre Movement in the Cinema," *National Board of Review Magazine* 1.5 (1926): 4-5.

unpopular or unprofitable domestic and foreign films with the importance of nurturing specialised, intelligent audiences. The full exploration of the cinema's potential—as an expressive form and as a discursive site—was deemed to be dependent on this.[22] It should be noted that advocates of the little cinema were not of a singular aesthetic or political persuasion. Some theatres such as the Cameo and the Acme programmed largely Soviet and socialist films in close affiliation with groups such as the Workers' Film and Photo League and therefore as part of a more general critique of dominant film form, content and industrial structure. Other theatres such as the Little Carnegie and the 55th Street Playhouse emphasised "photoplays of distinction" and "timeless masterpieces," billing their facilities as "salons of the cinema." They adopted the language of art appreciation and bourgeois refinement, demonstrating a concern for honing taste rather than critique. Nevertheless, all little cinemas struggled under the weight of obtaining films that were deemed worthy of their cinematic vision and simultaneously offered enough box-office appeal to cover the costs of their operations. Obtaining more profitable American films became especially difficult as their independent status left them "unaffiliated" with a major or minor distributor and therefore out of the distribution loop. In 1929, Roy W. Winton lamented that the great idea of little theatres was forced to endure not only unfriendly industry practice but also unwarranted attacks from trade members and critics, attacks aimed at the very exhibition practices adopted, in part, because of oligopolistic distribution

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[22] See John Hutchins, "L'Enfant Terrible: The Little Cinema Movement," *Theatre Arts Monthly* 13.9 (1929): 696; Mathew Josephson, "The Rise of the Little Cinema," *Motion Picture Classic* 24.1 (1926): 34-35, 69, 82, rpt. in George C. Pratt, ed., *A History of Silent Cinema* (Grenwich: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1973): 483-484.

and exhibition exercised by the same industry.[23]

During this period specialised exhibition was commonly linked to ideas about quality, educated viewing and opinions against commercial domination of film form. Such opinions encompassed a broad range of individuals and groups, including apolitical aesthetes, workers' groups and middle-class home moviemakers who perceived film industry practice as stifling if not oppressive. This, in part, explains why despite an increase of interest in film's past among small, specialised film groups, few of the films exhibited in these circles were examples of popular American filmmaking.[24] Most-often revived were films that have become elements of the non-American or non-feature film canon: *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919), *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925), and *Nanook of the North* (1922), some of which were available in 35mm and 16mm. Moreover, even if a broad selection of new or old Hollywood features had been available—most were not—their cost would have made exhibition of them impossible. Many of these early, alternative formations in film culture were seriously inhibited by the financial requirements of exhibiting 35mm films at all. This made exhibition of American films doubly difficult. While some had found their way into the 16mm film library circuit, few of these films represented the cream of studio production. Though they could be seen privately, these films could not be shown commercially because of copyright restrictions.[25] As far as

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[23] Roy W. Winton, "Photoplayfare: An Amateur Outlet?" *Movie Makers* 4.12 (1929): 808.

[24] According to the program notes archived at MoMA's Film Study Center, early Chaplin films seem to be the one consistent exception to this.

[25] This legal caveat proves to be one of the key catalysts for the formation of film societies throughout the 1930s, which were protected from these restrictions as private organisations.

35mm theatrical exhibition was concerned, sympathetic distributors, large audiences, properly licensed theatres and extended runs were necessary both for securing films and for covering costs. Many attempts to engender historically informed and/or critical viewing sensibilities depended on films largely unseen by popular American audiences. This was as much a matter of extant material-ideological barriers as it was a matter of taste or individual political stance. It should also be noted that the movements described were initiated and most active in major urban centres. In the United States, the locus of such activity was New York City.[26]

Despite the difficulty of obtaining films, the idea and practice of forming specialised audiences for select screenings was well underway. Other projects to exhibit films emerged, unattached to one particular theatrical site. Formerly the primary organisation for censorship-activity in the United States, by this time the National Board of Review had evolved into an umbrella agency for the Better Films Movement. They were officially against censorship, advocating instead for improving the moral and aesthetic content of films generally. They experimented with special screenings of "exceptional photoplays" as a part of their project to educate and to elevate film standards, and they issued regular lists of recommended films in the magazine of the same title.[27]

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[26] For more on alternative exhibition and little cinemas during this period see Jan Christopher Horak, "The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919-1945," *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919-1945*, ed. Jan Christopher Horak (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995) 14-66.

[27] Richard Koszarski, *An Evening's Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915-1928* (New York: Scribner, 1990) 208-209.

There were also short-lived interventions into specialised screenings such as those of the New York Film Society and the Film Forum, both founded in early 1933 and based in New York. Less entrepreneurial than the Little Cinemas, the Film Society and the Film Forum were non-profit organisations comprised of member cinephiles and were run on a subscription basis. Their mutual purpose was to show films that could not be seen in commercial or little theatres, whether because of disinterested commercial distributors or keenly interested censors. An introductory flier to the Film Society read:

> Beginning in January THE FILM SOCIETY [sic] will show its private membership on one Sunday evening a month (omitting July and August) motion pictures of excellence, not ordinarily to be seen in even the little playhouse, or forbidden for public performance by the censor, and revivals important to the history of the motion picture.[28]

Reported sponsors of the Film Society included some likely and unlikely co-participants including noteworthy literary, cultural and industry figures such as Nelson Rockefeller, E. E. Cummings, John Dos Passos, George Gershwin, Alfred A. Knopf, D. W. Griffith, and Lewis Mumford. Original directors of the Film Society included Iris Barry, Julian Levy, James Shelley Hamilton, Dwight MacDonald, Harry Alan Potamkin and Lincoln Kirstein. This odd mix of politicos, prominent intellectuals, high-cultural denizens and industry magnates set out to show "the best productions of the past, present and future, free of the restraints of commercialism and the censor."[29] The references to anti-commercialism should be reduced neither to a predictable high-cultural disdain nor to a radical critique of

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[28] "New York Film Society," 1932 [pamphlet] (Film Study Center Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art).

[29] "New York Film Society," back cover.

the culture industries. The diverse individuals involved in the Film Society brought equally diverse interests. For instance, Potamkin and MacDonald were well-known for their opinionated and politicised film writing. Nelson Rockefeller was known for his philanthropy and links to a vast oil fortune. Julian Levy ran a fledgling modern art gallery.

