



The Founding of Film in Museums: The Influence of Museum Philosophy on the Creation of Their First Film Libraries and Archives

Peyton Moriarty

Abstract:

In 1935, Librarian John E. Abbott of the Museum of Modern Art wrote this of the contemporary status of film preservation: “the situation is as though there existed a great interest in painting on the part of the public, but that almost no painting were ever exhibited save those executed within the previous twelve months.” In the early twentieth century, film collections were not sought after by museums, because the relevance of film to museum mandates had not yet been defined. In this paper, we refer to the creation of some of the first museum film libraries and archives, in order to examine the effort of their establishment within a museum, and the philosophical challenges and appeals that must be addressed when these mediums meet, in the interplay between archival and museological theory. We shall briefly review the beginning of film museums, and then discuss where the nature and priorities of museums most affected these pioneering film libraries and archives. These influences manifest in the rationale of why films should be collected, in the details of what should be acquired, and in the practical and philosophical challenges that are not commonly found in other information institutions, but are characteristic of museum work.

To cite this article:

Moriarty, P. (2024). The Founding of Film in Museums: The Influence of Museum Philosophy on the Creation of Their First Film Libraries and Archives. *International Journal of Librarianship*, 9(2), 4-16. <https://doi.org/10.23974/ijol.2024.vol9.2.358>

To submit your article to this journal:

Go to <https://ojs.calaijol.org/index.php/ijol/about/submissions>

The Founding of Film in Museums: The Influence of Museum Philosophy on the Creation of Their First Film Libraries and Archives

Peyton Moriarty

Museum of Anthropology at University of British Columbia, Canada

ABSTRACT

In 1935, Librarian John E. Abbott of the Museum of Modern Art wrote this of the contemporary status of film preservation: “the situation is as though there existed a great interest in painting on the part of the public, but that almost no painting were ever exhibited save those executed within the previous twelve months.” In the early twentieth century, film collections were not sought after by museums, because the relevance of film to museum mandates had not yet been defined. In this paper, we refer to the creation of some of the first museum film libraries and archives, in order to examine the effort of their establishment within a museum, and the philosophical challenges and appeals that must be addressed when these mediums meet, in the interplay between archival and museological theory. We shall briefly review the beginning of film museums, and then discuss where the nature and priorities of museums most affected these pioneering film libraries and archives. These influences manifest in the rationale of why films should be collected, in the details of what should be acquired, and in the practical and philosophical challenges that are not commonly found in other information institutions, but are characteristic of museum work.

Keywords: Film Acquisition, Museum Archive, Museum Library, Information Science History, Museology, Negotiation

INTRODUCTION

In 1935, librarian John E. Abbott of the Museum of Modern Art wrote this of the contemporary status of film preservation: “the situation is as though there existed a great interest in painting on the part of the public, but that almost no painting were ever exhibited save those executed within the previous twelve months” (Abbott et al., 1995). In the early twentieth century, film collections were not sought after by museums because the relevance of film to museum mandates had not yet been defined. In this paper, we refer to the creation of some of the first museum film libraries and archives in order to examine the effort of their establishment within a museum, and the philosophical challenges and appeals that must be addressed when these mediums meet, in the interplay between archival and museological theory. We shall briefly review the beginning of film

museums, and then discuss where the nature and priorities of museums most affected these pioneering film libraries and archives. These influences manifest in the rationale of why films should be collected, in the details of what should be acquired, and in the practical and philosophical challenges that are not commonly found in other information institutions, but are characteristic of museum work. In doing so, we shall demonstrate the unique place, value, and challenges of film libraries and archives within museums.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BEGINNING OF FILM MUSEUMS

While the presence of film in museums is sometimes a tense one, it is a relationship stretching back to the end of the nineteenth century. In 1898, a Polish cameraman published the pamphlet *Une nouvelle source de l'histoire* (1898), proposing “a cinematic museum or depository ... to be given the same official existence, the same access as to other archives” (Robinson, 2006, p. 237). The first dedicated film archive (the National Library for Historical Films and Voices, Copenhagen) would be founded in 1913, and in 1917 a Moving Picture Film Museum was conceptualized in the United States; but it would not be until 1927 that a museum dedicated to photography and film would be established at the Kodak factory in London. David Robinson describes Turin’s Museo Nazionale del Cinema as the first “modern” film museum, conceptualized in 1941 and at last opened in 1958 (Robinson, 2006, p. 246).

