

Opening the gates: an archival perspective

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Film curatorship, according to a recent definition is “[t]he art of interpreting the aesthetics, history, and technology of cinema through the selective collection, preservation, and documentation of films and their exhibition in archival presentations.” (Cherchi Usai, Francis, Horwath, Loebenstein 2008, 231). Although comprehensive and well-advised, two comments can be made about this definition. One is that its domain is delimited to considerations directly related to cinema. At one point in the reproduced discussions between its authors that led up to the definition’s final formulation the term “historical traditions” was advanced. Yet it was left unaddressed and then tacitly dropped.² Yet that single occurrence is a reminder that the history of cinema is inseparable from other histories. Therefore, the definition, although adequate for practical purposes, remains loose. I use the word “loose” in the sense intended by logician Olaf Helmer and philosopher Nicholas Rescher in their paper on explanatory statements in the “inexact sciences”, their umbrella term for applied physical sciences, the social sciences, and history. In these disciplines specifically, they wrote, law-like formulations are “not unrestricted or universal”, but “conditional in their logical form”. That is to say, the looseness of their definitions, predictions, etc. is a function of time, place, and circumstances “which may only be indicated in a general way and are not necessarily (indeed in most cases cannot be expected to be) exhaustively articulated” (Helmer and Rescher 1958, 8-13); sociologist Harold Garfinkel referred to and rephrased these conditions as the *et cetera rule*, by which he meant to cover (and in his experiments, to uncover) “unstated understandings” (Garfinkel 1984 [1967], 3).³ (To make this notion more concrete, take

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² Cherchi Usai, Francis, Horwath, Loebenstein 2008, pp, 222-230. The scope of the published discussions and e-mail exchanges between the editors that precede the definition is unrivaled within the film heritage world.

³ Anthony Giddens completes the objections against the notion of universal laws in the social sciences particularly, stating that not only “methods of empirical testing and validation are (...) inadequate”, but more importantly that “the causal conditions in generalizations about human social conduct are inherently unstable in respect of the very knowledge (or beliefs) that actors have about the circumstances of their own action. (...) This is a mutual interpretative interplay between social science and those whose activities compose its subject matter—a ‘double hermeneutic’. The theories and findings of the social sciences cannot be kept wholly separate from the universe of meaning and action which they are about. But for their part, lay actors are social theorists, whose theories help to constitute the activities and institutions that are the object of study of specialized social observers or social scientists.”; see Giddens 2014 [1984], xxxii-xxxiii.

for example the statement that during the so-called Hollywood studio era eight film companies together controlled all aspects—production, distribution, and exhibition—of the American film industry between the mid-1920s and late 1940s. Besides the explicitly mentioned temporal and spatial limits, it was also conditional on a number of circumstances, such as the companies’ vertical integration, their structure as stockholding companies with credit lines to Wall Street, their exemption from anti-trust laws, or their production modes of labor specialization and standardized product differentiation (Gomery 1986, 3-25; Staiger 1985, 311-319). Looseness, furthermore, also implies that counterfactual examples can be explained, or absorbed, by a law-like statement (Helmer and Rescher 1958, 12-13). For instance, films did get produced independently, but to recoup costs and make a profit its producers needed to make sure they were going to be distributed through one of these eight companies.⁴)

A second comment is that film historiography over the last few decades has massively demonstrated that film historians and scholars increasingly dig at sites further away from their own field. Examples are such topics as the borrowing of as well as competition by other arts, entertainments, and media in terms of their venues, technology, personnel, program formats, subject matter, etc.; censorship, copyright, patent, tax or antitrust laws; zoning, building, and fire regulations, theater architecture; the social geography, demographics or distribution of income of audiences; colonialism, war, system of government, etc. The range of potential signifying contexts that impinges on the making, distributing, screening, and viewing of film is open-ended.⁵ This is reflected in the range of new territories of research opened up by the so-called new film history that emerged in the late 1970s, early 1980s, initially led by early cinema studies: quite a number of its scholarly publications hardly feature films at all, while at the other end of the spectrum there are ‘philological’ studies that focus on the actual (archival) film *materials* (Gauthier 2013, 158-164). These comments, then, are necessary to establish why the public—and publicly funded—responsibility of professionally promulgating the film heritage and the knowledge generated about it (including but not limited to the elements of the abovementioned definition), have not been fully and meaningfully realized.