The Film Forum was a less privileged and slightly more political endeavour run by left-wing playwright Sidney Howard and Tom Brandon, founding member of the Workers' Film and Photo League. The Film Forum was more explicitly leftist, relying on distribution sources that existed primarily to circulate workers' films from Germany, the Soviet Union and England. In their founding statement they clearly rejected "social and artistic films" in favour of "human documents."[30] Whereas the Film Society sought "pictures of excellence," the Film Forum was more concerned to show films that were true to human (workers') experience. Despite the differences between the stated aims of these two groups, they shared interests in revivals and foreign films as well as a general anti-censorship platform.[31] Ironically, in the end, the programs of the respective societies did not look much different from each other and largely reflected the growing disdain for contemporary commercial films. Both showed a wide selection of films including Soviet features, early Disney animated shorts, and documentaries. The Film Forum did, however, exhibit some workers' newsreels and several more Soviet films than did the Film Society.[32]

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[30] Ben Davis, "Beginnings of the Film Society Movement in the United States," *Film & History* 24.3-4 (1994): 11.

[31] I have been unable to locate evidence that anti-censorship actions were ever taken by either group.

[32] Some of these film programs are held in the Film Study Center Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art.

Importantly, according to Tom Brandon, both groups were largely funded by middle-class audiences competing for a small pool of available films, further supporting the contention that non-commercial film exhibition of features and other sought-after foreign films was inhibited by a dearth of resources: films were expensive. [33]

Harry Alan Potamkin was particularly aware of one crucial irony inherent in this film-dilemma: In order to involve films in politically, socially and aesthetically relevant debates you needed to have access to resources likely unavailable because of the very social and political inequities that required rectifying. Nonetheless, Potamkin, a member of both the Film Forum and the Film Society, was optimistic about the potential of the two organisations to host challenging and lively discussion. He hoped they would come to reflect the cine clubs he had visited in Paris in which, he stated, film viewing was linked to active engagement with the nature of film and its place in the aesthetic, social and political world. Potamkin was, however, concerned that the American counterparts to these clubs might simply become a manifestation of what he termed a messianic cult in which film is separated from all things aesthetic, on the one hand, and social, on the other:

> The movie is not going to save the world and we are not going to save the movie, but we have certain functions to perform, and through the film club we may realize the conception of the movie, whether entertainment or instructional or educational, because it is a medium of propaganda and influence.[34]

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[33] Brandon is quoted in Davis 16. For further recollections which confirm the competition between these two groups for the same, small pool of films see Julien Levy, *Memoir of an Art Gallery* (New York: G. Putnam's Sons, 1977) 154.

[34] Harry Alan Potamkin, "The Ritual of the Movies," *The Compound Cinema: The Film Writings of Harry Alan Potamkin*, [orig. 1933] ed. Lewis Jacobs (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1977) 216-221.

Potamkin was sceptical of both high-art and populist approaches to film—tendencies he saw as latent in these newly formed film societies. For him, the film was neither a ritualised, bourgeois revelation nor a transparent document of oppression. Film form and function was, to him, something still unknown; its impact required intense and critical attention. Unfortunately, little information remains about the activities of these groups. They were short lived and did not leave significant documentation behind. Important to note, however, is that many of their members were already a part of, or would soon become key members of, the film critical, educational and archival communities.[35] Moreover, Potamkin's concerns suggest two developing strains of film practice which roughly correspond with the development of ideas about film-as-art and film-as-political intervention: the tendency to associate formal film matters with social privilege and to associate film's transparency and documentary abilities with the power to reveal and rectify social inequities. This resonates with a debate that continues to the present day.

There were other specialised audiences also forming during this period. In addition to little cinemas and film societies, clubs linked to the Amateur Cinema League and overtly political movements such as the Workers' Film and Photo League exhibited films

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[35] For instance, Dwight MacDonald continued an active career crafting polemical film criticism. Lincoln Kirstein had founded the well-known little magazine *Hound and Horn* which published many articles on the cinema, written by himself as well as by Harry Alan Potamkin, Jere Abbot, Alfred Barr, Jr., and Russel T. Hitchock. Many of the articles have been republished as George Amberg, ed., *Hound and Horn: Essays on Cinema* (New York: Arno Press, 1972). Years later, Kirstein went on to help found the short-lived journal *Films* (1939-1940) with Jay Leyda and others. Harry Alan Potamkin was a prolific writer on film and active member of the Workers' Film and Photo League and, of course, Iris Barry went on to curate at the Film Library.

which reflected their specialised objectives: foreign and repertory, amateur and experimental.[36] Nontheatrical film circuits became an integral part of a small but expanding movement to improve the understanding and expand the function of film generally. Groups readily identified as proto-art institutions took an interest in film form in order to further their own aesthetic appreciation of films and to help with their own film experiments. Some sought to harness the power of film to particular political agendas. This is most readily evidenced by writing in the journal *Experimental Cinema*, first published in June 1930, and also in the activities of the Workers' Film and Photo League, similarly founded in 1930. Screening old films and non-American films was intended to serve differently the emerging range of film-interest groups seeking to enhance their own particular film cultural activities. Which films were exhibited depended on the objectives of the respective organisations and the material means available for securing those films. At this point in American film cultural history, Soviet films were most readily available for small, specialised audiences partly because they circulated outside the control of large corporate interests ascendant in mainstream film and partly because there was a growing communist-friendly contingent in America.[37] Their availability in 16mm further facilitated

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[36] These organisations are discussed at greater length in chapter 2.

[37] During this period, the regular availability of Soviet features in America was made possible largely through the efforts of two groups, Amkino Corporation and Garrison Films, who shared exhibition rights to many Soviet features. While some of these films were shown in a select number of little theatres throughout this period, the activities of Garrison Films, in particular, were closely linked to the activities of the Workers' Film and Photo League and their project to develop a secondary 16mm film circuit for communist and worker-friendly news films and features. This is discussed at greater length in chapter 2. For more on this see William Alexander, *Film on the Left: American Documentary Film from 1931-1942* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) 36-40.

their exhibition, making them less expensive and more portable, and rendering basements, union halls and classrooms suitable screening sites. In the end, there is little evidence to suggest that a significant number of American films were revived in these expanding exhibitory contexts.

Old Films, New Publics

MoMA had a considerable public relations and press management campaign underway well before 1935.[38] Following suit, the Film Library immediately initiated its own active public relations campaign. By mid-1937 the Film Library staff had delivered over 27 film lectures and published more than 20 articles on film library activities in trade, theatre, museum, library and film literature.[39] Speeches, radio shows, celebrity endorsements and regular press announcements helped the Film Library aggressively insert itself into the public eye. By December of 1937 the staff had traced and collected 2029 press clippings related to their activities, generated in part by 41 press releases.[40]

The available press releases suggest a varied approach to presenting their project. At times, the Film Library staff constructed film history largely as a reflection of American cultural heritage and world influence. As such, it deserved serious and disciplined attention. At other times, they called attention to the unavailability of films that had passed and the consequent impossibility of both revisiting memories once forgotten and accessing

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[38] By 1931, MoMA had contracted the services of a publicity agent and was reported to have been receiving the most press of any other art institution in the world (Lynes 126).