While this article will reference conversations from these museums wholly dedicated to the collection and study of film, we shall look closer at the history of those institutions whose missions are more genre-oriented (history, art, science), rather than medium-oriented (film, photography). The foundations of these institutions rest in non-film mediums; in these places where film is foreign, it has naturally encountered more institutional conflicts, and there are more philosophical challenges to speak of – these shall be revisited in later sections.

The first film archive to exist within a larger, public museum not dedicated to film, is that of the Imperial War Museum (IWM) in London, which began collecting film soon after its establishment in 1917; one of its earliest exhibits was a presentation of a Battle of the Somme documentary from 1916 (Christie, 2012). A second notable London museum, the Science Museum, hosted some of the first permanent displays of cinematographic collections. These included a 1913 donation of six cinematographic apparatuses, and the much more substantial collection of William Day: five hundred objects of film and film machines. Day’s exhibit opened in 1922, occupying two large galleries of lavish mahogany cases (Cere, 2020; Robinson, 2006). Meanwhile, the broader profession of film archiving picked up steam in the 1930s, as awareness rose of the temporary nature of early films and their creators, and silent films were officially classified as a medium of the past and therefore in need of preservation (Cere, 2020; Christie, 2012). So it was in 1935 that the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City proposed and established one of the largest libraries of film in the world (Watson, 2005). But even so, film collections in museums were not sought after, and MoMA’s collection would come to be an industry original; it was the only post-WWII major art museum to systematically collect film, the rest of the work being done by specialist archives (Christie, 2012). It was only in the 1960s with a shift in exhibiting culture, that audiovisual mediums began to be widely recognized as a useful asset to museum displays; however, its relevance to the museum’s overall subject had to be explicitly argued to the institution (Alfaro, 2012; McIsaac & Mueller, 2016).

WHY COLLECT? ARGUMENTS MADE TO MUSEUMS

In understanding why a museum would agree to collect film, it is important to emphasize that a core function of museums is education – and any materials gathered should be useful for this purpose (Clover & Bell, 2013; Prottas, 2019). Staff invested in collecting film for their institutions had therefore to appeal to the museum with the educational value of the material. Jurij Meden (2021) highlights this as an aspect film museums can offer, that institutions such as film archives cannot:

The unique function of a film museum is not merely to serve a persisting audience a steady diet of classics, but also to actively educate and shape the taste of its public by embracing a wider view of film history (p. 70).

Indeed, the educational benefit of preserving and publicizing film was one of the key arguments made by MoMA to its potential supporters. Reaching out for backings and grants, MoMA staff wrote prolifically to women's colleges, other higher education institutions, other museums, and art clubs, with surveys on the existing interest in incorporating film into their studies (Watson, 2005). While early film curatorship was informed by its characterization as populist entertainment, educational emphasis such as this has given film curatorship the renown of being the “art of interpreting the aesthetics, history, and technology of cinema” (Latsis, 2016, p. 28). We shall explore these three aspects in the following subsections.

“THE TECHNOLOGY” OF CINEMA

In the case of the Science Museum, some of the earliest film-based exhibits were focused on the technology of the process. The inclusion of an exhibit of innovative film technology at the Science Museum was well-suited to the institution's mandate of science education. The early acquisition of the Day collection would later be bolstered by other technologically-notable items such as Louis Le Prince's 1888 single-lens camera, used to create what may be the earliest motion picture sequences (Harvey, 1998).