Gatekeeper

⁴ In fact, only through five of them, as during most of the studio era the so-called Little Three—Universal, Columbia, and United Artists—had no theaters of their own and distributed their films, too, through the so-called Big Five—Paramount, MGM, 20th Century-Fox, Warner Bros., and RKO. This is the reason for using the rather loose phrase “eight film companies *together*”.

⁵ I borrow the term *signifying context* from Bertellini 1999, 47, although he used it specifically with regard to reception.

The world of film historiography can be seen as an *interpretive community*, to borrow a term from literary scholar Stanley Fish. It is a network of scholars and students, partly overlapping with that of film archivists, curators, and technicians, that shares “a public and conventional view” about values, goals, and interests, although different opinions and different institutional priorities about those values, goals, and interests cause these views to change, even split, over time. The conventions and competences developed within interpretive communities allow their members to operate efficiently, as their communication presupposes, and proceeds on the basis of, a limited number of relevant perspectives and interpretations (Fish 1980, 14-17). Fish introduced the term *interpretive community* with reference to the literary institution, one which is blessed with the advantage of having its materials, the printed texts that play a central role within it, as a rule unproblematically available or accessible, except for reasons this community would accept as being normal (unique manuscripts or incunabula, for instance—although these are becoming increasingly available online (Blouin, Jr. and Rosenberg 2013 [2011], 200-201)—, variant editions or the lack of a translation).

In the film heritage world, however, a different situation prevails. Although an interpretive community itself (with overlaps in the academic world as well as in the world of film labs and, more recently, specialist digital R&D), in terms of its result-oriented conduct it can more productively be seen as what sociologist Howard Becker has called an *art world* (Becker 1984 [1982]). His approach, although akin to Fish’s, is defined “in a more technical way, to denote the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of works that art world is noted for.”⁶ Especially with regard to the collections that film heritage institutes manage this implies an influential position, because they control not only access to these materials, but also their accumulation or deaccession and, by extension, their histories. These institutes, then, act as gatekeepers (Becker actually uses the term *distributors*): they decide what goes in—and becomes part of its collections—and what comes out—and becomes part of its public presentations.

But whereas the film historical interpretive community as a matter of course shares its research findings, in spoken and written accounts, with the public (however small a circle of academic specialists it, too, often concerns), film heritage institutes, more particularly those general (or national/regional) institutes that are wholly or partly funded from public budgets, take their mandates often in a much lighter, and looser, way. It appears that the film heritage world as a

⁶ Becker (1984), p. x. As my article is about the cinema heritage as a whole, I am not interested in whether the materials under the remit of film heritage institutes are considered art or not. As their work is all about conventions and cooperation within a network, I see no reason to propose an alternative term for *art world*.

whole has a radically different view about values, goals, and interests of the film heritage than academic film studies and historiography. What is more, the privileged access film scholars have been given over the years has contributed to the emergence of the abovementioned new film history; yet the institutes themselves, except for innovations in restoration technologies and ethics, have shown few signs of having kept up with the new academic research.

Inconvenient

In a survey I did of the public presentations listed on the websites of 24 film heritage institutes worldwide, in February 2014, I found that most of these institutes largely rely on screening feature-length films, predominantly fiction (De Klerk 2015, 273-400).⁷ What is perhaps even more surprising is that the majority of the films these institutes show are of recent date: 25% of 1,170 films⁸ screened that month were made in the current decade (i.e. between 2010 and early 2014), while a whopping 43% were made since 2000. In contrast, between them the surveyed institutes screened a mere six films—just over 0.5%—that