[39] The Film Library, "Film Library Report (1937)": 28.

[40] The Film Library, "Film Library Report (1937)": 36.

vital records of human expression. There were small lessons in American film history which journalists used as a platform to wax nostalgic about Mary Pickford, to consider changing sexual mores and to observe shifts in acting conventions.[41] Such articles appeared in some usual and some notably unusual places, including the monthly magazine for the Girl Scouts *The American Girl*, the journal for the Special Libraries Association *Special Libraries*, the fan magazine *Delineator*, the radical theatre journal *New Theatre*, *The New York Herald Tribune* and *The Christian Science Monitor*.[42]

MoMA organised special press screenings and proudly announced new acquisitions. Their efforts signalled the ultimate in official public acceptance when they exhibited early American films at the White House to President Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt in 1937. A year later, a special Academy award was granted for their contribution to film preservation and for making films available to the public for study of

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[41] An excellent example of this mix of nostalgia and trivia can be found in the radio transcript of a show entitled "What's Art to Me?," aired December 2, 1939. The show featured Iris Barry and Holger Cahill, director of the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration, rehearsing a dialogue about old films and celebrities of yesteryear. A background character in the scenario asks: "What have a lot of old movies got to do with modern art?" Cahill answers this question by stating that movies are the liveliest, most popular, and most influential art of the twentieth century." Barry furthers this by adding that rather than rare and precious things, the "great movies happen to have been highly popular as well" ("What's Art to Me?," Iris Barry and Holger Cahill, CBS, New York, 2 December 1939 [Department of Film Series, Film Study Center Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art]). Barry was extremely careful in particular contexts not to associate films with traditional but more populist conceptions of art, purposefully distancing the Film Library from a perceived elitism that was extended to the Film Library from the museum itself.

[42] See Latrobe Carroll, "Where Do Movies Go From Here?," *American Girl* November 1936: 5-10; Iris Barry, "Films for History," *Special Libraries* October (1939): 258-260; Eliot Ramsey, "A-Growin'," *Delineator* 1937; Robert Stebbins, "The Movie: 1902-1917," *New Theatre* (1 March 1936) 22-23; Sanderson Vanderbile, "Theda Bara and Greta Garbo Show Movie Vampire Changes," *New York Daily Tribune* March 3 1936; Bruce Buttles, "Film of Auld Lang Syne," *Christian Science Monitor* 28 August 1936: 5, 13; All of these articles can be found in the Film Library Scrapbooks. Film Study Center Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art.

its history and aesthetic development. In 1938, Barry and Abbott began lobbying to have a movie made which advocated the importance of saving films. Their strategy was to highlight great moments from American film history long unseen. This film, it was hoped, would be circulated by all distributors for the benefit of the museum. In 1939, these efforts resulted in an estimated audience of 20 to 26 million when *The March of Time* produced a special issue devoted to American film history entitled "The Movies March On."[43] The episode frames the progress of American film with the Film Library's efforts to acquire and preserve the record of an impending American dynasty. The film clips included in this episode were wholly selected from the Film Library's first circulating exhibitions, also dedicated to American film history.[44] Positioning themselves as indispensable to the industry and as performing a valuable service for the nation, the Film Library—wittingly or not—became an authoritative spokesperson for Hollywood's Americanist disposition, documenting the ascendance of its films with utter disregard for international influence or critical cultural intervention. At this cost the Film Library found its first mass film audience.

While the Film Library was busy constructing historical narratives around films, it was also occupied with exhibiting those films. Not only should these films be saved, the Film Library staff reasoned, but they should also be widely seen. The public, non-

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[43] Raymond Fielding, *The March of Time: 1935-1951* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 238.

[44] Interestingly, these film excerpts were changed for the French version of "The Movies March On." The Film Library provided clips of films made by the Lumières, Georges Méliès, Max Linder, Carl Theodor Dreyer and Falconetti. See The March of Time, [Hanging File] (Film Study Center Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art).

commercial and ostensibly educational screening of feature, experimental and documentary films—old and non-American—was something largely new to the vast majority of American film audiences. Indeed, the normal theatrical life of a film rarely lasted longer than two years. This put the Film Library squarely at odds both with dominant industry practice and with popular viewing habits. In short, in addition to establishing the legal, material and technological means by which films from the past might be seen, library staff were tasked with making the very idea of *seeing films again* generally intelligible to, and desirable for, American film audiences.

Packaging Film History

As previously mentioned, the first circulating film programs were entitled "A Short Survey of the Film in America" and "Some Memorable American Films, 1896-1934." These programs included films such as *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), *Queen Elizabeth* (1911), *The New York Hat* (1912), *Intolerance* (1916), *The Clever Dummy* (1917), *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and *Steamboat Willie* (1928).[45] Organised into thematic units, these films represented American film development: "Development of the Narrative," "The Rise of the American Film," "The Talkies," "Screen Personalities," "Comedies," "The Western."

Program notes accompanied these films, providing information about

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[45] Other films include: *The Execution of Mary Queen of Scots* (1893-94), *The Fugitive* (1914), *Underworld* (1927), *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), *A Fool There Was* (1914), *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1903), *Sunrise* (1927), *Plane Crazy* (1928), and *The March of Time*, Vol I, No 2 (1935). While there were non-American films included in this survey, notably those made by Meliès, Pathé and a whole section entitled "The German Influence," these films were cast largely as markers of how American films arrived at their then-present state. The broad narrative woven by the Film Library often resembled a tale of centrifugal, American-cinematic destiny that absorbed rather than

production, the context of a film's formal development in relation to other films, the influence of other high and popular art forms, the film's affect on popular style, language and fashion and, occasionally, contemporaneous responses to the films themselves. Some attention was paid to non-American influence on film form but presented as these films were, the tale of American cinematic destiny was easily recounted. For the most part, these notes can be understood as demonstrating a soft formalism; innovations in form and mode of expression are discussed alongside sociological observations. There were clearly elements of high brow inflection which dampened the more fantastical, bawdy and comedic side of some popular films. Mack Sennett's slapstick comedy *The Clever Dummy* (1917) was transformed from a pie-throwing, mad-cap antic to "a high form of cinematic art improvised with an instinctive grasp of visual rhythm and of tempo." However, this same film was also said to demonstrate "a profound, wry knowledge of human nature and a most delicate observation of life."[46] Popular films not only found themselves embroiled in discussions of form and style but also in supplying socio-psychological insights. Many of these films and the narratives of which they were a part have persisted in the form of film canons and film literature; other films and their narratives were not as readily conducive to the idea of a formal or otherwise reductive categorisation of film's value. Theda Bara's vamp in *A Fool There Was*

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consciously appropriated styles and methods of other nations.