Indeed, the technology of early cinema was so core to its conceptualization within the Science Museum, that these early exhibits often minimized the content of the film itself, and the professional skill that went into its creation, to instead speak on the mechanisms of the machines involved. As the Director of the Science Museum reported in 1924, the museum's objects:

... are shown on account of their utility ... Each one has been designed for the purpose of performing specific operations more efficiently than heretofore and so in their assembly they represent the steps by which progress has been made, and show the gradual development of instruments, machines, etc. (Harvey, 2000, p. 7).

Rinella Cere (2020) proposes that this divided understanding of film was due to the organization of art, culture, and science in industrial society, which was founded in production systems and labor divisions. Michael Harvey (1998) further demonstrates this by highlighting the influence of nineteenth century ideas of independent technological progress, and the Science Museum's origins as the ‘science’ half of a larger whole.: When the materials from the Great Exhibition of 1851 were afterwards separated into science and art, the Science Museum was

created to represent the former, while the Victoria and Albert Museum created for the latter. Most museums tacitly maintained this estrangement, until there was a later movement to demonstrate the value of objects by contextualizing them in society, relevant individuals, and history (Ames, 1992; Schildkrout, 1991).

“THE HISTORY” OF CINEMA

When the IWM established its intent to collect the history of British participation in WWI, gathering film was an unusual but appropriate suggestion. At the time, film was considered a “low form” of leisure, “an amusement fit for children and half-wits”; although arguments for its value as a “vivid” historical record had been made since the 1890s, the pre-War British government was not interested in collecting film (Bottomore, 2002b; Smither & Walsh, 2000, p. 188). Yet it was at the first meeting of the IWM’s Board of Trustees, in 1920, that curator Major Charles ffoulkes reported that the Treasury had given funds and instructions to preserve all War Cinematograph films. With the creation of the IWM, the British government had quickly recognized film as a vital medium and record of its national history. It was a wise decision: when the films were accessioned, they were barely four years old and yet were already deteriorating with wear and discoloration. Institutional action to preserve and store these materials contributed to IWM’s present collection of 120 million feet of film, one of the largest sources of what has been called the twentieth century’s “filmed history” (Smither & Walsh, 2000, p. 203). Roger Smither (personal communication, November 27, 2023) emphasized that the IWM staff were “remarkably imaginative for the time and context in which they were operating,” in planning ahead and including materials representing the civilian war experience – “in other words, to take in the wider social experience of war, and not just the military story.” The concurrent disappearance of these films cannot be overstated; it is thought that less than 20% of films from the 1920s are still accessible today, and half as many from the 1910s (Bottomore, 2002a).

The history of film itself was a fundamental aspect for the MoMA Film Library’s appeal to its own institution, but also its appeal to the American film industry. MoMA Film Library staff argued that film’s history as a developing genre of art and storytelling justified the collection of both “high” and “low” films, from radio shows to cinematic masterpieces. In particular, film could be promoted as a uniquely ‘American’ genre, and it was the museum’s responsibility to collect and institutionalize film as ‘American history,’ for the benefit of culturally-informed citizens. Here the museum’s relationship with the American film industry became intense and complicated. Film companies were pleased at the opportunity for prestige, with the idea of films as “markers of American industrial accomplishment”; yet the film industry also had a strong investment in copyright, which the museum ideal of public education clashed with (Catapano, 1994; Watson, 2005, p. 120). Contacts in the film industry mandated careful monitoring of nonprofit or free exhibitions; they did not permit any for-profit ventures. They were also determined that their materials fit into “happy historical narratives” of American history, which they expected the museum to provide (Watson, 2005, p. 111). Ultimately, while MoMA received no consistent monetary support from the film industry during the Film Library’s early years, by 1936, staff were able to broker deals with Paramount, Twentieth Century-Fox, Samuel Goldwyn, Warner Bros, Disney, Columbia, MO, Universal, Paramount, MGM, and others. This permitted the museum to make prints at its own expense for educational use: a groundbreaking agreement to free film studies from the commercial market (Bandy, 1994; Catapano, 1994; Watson, 2005).