⁷ Websites may not always give a full account of what it is film heritage institutes provide in terms of public activities; one institute in my survey—Cinemateca Portuguesa-Museu do Cinema—explicitly mentioned the distribution of in-house produced information sheets before film shows. But I think it is safe to state that the various media in which these activities are publicized overlap rather than differ. For one thing, the sheer volume of activities would seem to preclude a costly and time-consuming, multi-pronged publicity approach (and if a particular activity called for addressing specific target groups, direct mailing would be the preferable method). For another, insofar as institutes publish printed program bulletins (which are, moreover, also available in PDF on their sites) there are no major differences to be detected. In fact, the printed program overview of one institute—Cinémathèque québécoise—contains less information than its digital counterpart. Finally, these days it seems safe to assume that the institutes' potential visitors are expected to inform themselves of their activities through the internet, an expectation confirmed, and a trend reinforced, by the possibility of online ticket reservation and purchase. The institutes included in the survey were: Australian Cinematheque, Brisbane; Bophana Centre de Ressources audiovisuelles, Phnom Penh; British Film Institute-National Film & Television Archive, London; Centre cinématographique marocain, Rabat; Cinemateca Boliviana, La Paz; Cinemateca Dominicana, Santo Domingo; Cinemateca Portuguesa-Museu do Cinema, Lisbon; Cinemateca Uruguay, Montevideo; Cinematek, Brussels; Cinémathèque de la Ville de Luxembourg; Cinémathèque québécoise, Montreal; Cinémathèque suisse, Lausanne; Deutsches Filminstitut Filmmuseum, Frankfurt; Filmoteca de Catalunya, Barcelona; Fondazione Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia-Cineteca Nazionale, Rome; Hong Kong Film Archive; Irish Film Institute, Dublin; Jerusalem Cinematheque-Israel Film Archive; National Film Center at the National Museum for Modern Art, Tokyo; Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision, Wellington/Auckland/Christchurch; Österreichisches Filmmuseum, Vienna; UCLA Film & Television Archive, Los Angeles.

⁸ The number is actually higher: not included are the screenings of the National Film Center, Tokyo, whose website didn't specify the titles of its film programs, nor screenings at the subsidiary venues programmed by an institute, as these could not all be retrieved.

were made during the first two decades of film history, which I conveniently date from 1895 onwards (in fact, “between them” is hardly an appropriate turn of phrase, since these six films were all screened at one institute during a single evening’s program). Furthermore, not a few of the large number of recent (mostly feature fiction) films were new release titles that often also played in regular commercial venues. As a matter of fact, nine of the surveyed institutes allowed external distributors access to their programs of public presentations, while only a few of them (also) engaged in self-initiated distribution activities, usually featuring their own or other archives’ restorations of vintage titles.⁹

Another common practice was that whenever the institutes screened programs of feature-length films the preferred format was that of the retrospective. Of course, the size of such programs—here and there up to 50 titles or more—forces most institutes to shop around for prints they themselves do not have. But by thus bringing together prints from *other* archives, film heritage institutes thereby limit the possibility of making their *own* materials available to their own public.

The emphasis, then, on feature-length (fiction) film in extended programs precludes a consistent and liberal presentation of materials the institutes do have. Surely, many such materials do not fit the regular two-hour slots into which public archival programming is invariably organized—the reason one programmer called them inconvenient. And indeed, they often are shorter in length, belong to uncurrent genres or were not meant for conventional theatrical screening in the first place, to name just a few aspects that contemporary curatorship seems unable or unwilling to handle. So, these materials remain inactivated. That is to say that despite the fact that many of them have actually been preserved, they are not released from the darkness of the vaults to the light of the projected screen or display box before an audience.

A second conclusion from my survey is that film heritage institutes are generally not able or willing to provide full, up-to-date visitor information about their presentations—online or on site—, whether it concerns technology (formats used; preservations, etc.), film history, aesthetics or any other relevant context. And even though film is routinely, if not monotonously, framed as art, the aesthetic contextualization is most often of a traditional, conformist nature (based on “unstated understandings”). The recent phenomenon of online presentations, either in-house or through a variety of portals and web channels, has in fact activated a larger share of ‘inconvenient’ materials, yet accompanying visitor—or user—information continues to suffer from the same inadequacies.