[46] Iris Barry, "The Clever Dummy," 1936 [The Rise of the American Film, A Short Survey of the American Film, Series 1, Program 2] [Film Notes] (New York: Film Library, Museum of Modern Art).

(1914) was included as a document depicting the attitudes toward, and appearances of, life indigenous to the time and place of the film's production.[47] *Shootin' Mad* (1911), a "Broncho Billy" Anderson serial, was deemed remarkable both for its innovative narrative methods and for making movies "universally beloved."[48] The tremendous popularity of certain films was often invoked as a virtue unto itself rather than a vice. Moreover, film's formal history and the attempt to foster a critical public were not dissociated from attempts to consider film's socio-historical significance. These narratives were intricately intertwined throughout the Film Library's notes.

Films were also grouped into units entitled "The Film and Contemporary History" and "Mystery and Violence."[49] The former included an episode from the *March of Time* series, deemed important because it represented a "new kind of pictorial journalism," carrying forward the actuality and newsreel traditions of cinema-as-reportage.[50] Resonating with the discourses about new kinds of visual knowledge, discussed earlier in this dissertation, was Barry's note on *Cavalcade*, a 1925 historical drama:

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[47] Iris Barry, "A Fool There Was," 1936 [The Rise of the American Film, A Short Survey of Film in America, Series 1 Program 2] [Film Notes] (New York: Film Library, Museum of Modern Art).

[48] Iris Barry, "Shootin' Mad," 1936 [The Development of the Narrative, A Short Survey of the Film in America, Series I Program I] [Film Notes] (New York: The Museum of Modern Art Film Library).

[49] The former of these films were categorised under the broader title of "Documentary Films," and also included a slow motion study, footage of President McKinley's inauguration and a newsreel of the assassination of King Alexander. The latter included *Tatters* (1911), Von Sternberg's *Underworld* (1927) and *I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932).

[50] Iris Barry, "The March of Time Vol. 1, No. 2," 1936 [The Film and Contemporary History, Some Memorable American Films, Series II, Program 3] [Film Notes] (New York: Museum of Modern Art Film Library).

> Through [the film], we can study at very nearly first-hand the revealing gestures and expressions of eminent men now dead, of crowds at public gatherings that took place thirty or forty years ago. In compilations of old newsreels, such as the English *Through Three Reigns*, it has been possible for us to look backwards, as no previous generations could, on the living and animated face of yesterday. That Queen Victoria was indeed "a very little lady" we know to be the fact. There is a shot of her riding through Dublin around 1900 which proves it. *Cavalcade* is a newsreel compilation in dramatic form.[51]

The film was also an uncanny historical document construed as having an aesthetic-informational value uniquely its own. Moreover, historical reenactments of important events were equally valuable, lending spectators through the ages an unprecedented window onto the past. Many of these film notes were written by Iris Barry and reflect both the fascination with visual information evident in Barry's early film criticism and the more general fascination with historico-visual information that we have seen manifested in discourses related to archives and libraries pre-existing the Film Library. This fascination with visual information was also, at times, transferred onto narrative films as well, though this should not overshadow the attention paid to formal innovations throughout the library's notes. Indeed, concerns formal and functional, informational and spectacular were woven throughout.

Responding to Old Films

In the 1930s, three significant trends in popular viewing involved the screening of old films.[52] One was the shift of film exhibition to the double feature format. Films of

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[51] Iris Barry, "Cavalcade," 1936 [The Film and Contemporary History, Some Memorable American Films, Series II Program 3] [Film Notes] (New York: Museum of Modern Art Film Library).

[52] As a rule, non-current releases were not regularly or officially shown in theatres during the period preceding the shift to synch-sound. Though there are certainly exceptions to this. Throughout my

recent years, still in circulation, would occasionally be shown on the second half of a double bill, providing inexpensive filler. Second, there was also a select group of films chosen for re-release as primary features, films such as *The Informer* (1935), *Dangerous* (1935), and *A Connecticut Yankee* (1931). These films were chosen because of their widespread appeal upon initial release. However, these revivals were exceptions to the rule and the vast number of American features, notably the great silent features, would not be seen again by general audiences.[53] The third trend was the assembly and exhibition of found-footage compilations such as *Screen Souvenirs*, exhibited as part of an evening's theatrical program. These were essentially mini-cinema anthologies of silent-film clips, accompanied by a voice-over and sound effects, live or recorded, casting the conventions of silent cinema in comic relief. The gestures were construed as exaggerated; the gimmicks were dated and silly. The special effects were cheap and contrived. Old films became objects of derision, inducing laughter and further ensuring that current films would be seen

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research I have found numerous references to reissues of Chaplin's early films. Further, Anthony Slide has identified the notable exception of American Biograph which regularly reissued its fictional shorts. They discovered that actors featured in these shorts who had since become famous carried renewed market appeal. Such celebrities included Mary Pickford, Lillian Gish, Robert Harron, Henry B. Walthall, and Blanche Sweet. See Anthony Slide, *Nitrate Won't Wait: A History of Film Preservation in the United States* (Jefferson, N.C.: MacFarland, 1992) 18.

[53] One important exception to this was the growing number of 16mm film libraries that sold and rented 16mm films for non-theatrical, non-commercial, private screenings. While largely affordable only to upper-middle class families and larger groups, along with the Film Library, these libraries were largely responsible for the continued circulation of silent films beyond the sound revolution. While most of the titles circulated by these libraries were representative of the commercial, run-of-the-mill programming rather than those that have been celebrated as key examples of silent cinema's popular and aesthetic peak, their programs are an overlooked aspect of the silent-to-sound transition and to non-theatrical exhibition generally. These libraries have also become a major source for film archives and collectors. This is discussed at greater length in chapter 2. For more on the relationship between silent films and film libraries, see David Pierce, "Silent Movies and the Kodascope Libraries," *American Cinematographer* January (1989): 36-40.

as superior to films of the past. There was also a curiosity-value in these exercises as current-day celebrities could be viewed playing extras, wearing dated costumes, old-fashioned hairstyles and cheap disguises. The sudden bathos of Hollywood's elite induced the recognition of fallen fame and forgotten youth. The humour should also be understood, in part, as a marker of the enormous changes the cinema had undergone in the past 30 years. From "flickers" to grand Hollywood spectacles, technological and stylistic economies moved quickly, serving to date films in such a way as to make them seem of a dramatically different time and species, and therefore laughable.