“THE AESTHETICS” OF CINEMA

Yet the crucial argument of MoMA’s Film Library, to its own institution, was the quality of film as an art form. This was in context of a broader expansion of film’s perceived value, which alleged that it should be collected for its artistic qualities (Bottomore, 2002b). David Walsh (personal communication, November 14, 2023) opined that for some organizations this was an either/or between film as historical record or film as art, pointing to the British Film Institute (BFI, est. 1933) as an example. In contrast to the IWM, the BFI specialized in collecting film as an art form, and accordingly turned away undirected film, believing that there was no intention to it and therefore it was not worth collecting and preserving. The philosophical divide on film’s purpose was significant; Smither (personal communication, November 22, 2023) opined that it even influenced how the institution would handle the film: whether it would prioritize film preservation (as a historic record) or the sharing of the film experience (as an art form). However, staff of both the IWM and the BFI seemed to hope or assume that an organization from the other side of the history/art divide would step up to take the discarded films (D. Walsh, personal communication, November 14, 2023; *Imperial War Museum Film and Video Archive Handbook – A User’s Guide*, 1997).

At MoMA, the Board of Trustees were skeptical on film’s value to an art museum, and on bringing a populist medium into an elite institution (Catapano, 1994; Wasson, 2018). Their museum specialized in painting and sculpture, and film differed greatly from these. Film could not be displayed statically on walls, it rarely accrued value over time, and it was not intended for individual contemplation but rather for projecting to large audiences (Watson, 2005). Film Library staff took pains to parallel particular films with more traditional art, in order to justify their deserving of the same prestige and resources. They emphasized the idea of “great” artist-directors to match the classic artistic ideal of an individual creative genius (Watson, 2005). They stressed the precarity of the situation, as these films were not being preserved by any institutions, and were only available to the public for the duration of their showings, after which they essentially vanished (Abbott et al., 1995). Determined to educate the trustees about film, some staff went as far as forwarding movie tickets and reviews to the skeptics who habitually avoided the theater. Pointing to the existence of libraries and museums, staff argued that making films more available to the public would not devalue them (Watson, 2005). If established, the Film Library’s purpose would be to perform the same recordkeeping and public service for film as the museum did for other artworks, in “exactly the same manner . . . so that the film may be studied and enjoyed as any other one of the arts is studied and enjoyed” (Abbott et al., 1995, p. 326).

Proving film’s artistic worth to MoMA was no short-term project. Ron Magliozzi (personal communication, October 31, 2023) emphasized that for the first several decades after the Film Library’s creation, it was preoccupied with proving film’s worth as an art form, which required a limited scope. Film curator Iris Barry created and personally pursued a list of desiderata of specific films and directors, fulfilling her idea of film as art. In the years during and since, the design of her scope was criticized for the resulting exclusion of materials such as experimental films and home videos. Meanwhile, to demonstrate the library’s value, staff submitted annual reports on the success of their department in communicating with other institutions and contributing to public education: a 1937 Film Library report declared that the department had corresponded or aided 1,520 organizations with a range of services, filling a vital gap in the professional world (Watson, 2005). But as late as 2005, a staff member described the work as “rather remote” from the rest of

the museum, and likened the dynamic to the “slightly ambiguous position of an adopted child who is never seen in the company of the family” (Watson, 2005, p. 121).

WHAT TO COLLECT? FILM AS VALUED BY MUSEUMS

When film enters the collections of a museum, depending on the institution the film shall be conceptualized either as an archival record (primarily arranged and described according to associated creator materials, hierarchies, original order, etc.) or as a museum object (primarily arranged and described as an individual item with inherent and distinct characteristics). Either arrangement has its advantages, depending on the way the museum intends to locate and use film for its research and exhibitions; the choice between archival record and museum object is a typical information institution conflict within museum archives, wherein the museum archive’s records are subject to both archival and museological theory (Fleckner, 1986; Smith, 1995; Wythe, 2004). Therefore, in addition to concepts of historical and administrative value (as are typical of archives), museum film accessions are also considered under such values as experience, rarity, and authenticity, which the following subsections shall discuss (Fink, 2006; Schwartz, 1983).