⁹ Two institutes in my survey, furthermore, hosted festivals that were organized by outside parties. I counted at least ten other institutes outside my survey that also showed commercially distributed titles regularly.

Broadening

What one can observe here is another instance of looseness, namely the economic context in which most publicly financed institutes operate. Many of the 24 institutes' published mission statements are usually a variant of the boilerplate "to collect, protect, preserve, and disseminate the moving image heritage", but funding statements are often absent. The circumstance, however, that in recent times quite a number of the institutes within (and without) my survey have relocated or expanded their premises (exhibition space and/or auditoria and seating capacity) surely has put more pressure on attracting visitors in greater numbers to finance the increased rent and upkeep.

As well in recent times the mingling of public and private interests with respect to the public heritage has become the rule rather than the exception. Indeed, few film heritage institutes today are wholly subsidized from public budgets; and those that are often seek additional funding—cash, sponsorship or contra—from third parties for non-mandated, costly, and/or high-profile activities. Private sponsorship, either on an incidental (or "project") basis or as a long-term partnership, has become a fixture of the way cultural institutes, certainly those that are perceived as having prestige, operate nowadays.¹⁰ These mixed financial sources constitute a major element in the dynamics of the cultural field as a whole, compounded by retreating government funding and/or making subsidies conditional on revenue from other sources, such as matching funds by sponsors, grantors, donors, endowments, etc. or a certain percentage of earned income—hence the ubiquitous museum store and cafe/restaurant as well as archival sales departments, membership programs, facilities rental, etc.

With no available research on film heritage institutes' public programming, I use instead an example of this dynamics from sociologist Victoria Alexander's survey of American art museums between 1960 and 1986. She argues that the change of funding (in this particular case, from private—or philanthropic—to corporate and institutional) went hand in hand with a shift in museum policies and power: from a curatorial, internally oriented model in which a museum's public activities were based on scholarship, to a managerial model and its more external orientation to both funders and audiences. This shift did not imply, however, that museums always simply marched to their new sponsors' drums. She observed rather that museum managements were able to retain a high degree of autonomy by reshaping funders' demands or wishes in accordance with a museum's "portfolio", i.e. its ideas and proposals for future exhibitions. While corporately funded shows often got the publicity their sponsors were seeking in order to increase name recognition, museums—certainly not averse to name recognition and

¹⁰ The institutes' funding statements, insofar as they are published, are often reticent on detail. Exceptions are: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art 2013 and Cinémathèque québécoise, n.d. [2014].

increased attendance either—were able, by public money thus saved or by door money earned, to maintain more traditionally curatorial exhibitions, albeit perhaps with a smaller splash. Alexander concluded that in art museums these developments, besides a conflictual relation between curatorial staff and management, have led to a “broadening of art”, a trend exemplified by more, and often more popular, exhibitions and a break with the traditional high art canon (Alexander 1996).