Within this context the Film Library announced its plans to build a museum of the cinema. There were varied responses to the Film Library itself as journalists expressed scepticism about the exercise of simply taking films seriously. *The New York Telegraph* described the library's intentions to facilitate film study, commenting glibly: "Said research work, of course, taking the form of critical examination of Miss Jean Harlow, Miss Marlene's Deitrich's legs and other such curious manifestations of motion picture life."[54] Upon the thought of Pickford, Keaton and Chaplin sitting beside Gauguin, Van Gogh and Picasso, Emily Grenauer of the *World-Telegram* wrote succinctly, "the academic die-hards are cackling.[55] There was also a kind of populist defence of the cinema; concern was expressed that associating film with "art" would somehow taint the pleasure of the cinema, resulting in "higher standards" and "intellectual snobbishness" and robbing "the rising

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[54] "Movies Museum Born, Harlow's Legs Immortal," *New York Telegraph* 26 June 1935 [Film Library Scrapbooks, Film Study Center, Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art].

[55] Emily Grenauer, "A Museum of the Cinema," *World-Telegram* 27 June 1935 [Film Library Scrapbooks, Film Study Center Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art].

generation of its gunmen and sex dramas."[56] In short, there were sceptics from within and outside of established cultural circles. Others simply went along with the idea, announcing that the establishment of the Film Library itself confirmed that film is indeed an art.

Upon release of the first circulating exhibitions in January 1936 there was an enormous response in the popular press that cannot be solely attributed to the Film Library's attempts at press management. Consequences unintended and unpredictable made themselves evident. More than as a demonstration of film's formal development or sociological significance, the circulating programs were greeted as most remarkable for their "oldness." Films were described as "primitive," "archaic," "lost treasures," "relics," "antiques," "ancient thrillers," "rare." Films were "unearthed," and "resurrected," "reborn" and "embalmed."[57] The film "veil" had been lifted. The Film Library became an "asylum for film," and a "sanctuary against time."[58] Only forty years after the first projected films, the cinema had acquired the sense of wonder and discovery usually reserved for objects of lost civilisations and far-away cultures. At the same time, these objects maintained an uncanny familiarity. These were objects of another time and place

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[56] *New York Sun* 28 June 1935 [Film Library Scrapbooks, Film Study Center Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art].

[57] See for example: "Films Reborn," *Literary Digest* March 1936; Katherine Hill, "Ancient Thrillers of the Cinema Museum Affording Cheerful Entertainment," *San Francisco Chronicle* 29 March 1936; "Relics Acquired by New Film Library," *Hollywood Reporter* 11 July 1935; "Film Library Embalms Hot 'Gay 90's' Kiss," *New York Evening Journal* 11 July 1935; "Rare Old Products of an Early Day in the Cinema Acquired by Library," *Washington Post* 21 July 1935. All of these articles can be found in the Film Library Scrapbooks, Film Study Center Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art.

[58] "Asylum for Negatives," *World Film News and Television Progress* 1.1 (1936): 1; William Troy, "Films: The Film Library," *The Nation* 24 July 1935: 112.

that bore remarkable resemblance and some ill-formed relationship to the visual culture of the present. Furthermore, these films were identified as an integral part of American heritage, as emblems of a past long gone and as the utter vindication of American contribution to the world—a view forwarded, though not fully embraced, by the Film Library staff itself.

Despite the Film Library's attempt to foster more critical attitudes toward film history through its program notes and targeting of institutions of higher learning, initial press reports suggest that their first circulating exhibitions were largely greeted as historical oddities, with dated fashions, histrionic gestures and archaic conventions. Much like the old films shown for comic relief before and between features—what were once tragic moments turned to hilarity, what were once gestures of horror became gestures of clowns. Frank Nugent titled his review article for *The New York Times* "A Comedy of Eras." Katherine Hill, writing for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, titled hers "Ancient Thrillers of the Cinema Museum Affording Cheerful Entertainment."[59] *Faust* (1910) became burlesque. Sarah Bernhardt's death scene in *Queen Elizabeth* (1912) sent audiences into "gales of laughter." Yet, there was something different about this laughter than that which had come before. Now, audiences were laughing at films that were *historical*. While journalists had difficulty articulating how this laughter was different, it clearly was. Old films, now an integral part of film history, became part of a

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[59] Frank Nugent, "Comedy of Eras," *The New York Times* 8 January 1936; Katherine Hill, "Ancient Thrillers of the Cinema Museum Affording Cheerful Entertainment," *San Francisco Chronicle* 29 March 1936 [Film Library Scrapbooks, Film Study Center Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art, New York].

simultaneously laughable and laudable event. After calling these old films very naïve, quaint and funny, Leo Mishkin wrote apologetically:

> But they are historic. And that they are historic is the most important matter in connection with them. It shows that the screen is finally coming into its heritage, that it is at last becoming recognized as a major art and that there will come a time in the not too distant future, when early motion pictures will be ranked with early novels and early plays in the development of civilization.[60]

Virginia Boren, writing for the *Seattle Daily Times* wrote:

> We laughed at the train robbery picture when men squirmed in wild gestures as they died in a shooting fray, we thought the love scenes between Essex and the Countess more comedy than tragedy, we felt patronizing pity for those pioneers in entertainment who were momentarily satisfied with a screen that quivered. But...we were fascinated every moment.[61]

Vague references were made to the future civic function of film's oddities and to the basic fascination of seeing these images again. They had changed; they seemed raw, innocent, even pathetic. Yet, they were often treated as a vindication of cinema's present and as hope for its future.

More commentary was to follow. As the travelling programs circulated, journalists took the opportunity to write small histories of the American film, inspired largely by the Film Library's program notes and press releases. As time passed, more and more commentary was directed away from the novelty-factor and towards an expectation that

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[60] Leo Mishkin, "Screen Presents: Film Library Museum Established a Tradition - Heritage for Movies," *New York Telegraph* 9 January 1936 [Film Library Scrapbooks, Film Study Center, Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art].

[61] Virginia Boren, "Glancing backward with the movies," *Seattle Daily Times* 21 January 1936 [Film Library Scrapbooks, Film Study Center Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art, New York].

old films ought to be more widely available—as much for their entertainment value as their informational or heritage value. While individual films seemed silly, these films took on new relevance arranged as a historical narrative.