THE FILM EXPERIENCE

As museums seek to educate their visitors about the objects on display, many of these institutions aspire to use those objects to represent the experience associated with them (Allyn et al., 1987). In this sense, displaying “film” is not just displaying the film strip, but also the experience of watching it, an active system which demonstrates the production and relationship of film and machine. Alexander Horwath (in Cherchi Usai et al., 2020) provides a compelling metaphor of a clock in a museum exhibit: to experience and understand the beauty of a clock, it is not enough that it be shown as a static object – it must also be operational. Film exhibitions must be a “working process” to demonstrate the true experience of film as it is meant to be seen, and film collections in museums will have to preserve that system in order to achieve the effect (Cherchi Usai et al., 2020, p. 93).

Accordingly, museums might acquire films and playback machines as a set, to be displayed in close context with each other. However, this is sometimes contrary to the museum concept of individual independent objects. A final consideration for recreating an ‘experience’ is that museums must take care to contextualize without overbalancing into nostalgia, lest they sacrifice some of their institutional legitimacy by getting into what has been termed “theme park territory” (Cherchi Usai et al., 2020, p. 87).

THE VALUE OF RARITY

A core aspect of the museum object, in its ability to mimic the “experience” of a topic, is that it offers a unique perspective, such that visitors need to attend the museum in order to witness it (Sachatello-Sawyer & Fellenz, 2000). In the case of early twentieth century film, its unique or rare qualities may manifest in projectable nitrate prints, silent films accompanied by live music, and

reconstructions of rediscovered films: these attractions can draw visitors from hundreds of miles away (Kuiper, 1995). Meden (2021) opines on the unique power of film museums to provide especial experiences:

It is, again, the exclusive privilege of film museums – sites of actively curated live film programming beyond any trends and commercial imperatives – to oppose the militant trend of cultural homogenization and retain some traditional local color on (or indeed return such color to) the pale face of world cinephilia (p. 72).

Museums may be able to profit from their archives and libraries of early film, by presenting original prints as original museum objects, and therefore the experience can only be had by attending the museum's presentations. This establishes the economic value of a film's uniqueness: Horwath comments that, for museums in a bourgeois-capitalist society, their status is determined by the quantity of "single, unique, valuable" objects that they have amassed (Cherchi Usai et al., 2020, p. 89).

Museums must also contend with rarity to the point of inaccessibility. How can an institution for public education offer unique, exclusive experiences, without being paradoxical? For films in particular, exclusivity can be an insulting reality when they are generally inherently intended to be a group viewing experience by a mass audience. And when the rarity is prioritized over the film's content itself, it tempts some audiovisual professionals to reject entirely the notion of attaching a monetary value to the collection. But it is the economic reality of the business: museums often find greater support when they can demonstrate the dollar value of their collections, and value estimates are critical for licensing fees and constructing new collection housing (Cherchi Usai et al., 2020; Kuiper, 1995).

THE VALUE OF AUTHENTICITY

A final aspect of a museum object as an "experience" is that it must be authentic or "accurate" in order to be educational (Goulding, 2000; Hampp & Schwan, 2015; Schwan & Dutz 2020). Films of the fiction genre are more difficult to justify as educational; museums have an ill-defined relationship with "fake" content, as many visitors expect only pure truth and fact. As an example, the IWM struggled with the potential of propaganda films: the museum knew these films to be exaggerations and 'inauthentic' (to the reality of history, though still authentic to propaganda itself) but moreover was embarrassed by their attitudes now that a post-war period had begun. Because of this, the museum declined to preserve material such as *The National Film*, a piece of anti-German propaganda which has now been lost to time; historians opine it would have been of significant interest to modern researchers (Cherchi Usai et al., 2020; Smither & Walsh, 2000). The IWM has also struggled with the consequences of a selection policy which preserved only select film sequences and excluded intertitles; a similar issue is the donation of film that is already in pieces, due to an earlier practice of cutting up the film for souvenirs after a showing (Cleveland, 2002; D. Walsh, personal communication, November 14, 2023; Smither & Walsh, 2000). Both causes led to damaging of the materials' authenticity and accuracy, due to its being incomplete and potentially missing important context.