Political Q&A

The same tendencies and circumstances have affected film heritage institutes. They have also broadened their presentations and lowered the threshold of their visitor information, yet at the same time they have narrowed the range of materials selected from their collections. As a result, confirmed by my survey, many film heritage institutes tend to confine themselves to the received wisdom of a professed aesthetic approach and to a largely repertorial—often canonical—high art range of works. In the recent past exceptions to this cinema-theater programming style have been few and far between. One example were the innovative screenings at the Nederlands Filmmuseum, Amsterdam, in the 1990s, which were firmly rooted in and stimulated by the discoveries made in its (long-neglected) archive, particularly, though not exclusively, materials from the silent era. Today, there still are few exceptions. One outlier, albeit of a totally different kind, is Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision, in New Zealand, whose public presentations largely come from its own archives and/or focus on materials that were made in or relate to New Zealand and its relevant geographic context, Pasifika. As a rule, its screenings and exhibitions, whether it concerns fiction or nonfiction, distinguish themselves in terms of subject matter, as they are framed in a politically, socially, culturally or environmentally national or regional context rather than a purely aesthetic or auteurist one—here, the retrospectives of directors or actors so common at other institutes are conspicuously absent; in fact, a non-aesthetic frame prevails whenever it features foreign films. At the moment I write this—February 2016—, the institute’s announced screenings for its February-March program at its Wellington venue for instance, feature three documentaries on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the passing of the homosexual law reform bill. As well, the foreign films it shows are either shorts in a compilation program of the Berlinale film festival, or documentaries, e.g. *Trace of the Bears*, in honor of the 60th anniversary of the same festival, the visitor information of which focuses on two of its political scandals related to the Vietnam war, or the Estonian political documentary *Ash and Money*, “[f]ollowed by a political Q&A”. The institute also shows Alfred Hitchcock’s earliest surviving feature, the first three— and only extant—reels of which were identified in its archive, in 2011. Its online exhibition, co-produced with the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, features audio and video related to ANZAC, the combined Australian-New Zealand Army Corps,

and its experiences during World War I. Here, film curatorship appeals largely to extra-filmic contexts of film heritage artifacts and records, pointing up that there is a wealth of sources for a wealth of histories.¹¹

Going beyond these examples, there is still a long way to go in fully exploring the complete film heritage and its significance. As a matter of fact, the theatrical format itself is an obstacle to do justice to the kinds of materials national, general film heritage institutes commonly hold. Many of their films were screened in other performative configurations, other venues, with other goals, for other audiences. All sorts of propaganda (e.g. colonial, political, partisan, military, religious), instruction (e.g. medical, hygienic, military, education, business) or private films, as well as their role in mixed-media presentations, are thus neglected and disappear from the public's sense of cinema history. Yet these films and their specific purposes, target audiences, ways of exhibition, etc. are ever so many instances of the range of materials and practices that existed before and/or concurrently with what became cinema's mainstream theatrical products, practices, and technologies.

In my view it is the task of film heritage institutes, those publicly funded in particular, not only to bring out the full range of materials and practices, but also to bring a wider array of signifying contexts to bear on them than the usual production-oriented, aesthetic categories. Surely, the very notion of looseness is a warning that any attempt at comprehensiveness is futile. Yet the inclusion of those materials, conditions, conventions, and practices the interpretive communities of the film heritage world do know have existed, or still exist, will at least ensure that a definition of curatorship, if not of the task of film heritage institutes tout court, accounts for both majority and minority practices and do justice to cinema as a highly diversified phenomenon. So, as a legend to the definition's subdivision in technology, aesthetics, and history, I suggest for consideration a conceptual apparatus, in agreement with Howard Becker's delineation of networked, interdependent cultural worlds, that covers the histories, conditions, and conventions that have allowed the accomplishment of cinema, then and now, along or against the grain. Others may want to subdivide or supplement these concepts, but for now I have settled on a minimal number of more or less coherent considerations.

¹¹ The phrase "at its Wellington venue" is indicative of the institute's geographical spread, with venues in Auckland and Christchurch that have their own priorities in terms of collections and presentations. Moreover, for online access Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision has provided 17 "medianet digital video kiosks" at partner organizations, such as galleries and museums, throughout the country. A few other institutes in my survey (e.g. Bophana Centre de Ressources audiovisuelles, Phnom Penh; Cinemateca Dominicana, Santo Domingo; Filmoteca de Catalunya, Barcelona) have a policy of having a selection of their screenings brought to venues throughout the country or region that has mandated them.