Serious film writers used these film programs as points of comparison with current commercial cinema. Some saw the films as proof that Hollywood had brought unmitigated progress to the popular film. Others considered these films evidence of all that had been lost in film's increasing industrialisation and adoption of sound technologies. Others considered such films as evidence that American films reigned supreme and were entitled to international dominance. For the emerging film critical community, the Film Library's programs became a kind of cinematic Rorschach test. An example of this is readily evident by surveying the comments of three established film critics of the period. Gilbert Seldes, Herman Weinberg and Robert Stebbins each differently acknowledged the important contribution the Film Library was making to film culture. Seldes noted that in exhibiting old films otherwise unavailable that "the Museum's Library will at least give people the idea that the movies are not something seen today, to be forgotten over-night, but as steadily interesting as a good novel."[62] Herman Weinberg acknowledged the value of the synchronic comparison the Film Library's screenings allowed, leading him to comment:

> Aside from their obvious interest as curiosities, the films shown had a deeper and more significant interest; they gave mute but eloquent proof that the tendency of film today is to stray farther and farther away from its essential domain. The province of the cinema, as originally conceived, and in which it was developed to its most intense form, was that of fantasy and flights of the imagination...it is the film of today which is in an alien land, and not the film of yesterday which stems from an alien source. And

[62] Gilbert Seldes, "True to Type: Old Movies," *New York Journal* 25 September 1935 [Film Library Scrapbooks, Film Study Center, Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art].

memory is a short and deceptive thing.[63]

Robert Stebbins, writing for the leftist *New Theatre*, also used the library screenings as an opportunity to consider what film had become with Hollywood's ascendance:

> The Museum of Modern Art Film Library deserves the gratitude of film devotees for this unexpected opportunity to take stock of the present state of film by comparison with past achievements. Perhaps if a wide enough public will be admitted to the showings, American audiences will be shocked from their complacent acceptance of Hollywood's 1936 claim to movie pre-eminence.[64]

While Seldes celebrated a generalised respect for films, Weinberg focussed on what had been lost of film's true aesthetic spirit. Stebbins used these films as an overt attack on Hollywood itself.

Old films would soon be an accepted and obvious aspect of specialised film culture. Indeed, the Film Library's programs fed a growing number of film courses, clubs and societies eager to gain historical perspective. Yet, the demand for such films was not always in the name of criticism or education. In fact, old films became quite a fashion, being presented at chic cocktail parties and in upscale department stores. Headlines declared: "Public's Craze for 'Meller-Drammer' of Early Movie Era Spreading Rapidly,"[65] "Freak Demand for Silents,"[66] and "Old-Time Movies are the Newest Film Fashion."[67]

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[63] Herman Weinberg, "Evolution of the Cinema," *New York Times* 18 July 1937: X4.

[64] Robert Stebbins, "The Movie: 1902-1917," *New Theatre* 1 March 1936: 22

[65] Frank Leyendecker, "Public's craze for 'meller-drammer' of early movie era spreading rapidly: museum of modern art credited with starting revival of tear-jerkers and comedy pictures of custard-pie by theatres in the east," *Box Office* 1 August 1936 [Film Library Scrapbooks, Film Study Center, Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art].

[66] "Freak Demand for Silents," *Variety* 17 March 1937 [Film Library Scrapbooks, Film Study Center

Journalists reported that silent films had become a popular stunt for private parties from coast to coast. Their regular screening was held in eastern resort towns such as Atlantic City and in at least one upscale theatre in New York City.[68] One notable example of this was *Flicker Frolics,* which was sold as "movie antiques." *Flicker Frolics* debuted in department stores in 1936, graduating to the film circuits that supported clubs, churches, schools and other organisations, eventually becoming popular enough for theatrical exhibition. Culled largely from the shelves of a stock-shot library rich in rapidly aging pre-war footage, these films were used as nostalgic journeys through the past, replete with old slides that encouraged cheering, hissing and sing-alongs. Sound effects were sometimes added for comic relief.[69] In many of these references to old-film fashions, the Film Library was identified as having influenced if not initiated this new trend.

While there was an ample supply of inexpensive films filled with anonymous actors to satisfy the *Frolics* and the *Souvenirs* series, many feature films requested by exhibitors and party hosts alike were simply unavailable. Some journalists questioned studio refusal to release silent films such as *The Covered Wagon* (1923), *Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923), and *Phantom of the Opera* (1925) for limited theatrical runs and special events. They reasoned that film exchanges were geared to handle "fresh film" and had no place for

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Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art].

[67] Amy Gage, "Old-time movies are the newest film fashion," *Baltimore Evening Sun* 1 September 1936 [Film Library Scrapbooks, Film Study Center Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art].

[68] Gage n.p.

[69] Dorothy T. Stone, "The First Film Library," *Films in Review* 11.7 (1951): 35.

old films, that studios were unwilling to relinquish tight control of their vaults and that unavailability of "fit prints" made re-releasing them unprofitable given the cost of striking a new print.[70]

Conclusion

The Film Library was a complex institution with a complex task: to gather film's scattered history within the limits and possibilities offered by an American art museum. Film art was a notably heterogeneous and contested concept during this period, and the Film Library set out to collect a suitably wide range of film types. In addition to saving films, the library also aspired to engender historical and critical viewing sensibilities, in part, by ensuring that these films would be seen. Its circulating exhibitions provide one measure for evaluating the institutional shape given to "film art" and "film history" during this period. Its extensive public relations efforts, and the responses engendered by them, are equally important, signalling another aspect of the library's public persona. Their efforts to exhibit German, French, Soviet and documentary films during this same period are also important and overlooked elements in the history of their activities and of film culture generally.

By focussing on the idea of old films, a phrase used continuously throughout this literature, I have shown that saving film art was prefigured by a more fundamental shift: the discursive and institutional endowment of old films with historical significance. Through its programs, its press releases, and its other public relations efforts, the Film Library catalysed a flash of historical consciousness in specialised and popular contexts

[70] Leyendecker "Freak Demand," np.

alike. This historical consciousness was characterised by ideas about nation and heritage, but also drew upon nostalgia, trivia, popular memory and the very basic idea of film-as-records.

MoMA's Film Library crystallised ongoing trends in film culture and catalysed others. I have argued that one of its most noteworthy interventions was to make old, popular films more widely available to a diverse range of audiences. The Film Library sought to ensure that the film would enjoy a more complex relationship to time and that its history would be a part of the visual-present. This implied shifts in the allocation of material and ideological resources. Building a Film Library based on principles of diversity and access required resources gathered from established corporate and social interests. Wealthy patrons, including the Rockefellers, brought the contradictory wonders of philanthropy to film. Hollywood involvement brought glamour, legitimation and contributed to the expansion of its own machine—now officially integrated into American heritage and identity. In the absence of state support for such a project, actively working to instil film with historicity depended on this. Film art and film history were loose, rhetorical categories used to justify an archival intervention. The concepts were intimately related, used to elevate the status of film generally. In the 1930s ideas about film art, film history and cultural institutions converged on the sight of the archive, retrieving a lost past for an inchoate future using cinematic art as the conduit.