A BRIEF LOOK AT TODAY

Although most non-film museums had a distant and tentative relationship with film for many decades, some argue that the developments in these institutions were (and are) critical for all film archive practice. Mary Lea Bandy (1994) argues that MoMA conducted groundbreaking work in forming methodologies and standards for film cataloging, preservation, and education; even in 1994, MoMA was the only American museum or archive to have a fundamental practice of distributing films. Likewise, the IWM, as one of the earliest collectors of film, was one of the first to encounter many of the fundamental practical problems of storing and preserving film; observation of the film was a particular concern, as the projectors could cause the nitrate film to ignite. Meanwhile, it would take several decades and attempts for safety (acetate) film to become the standard film stock (Cleveland, 2002). Indeed, the danger was perceived to be severe enough that the government had earlier hesitated to archive the films (Bottomore, 2002a). The nitrate film situation was so uncertain that the IWM reached out to the filmstock manufacturers directly, to establish some of the first institutional film preservation standards. Some of the suggestions received (storage in a moist environment) were less useful than others (precautions for film brittleness/shrinkage, and an awareness of inevitable deterioration over time). “It is both salutary and amusing,” reflect Roger Smither and David Walsh (2000), “to note how many of the issues important to film archivists in the second century of cinema had been explored in these fifteen years [1919-1934], before the concept of the film archive had any currency” (p. 201). (For further context on early twentieth century experimental film preservation and the fates met by much early film, consult Bottomore, 2002a, 2002b).

Today, the mission of MoMA’s Film Library is self-described by one of its curators as “to champion films and filmmakers,” particularly those that have been lost to time or to society, so that disparate audiences can experience them: the results of nearly a century of collection and conservation work (Dixon, 2015, p. 506). Although museum film collecting has been conducted for such a length of time, the work has no natural end. This work has continued and must continue for as long as museums recognize and pursue film’s value as an innovative artform, as a complex technology, as a historical record, and as a captured frame of popular culture.

Many other museums have joined in on the effort: highlights include the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (est. 1963), which was envisioned as a Pacific Rim film archive under an arts museum, the idea partly inspired by founder Sheldon Renan’s interactions with MoMA staff. Today it is renowned for its collection of over 18,000 classic, avant-garde, and international films, including some of the largest collections of Japanese and Soviet cinema (Amazonas, 2004; Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive [BAMPFA], 2015; Staff of the Pacific Film Archive, 1996). Another notable institution is the Smithsonian’s Human Studies Film Archive (est. 1981), which is the culmination of anthropologists arguing for the unmatched documentary value of film to address “the real educational problem ... a genuine goal for a scientific discipline—to teach man how to see and understand the structures of human behavior in their visible manifestations.” the Human Studies Film Archive currently stores more than 8 million feet of film from some of North America’s most notable anthropologists and filmmakers, contributing to scientific and cultural study as part of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History (Homiak, 2004, 2013; Lomax, 1971, p. 11; Sorenson, 1975). A final example is the Japanese American National Museum (est. 1992), which works with the Academy Film Archive to collect and care for over 250 home movies documenting the Japanese American

experience in the 1920s-1960s, providing primary sources on cultural celebrations, work, and leisure, as well as footage of WWII-era internment camps (Hiramatsu Morishima, 2015; Japanese American National Museum Collection, 2014). Each of these institutions contributes to the preservation and popularization of film as an important type of museum object, which any museum may invest in to support its specific mandate and the public education of its topic.