- *Continuity*, first of all, emphasizes the parallels and contact points between the histories of cinema and other (performing) arts, entertainments, and media in terms of technologies, business models, personnel (ownership and management structure as well as crew or cast), narrative and presentational formats, venues or audience composition. This concept is important, for instance, for understanding the acceptance of cinema by virtue of its introduction into established entertainments, the rapid transition from silent to sound film, as well as for the current transition to and proliferation of digitally-based practices.
- *Manifestation* refers to cinema's manifold, multifaceted appearances and its ways of organizing production, distribution, marketing, and screening: its purposes (e.g. propaganda, campaigning, instruction, documenting, education, advertising, recruitment, discovery or entertainment); target groups (e.g. family and friends, children, shoppers, students and trainees, the military, foreign audiences); venues (e.g. fairgrounds, variety theaters, department stores, coffee houses, cinemas, schools, museums, world and trade fairs, drive-ins, as well as various home cinema systems and web applications); presentation formats (e.g. mixed-media formats—ranging from variety shows to tie-in publicity campaigns—, multiple-channeled shows, framing events—such as Q&As or lectures—, programs, serials, festivals, playback systems).
- *Experience* refers to the ways cinema appeals to spectators' imagination, world knowledge (including social and political commitment), emotions or involvement. Besides genre, narrative forms, rhetoric or style, they include the contexts most proximate to the film screening: the specific location and architectural properties of a venue as well as its social meaning;¹² the state of projection and display technologies; announcements of all kinds—e.g. music, posters, trailers; program formats and live elements during a performance; souvenir program bills and memorabilia as reminders; I cluster fanzines and fanclubs in this category, too.
- *Identity*, finally, pertains to the negotiation between local and international aspects, most emphatically the practices of appropriation—local measures to adapt foreign cultural objects to legal, linguistic or market conditions as well as all sorts of customs.

These concepts are meant to flesh out the abovementioned definition of curatorship, while at the same time they propose signposts to the contexts of the film heritage in a given geographic region and historical era. As such, they are meant to align with the archival notion of what archivist Hans Booms once called *functional context*, i.e. all those contexts that contribute to forming “a conception of a certain pe-

¹² A circumstance pointed out as early as 1914 when sociologist Emilie Altenloh commented on the difference between neighborhood cinemas with their simple wooden folding seats and the picture palaces with their lobbies, refreshment rooms, and upholstered seating; see: Altenloh 1914, 19.

riod in the development of the entire section of society” (Booms 1987, 103; Cook 2009 [2006]; Cook 1992; Bearman 1989; Alexander and Samuels 1987, 526-529). This concept was developed to broaden the remit of archives in two ways. First of all, from the records generated by administrative bodies to those generated by all parties involved in a specific area of societal, economic or political activity (e.g. pressure groups, NGOs, media, relevant individuals, etc.). And, secondly, to cope with the overwhelming accrual of the record production by postwar administrative bodies specifically. A focus on the functional contexts implies a different approach to research: instead of the custodial description of *documents* transferred and accessioned it calls for establishing the (hierarchized) functions and activities of record creators (also called macroappraisal) in order to prioritize the *documentation*.

My conceptual apparatus is, therefore, meant to achieve a fuller understanding of the institutions—in the sense of both organizations and practices—that affected cinema at certain places and at certain times. As such, it constitutes a major difference with the way general film heritage institutes conceive of their tasks. Indeed, in their public activities—presentations, visitor information about these presentations—films have always been the focus. But they are no documents or records in the sense archival science commonly understands these terms.¹³ That is to say, they are unlike, for instance, a film production or distributing company’s correspondence—which are records generated precisely in the service of making or distributing the films. Rather, they are artifacts. So, what film heritage institutes allow to come out of their vaults is presented less for their collections’ evidentiary value (i.e. “the quality of records that provides information about the origins, functions, and activities of their creator”) than for their informational value (i.e. “the usefulness or significance of materials based on their content”).¹⁴ Films as artifacts, then, foster all sorts of aesthetic judgments considered valuable in and of themselves (no wonder their selection usually goes beyond accessioning only a few items that are exemplary for various formal, stylistic or narrative aspects).