Particular aesthetic configurations from the past served, at least temporarily, to denaturalise dominant visual forms of the present while linking them to the very images that seemed so foreign; they also served to associate their particularities with contiguous

social and cultural configurations—real or imagined, remembered or forgotten.

With distribution and exhibition patterns soon to change dramatically with the arrival of television, the Film Library marks a distinct point on an expanding map of cross-contextual, cross-historical image circulation and serves as a concrete example of the material, ideological and intellectual currents informing this movement. The popular film was increasingly less dependent on theatrical exhibition and continued its journey toward more varied methods of distribution and exhibition. While Hollywood was busy honing its production methods and circumscribing film form, the film culture that had built up around it, through it and despite it, was simultaneously busy developing new ways to understand films—in this case old films—themselves, through the actual collection of films, through writing about these films and through knee-jerk derision, nostalgia, popular memory and irony.

VIII. Conclusion

Archival Paradise and Parable

In 1945, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer produced an issue of John Nesbitt's *Passing Parade*, a newsreel distributed to MGM theatres and exhibited before its feature films. Entitled "Forgotten Treasure," the episode was born out of collaboration with MoMA's Film Library, established only 10 years earlier. Acknowledging the invaluable contribution of film to the storehouse of human records, "Forgotten Treasure" documents and dramatises the plight of film images. While doing so, it asserts the uniqueness of film as a precious record of human activity and, thereby, implores that these decaying pieces of human experience be saved, that they be rescued from what Walter Benjamin once termed "the dustbin of history." The film's authoritative voiceover laments that despite "nearly every great event in recent history" having been saved on celluloid "most of the priceless films have been lost to us for all time."

Speaking from the present but organised on a flash-forward and flashback narrative structure, the voice-over continues:

> In New York City, however, the wide-awake Museum of Modern Art began one of the greatest salvage hunts of our time, a hunt to find and rescue what remains of this rare film. So that long years from now, our grandchildren can actually see some of the things that are already becoming memories to us, perhaps understand us better, and in the new and wonderful moving picture history classes, learn the triumphs and heartbreaks which you and I go through today.

Throughout, the film displays this imperiled footage which includes images of prominent political figures, natural disasters and ceremonies wrought with symbolism—each pregnant with the tension of historical moments, as if they alone were the culmination of all that had come before and all that was to come after. The film is punctuated

periodically by a scene of young students sitting in film theatres, the proposed setting for teacherless history classes of the future. In an attempted gesture of prescience, the film looks forward to February 1999, depicting a more evolved consciousness, when all of history is recorded, preserved and transmitted by moving images alone. The voice-over concludes:

> But whatever the future will hold for us, one thing at least is certain, that if we can preserve the film we have or even discover an indestructible film, in 1999 the boys and girls now unborn will see the crushing struggle of our lives in this day as the ancient history of theirs. Even this war will be to them just another lesson in history.

Panning away from images of the Pearl Harbor bombing, an event barely three years old, the final word is given over to the students of this utopic future. Four of them sit wide-eyed, ostensibly watching a now remote and distant history unfold before them. As the film ends, an inter-title and voiceover instructs them: "Walk out quietly." Before obeying, one precocious little learner exclaims: "Just think, they used to study out of books." Another denounces: "How primitive!" The crude, inferior book and its potential contribution to historical knowledge are deemed obsolete by the impending technological utopia. A higher form of knowledge has been created. Recent history becomes the ancient past. National atrocity becomes a rhetorical and totalised image, imparted with the purported wholeness of the past, intended to serve the as-yet-incomplete future; all of this, to make a plea for films said to hold the undiscovered secrets of human time within them.

Dystopian or utopian, "Forgotten Treasure" serves as a parable, emblematic of the rhetoric commonly attached to narratives about film's place in the expanding archive of human knowledge and, therefore, of the moral imperatives similarly attached to rescuing

films from imminent decay. Posterity, represented by the faces of innocent young school children, must be served. Indeed, upon surveying texts addressing film's archival importance—past and present—one could be easily moved to believe that saving films naturally implied saving history itself. Moreover, projects to save films tend not only to speak on behalf of a lost past but gesture toward a newly invigorated future, rich with historical knowledge and endowed with the technological means to finally revolutionize pedagogy. The harmonious relationship of an innocent future to a fully unreeled past is assured. Utopia will be unburdened by an impoverished, incomplete visual record, historical disagreement or contested images; its hope rests simply and comfortably within the ostensibly progressive ideal of an utterly visual history. Imbued with the moral imperative of saving the past and the future, the present is dramatised by an impossible yet necessary task: discovering, collecting and preserving the past-as-image for an imagined future. In short, the task of the present is literally to recover the past from amidst its refuse, to construct the past from its cinematic leftovers. Within this swell of ideas and rhetoric, the film archive becomes a powerful idea and space, laden with manifold layers of time and the heavy, persistent and necessary plea for historical knowledge. The irrefutable and complex nature of film's historical value is cast in a compelling light by invoking the tensions and anxieties that have historically accompanied its archival imaginings: the utopian and dystopian ideals of cinematic knowledge.

The Film Library perpetuated these archival discourses, while further inflecting them with ideas about art, American history and the diverse forms in which cinematic knowledge might be found. The grand archival question of "what was saved and what

was lost?," has not been directly addressed in this study of the Film Library. The question itself suggests one element of the profound power and anxiety of the archival idea: the impossibility of, yet simultaneous desire for, a visual tally which registers all that has come and all that has gone. While upon only brief reflection the material implausibility of this concept is clear, few scholars and archivists have not been moved—at least for a moment—by the simultaneously terrifying and wondrous allure of archival plenitude. What might the archive contain? Actual archival experiments such as that of the Film Library demonstrate how the compelling idea of the archive has been shaped by many material and ideological influences, making seemingly manageable inquiries into what was lost and what was found invitations to labyrinthine searches. There is no master list that reveals what films were made available to the Film Library and, of them, which survive; many of the remaining records are simply not publicly available. Burrowing through the traces left by these choices in internal reports, memos, catalogues, filmmakers' and studio's correspondence files and so on, provides a starting point for another project.