With the shift and evolution in format of audiovisual materials in the last century, the understanding of the “moving image” category has broadened and the scope of “film” collecting has likewise expanded to address other mediums such as magnetic tape and digital media, each of which requires their own specialized care (Mkadmi, 2021; Van Bogart, 1995). Some point to born-digital media as a game-changer for accession work, as the easy access to creating moving images and the resulting sheer quantity of them will necessitate significant changes to the definition of film and prioritization of certain moving images over others for acquisition (D. Walsh, personal communication, November 14, 2023). Meanwhile, new audiovisual formats emerge, and museum staff may have to reckon with an entirely new genre of content. The same arguments made for the systematic collecting of film may have to be made for video games, virtual reality, and the myriad other uncategorized digital creations of the modern age that defy standard concepts of art, science, or history, but which nevertheless represent their latest instances (Eklund et al., 2019; Guay-Bélanger, 2022; Olgado et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION

In this examination of museum library and archive history, we have delved into the ways in which the values of museums were tied intrinsically to the establishment of these museum film libraries and archives. Each of these film collections was founded (and funded) through appeals to central concepts of museum philosophy. The strategies of collecting and networking in these pioneering film libraries and archives were shaped by the values of their museums; values that were shared (public education, preservation, and rarity), and values that were special to their particular institution (history, science and technology, and art). We demonstrated that in successfully conforming the concept of film to the interests of museums, the actions taken at these institutions directly contributed to the founding practices of film libraries and archives, reformations in the perception and use of film and film studies, critical early work in the preservation of film material, and the creation of vast libraries and archives of film which would otherwise have been lost to time.

Those museum staff members aiming to argue for a film library or archive at their own institution may take inspiration from these historical cases. To briefly highlight potential takeaways from the origins of the Film Library at the Museum of Modern Art: struggling against conservative institutional attitudes on what could be considered art, these staff demonstrated the place of film within their museum’s mandate of collecting and preserving artistic works for the public good. Their arguments included the use of film as critical educational material in schools, as valuable American storytelling history, as a vanishing medium, and as a genuine artform, with its own “greats,” techniques, and themes worthy of study. Similarly, today’s museum staff may consider how film critically contributes to the interests of their institution and the public. What can film contribute to the museum, and the field the museum lies in? What does the museum stand to lose, if it does not collect film? How can that be advocated to stakeholders?

What is the place of a film archive or library in a museum? In reviewing this history, we have followed the arguments made by film staff to find that place, by defining film's unparalleled worth as a resource: there is no sculptural substitute for the films of Douglas Fairbanks, no paper proxy for a recording of the World War I trenches. It is also evident that an additional core value of a museum film library/archive is to provide the museum with a new perspective and unique depiction of its own mandate, despite and because of the unusual nature of the medium. A film library/archive in a museum challenges the scope, priorities, and interests of the museum, and obliges these to be defined and then engaged with, in a continual determination of what counts as history, art, or science. These conversations represent the history of museums as well as of their film collections, and in that way, a film archive is truly an archive of its museum.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Additional insight provided from interviews and correspondence with generous staff and former staff of these museums: Ron Magliozzi (Curator, Department of Film, Museum of Modern Art), David Walsh (former Digital Preservation and Film Consultant, and Head of Preservation, Film Archive, Imperial War Museum), Roger Smither (former Keeper of the Film and Video Archive, Imperial War Museum), Jane Fish (Senior Curator – Film, Imperial War Museum), and Toni Booth (Curator of Film, National Science and Media Museum).