This artifactual, aesthetic bias has doubtlessly contributed to film heritage institutes’ textually oriented conception of their mission. It may also explain why presentation is such a prominent activity. And because

¹³ Proctor and Cook 2012 [2000], 254, *Manual of archival description* (Farnham – Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012 [2000]), define record(s) as “[d]ocument(s) created or received and maintained by an agency, organization or individual in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business”. Pearce Moses 2005, 126-12, allows wider meanings in terms of both purpose and medium (“Information or data fixed in some media” is one of his definitions), yet comments that “document is used synonymously with record”.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 152, 206. However, the distinction between artifacts and records is not all that rigorous, as “[a]rtifacts may be preserved as records, documenting a design or function” (p. 36). The latter notion, however, is not emphasized in film heritage institutes’ public information.

this conception largely favors questions of form and style and artistic meaning, film heritage presentations have often imposed *new* contexts on these artifacts that are potentially enlightening—e.g. the work of one director, performer or studio—, yet also potentially dubious, as when works unrelated in time, place or agency are hitched together under a collective title; in both cases there is often no overmuch consideration for the different conditions and signifying contexts in which the works—let alone their prints—presented were made, exhibited or received. As often as film heritage institutes apply such new contexts¹⁵, as seldom do they, in their *presentations*, respect the archival principle of (original) provenance, the entity “that created or received the items in a collection”, let alone “the organizational, functional, and operational circumstances surrounding materials’ creation, receipt, storage, or use, and its relations to other materials.” (Proctor and Cook 2012, 317-318; 90) But most consequentially, as the vast majority of in-house presentations of film heritage materials takes place in a theatrical setting, with its regular daily programs, at regular times, in conventional screenings, the artifacts that were screened in other types of venue and for other purposes than entertainment or aesthetic enjoyment have become hard to account for. It is this circumstance that makes such artifacts into collection items yet outcasts at the same time. Of course, it also impedes the presentation of the “working system” (Cherchi Usai, Francis, Horwath, Loebenstein 2008, 84-89) of various alternative settings.

Conclusion

To recapitulate the above, film heritage institutes distinguish themselves less and less from both commercial and art cinema theaters¹⁶: mechanical projection technology as well as the range of materials—both film and film-related—that used to make up the cinema experience, the range, that is, of materials that constitute the heritage stored in the institutes’ vaults, seem to have a decreasingly meaningful place in their on-site presentations. Their visitor information is largely determined by a conception of film as art, even though the aesthetic notions communicated are traditional rather than original or based on research. Therefore, in order for film heritage institutes to meaningfully present

¹⁵ Archivist Lori Podolsky Nordland writes: “A document is more than its subject content and the context of its original creation. Throughout its life cycle, it continually evolves, acquiring additional meanings and layers, even after crossing the archival threshold. As such, archivists need to read documents against the grain to search for the deeper contexts of their meaning.” She has termed these “additional layers of context” *secondary provenance*; see her, “The concept of “secondary provenance”: re-interpreting Ac co mok ki’s map as evolving text”, in: Nordland 2004, 147, 149.

¹⁶ For example, at one point in time the screenings in the Nederlands Filmmuseum were virtually indistinguishable from regular cinemas (besides the large amount of new distribution titles) insofar as they opened with commercials and trailers, not from its archive, but topical ones, delivered by advertising or PR firms. Currently something similar happens in the theaters of the Film Archiv Austria, Vienna.

their collections and their histories as well as to meaningfully communicate their knowledge to the public, they need a way of doing curatorship that activates all types of objects. Secondly, to accommodate these objects they need to develop different presentation formats, particularly for screenings, that are more flexible and more imaginative than most film heritage institutes are accustomed to mount. Obviously, this would also allow, if not force them to contextualize information for their public. More thoroughly contextualized presentations may play up the histories, ideologies, purposes or “intellectual content” (Bearman 1989, ch.III), hidden (even behind deceptively transparent feature fiction materials) as well as extrinsic aspects, such as the materials’ histories (e.g. splices, inserts, cuts, and other changes film materials were subjected to, including the preservation and restoration measures taken by the films’ current repositories; the arrangement, or re-arrangement of film-related records, in terms of provenance, material, etc.). An adequate performance of public accountability implies that the broadening of materials should go hand in hand with the sharing of knowledge.

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