I have chosen to navigate this archival dilemma by addressing broader questions about film's cultural and historical value: What does the archive and the discourses generated by it illustrate about the social construction of visual knowledge and of film? What has the archive made visible? In other words, I have situated the archive and the tensions about the concept of visual plenitude within a socio-historically specific place, seeking to understand how this idea has changed when interfaced with radically different ideas about cinematic value. I have shown that cinematic plenitude is a persistent yet porous concept that has fed the articulation and design of different archival models. Even

within one institutional site such as the Film Library, the cinematic values that underlie archival plenitude changed across contexts. Importantly, the consistent trope of film archival discourses suggests itself to be cinematic plenitude as well as its mirror image, cinematic loss—construed variably as lost history, lost memories, lost knowledge or lost art.

The Film Library drew on the archival tension between plenitude and loss, perpetuating these very concepts through its active circulating programs, its press releases, speeches, publications and films it assisted in producing. In doing so, it invoked ideas that had been long attached to films themselves—moving pictures from anywhere, anytime—dramatising simultaneously the impossibility of this by documenting film's ephemerality. Library staff argued consistently that crucial pieces of history had been destroyed, had decomposed or had simply disappeared; despite this, they continued, films must be saved. Rescuing these films was meant to serve the ideal of access to the visual past thereby enabling study, appreciation and new forms of everyday knowledge. While the concept of an exclusive film art informed the very foundations of the Film Library's project, it rarely surfaced in the library's public discursive interventions. The historical value of film proved less laden than the artistic value of film, providing an ostensibly more benign site upon which the value of old films would be discursively and materially negotiated. "Film history" suggests itself to have been less contested than "film art," as well as more conducive to the archival idea itself.

Further investigations into how historical concepts have been used to legitimate various film practices are needed. For instance, today the term "film classic" is used regularly to sell videos, specialty cable stations, and even the ostensibly generous

contributions of American film studios to history itself. How have historical discourses themselves been used to sell now-edifying entertainment? Moreover, how have archives themselves used the concept of historical value to further their own interests? How has the endowment of old films with *a priori* historical value influenced the way visual histories are constructed through documentaries, journalism and features? More simply, what might an examination of other archives—contemporary to the Film Library and those more recently established—demonstrate about the ways in which visual-historical knowledge has been and continues to be constructed across cultures and across time?

Archives were not simply observers of the cinema, remote storehouses that safeguarded what was benignly offered to them. Archival ideas and advocates have actively shaped how the past, the present and the future of cinema would be understood, from the beginning of the medium forward, thereby reflecting and participating in the discursive cinematic horizon. Further, the archive and its imaginative surpluses are one element of what Miriam Hansen has called film's *publicness*—its simultaneous status as a reflection and a tool of modernity—as it participated in specialised and broad public discourses about film's historical significance. This suggests that the archive is one site upon which the varied nature of this significance can be observed and through which visual historical knowledge has been configured, reconfigured, proselytised and popularised over time.

Throughout, I have attempted to complicate the concepts of "film art" that circulated during this period. Using the Film Library as a focal point, I have shown that such discourses drew on dramatically different models for what film was at all. Clearly, film could not be readily dissociated from its popular, commercial status. The idea of a

rarified high-film art was unpalatable to many for a wide variety of reasons. The various and often underdeveloped models for film art offered by the Film Library itself suggest awareness of the diversity of opinions regarding properly "cultural" or "artistic" objects. The fact that "film art" was not uniformly accepted or rejected suggests more than the manifold interests and dispositions of relevant parties but also the shifting character of the concept itself. Further investigations into the Film Library's later activities and how they changed as more archives and film art institutions grew, would provide important insights into how the library has or has not influenced the kind of art that film has—and continues—to become. The persistent differentiation between film-as-art, film-as-mass-medium, and film-as-entertainment suggests that simply pointing to the discursive interfaces of these concepts cannot fully account for their lasting use in historical, critical and popular contexts. Moreover, the role of American philanthropies in forwarding these particular concepts and in funding their exploration provides an important area for further inquiry.

Film boldly articulated the modern experience of spatio-temporal disjuncture; it also simultaneously expressed the desire to make records of this disjuncture, depicting it and, in a sense, preserving it with unprecedented accuracy. As a distinctly modern institution, the film archive proposed that by collecting, exhibiting and studying films, a record might be maintained of the cinema's specific role in the unfolding concepts of time and space, information and art emerging from within modern conditions. The film archive is, therefore, a bold expression of an apparent and perhaps modern paradox: the move to preserve objects that are largely the product and expression of ephemerality

itself. Ideas of plenitude and loss, presence and absence converge yet again on the site of the film archive.

I have suggested that through examination of the Film Library and its deliberations on the nature of the film medium and also through its negotiations with a wide range of constituencies and concepts that socio-historically specific responses to modernity itself might be better understood. The Film Library is a clear example of one ongoing attempt to make sense of modern conditions through film. The library importantly demonstrated that a cinematic past could be reconstructed through the visual fragments left behind by industrial practices of distribution and exhibition. This sentiment in itself was a hopeful and perhaps utopian one. Intimately attached to it is the complementary ambition that film would find its place in deliberations on aesthetic, social and political histories. Conversely, the film archive and, in this case, the Film Library lends shape to the history of attempts to make meaning through the cinema by providing an identifiable institutional site whereupon discourses converged, providing a unique window onto film's larger discursive horizon. I do not contend that the Film Library was an unconditionally progressive organisation or that it was an irretrievably bourgeois imposition onto the cinematic world. It was both and neither, struggling with limited means, high ideals and flawed conditions.

MoMA cast a wide net for its then-unusual collection project. They encountered confusion over how Bara might bear relevance to Buñuel, how Edison might speak to Eisenstein, or by what logic *Mechanics of the Brain* might complement the antics of Mickey Mouse. Old films and new films of many types came together, enabling novel configurations of cinematic texts and cinematic publics. The Film Library's efforts mark

an important and early stage in the gradual association of film and, in particular, feature films with private and public history. Their efforts also mark the initial creation of the material, legal and intellectual grounds upon which films from the past have been increasingly circulated and considered to be valuable historical and aesthetic objects. In the 1930s, old images were beginning to acquire new forms of value. The Film Library marks one visible moment in the development of assumptions about how the visual past would be used, the interests around which it would be formed and the means through which it would continue to be reformed. This dissertation has only begun to build a foundation for exploring these questions. It has shown that the archival value of film is a long foreseen one, attached to film's capacity to make accurate moving pictures of things as well as to its ability to link vastly different public and private formations through film's history as well. Important questions remain to be explored. Without the film archive, what would we see? In Benjamin's words, the crates have been unpacked and books have been placed on shelves. The anticipation of their disorder and rediscovery has not entirely dissipated. More books will be found; room on the shelves will have to be made, and their order rearranged.

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