References

- Abbott, J. E., Barry, I., Barr, A. H., & Mabry, T. D. (1995). An Outline of a Project for Founding the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art. *Film History*, 7(3), 325–335.
- Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. (2014, December 22). *Japanese American National Museum Collection*. <https://www.oscars.org/film-archive/collections/japanese-american-national-museum-collection-0>
- Alfaro, K. (2012). *Moving Cinema: Experimental Distribution and the Development of Anthology Film Archives* [Masters, Concordia University]. <https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/id/eprint/974690/>
- Allyn, N., Aubitz, S., & Stern, G. (1987). Using Archival Materials Effectively in Museum Exhibitions. *The American Archivist*, 50(3), 402–404. <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.50.3.g5203123461g2208>
- Amazonas, L. (2004). Pacific Film Archive. *Chronicle of the University of California*, 147–159.
- Ames, M. M. (1992). *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums*. UBC Press.
- Bandy, M. L. (1994). The movies at MOMA: The first cinema museum in the United States. *Museum International*, 46(4), 26–31. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0033.1994.tb01203.x>
- Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. (2015, February 23). *Mission and History*. Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. <https://bampfa.org/about/history-mission>

- Bottomore, S. (2002a). "A Fallen Star"—Problems and Practices in Early Film Preservation. In R. Smither & C. A. Surowiec (Eds.), *This Film is Dangerous: A Celebration of Nitrate Film* (pp. 185–190). Fédération Internationale des Archives du Film (FIAF).
- Bottomore, S. (2002b). "The sparkling surface of the sea of history"—Notes on the Origins of Film Preservation. In R. Smither & C. A. Surowiec (Eds.), *This Film is Dangerous: A Celebration of Nitrate Film* (pp. 86–97). Fédération Internationale des Archives du Film (FIAF).
- Catapano, P. (1994). Creating "Reel" Value: The Establishment of MOMA's Film Library, 1935–37. *Film and History*, 24(3), 28–46.
- Cere, R. (2020). *An International Study of Film Museums*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003134206>
- Cherchi Usai, P., Francis, D., Horwath, A., & Loebenstein, M. (2020). *Film curatorship: Archives, museums, and the digital marketplace* (2nd edition). SYNEMA Gesellschaft für Film und Medien.
- Christie, I. (2012). A Disturbing Presence? Scenes from the History of Film in the Museum. In A. D. Vacche (Ed.), *Film, Art, New Media: Museum Without Walls?* Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cleveland, D. (2002). Don't Try This at Home: Some Thoughts on Nitrate Film, with Particular Reference to Home Movie Systems. In R. Smither & C. A. Surowiec (Eds.), *This Film is Dangerous: A Celebration of Nitrate Film* (pp. 191–197). Fédération Internationale des Archives du Film (FIAF).
- Clover, D. E., & Bell, L. (2013). Contemporary Adult Education Philosophies and Practices in Art Galleries and Museums in Canada and the UK. *Adult Learner: The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education*. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1016078>
- Dixon, W. W. (2015). "You Can Never Do Enough"—An Interview with Joshua Siegel, Curator of Film, Museum of Modern Art. *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 32(6), 503–510. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509208.2015.1049108>
- Eklund, L., Sjöblom, B., & Prax, P. (2019). Lost in Translation: Video Games Becoming Cultural Heritage? *Cultural Sociology*, 13(4), 444–460. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975519852501>
- Fink, L. M. (2006). Museum Archives As Resources for Scholarly Research and Institutional Identity. In J. Marstine (Ed.), *New Museum Theory and Practice* (pp. 292–307). Blackwell Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470776230>
- Fleckner, J. A. (1986). An Archivist Speaks to the Museum Profession. *Museum News*, 17–25.
- Goulding, C. (2000). The commodification of the past, postmodern pastiche, and the search for authentic experiences at contemporary heritage attractions. *European Journal of Marketing*, 34(7), 835–853. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560010331298>
- Guay-Bélanger, D. (2022). Assembling Auras: Towards a Methodology for the Preservation and Study of Video Games as Cultural Heritage Artefacts. *Games and Culture*, 17(5), 659–678. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120211020381>

- Hampp, C., & Schwan, S. (2015). The Role of Authentic Objects in Museums of the History of Science and Technology: Findings from a visitor study. *International Journal of Science Education, Part B*, 5(2), 161–181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21548455.2013.875238>
- Harvey, M. (1998). The Cinematography Collection of the National Museum of Photography, Film & Television. In J. Fullerton (Ed.), *Celebrating 1895: The centenary of cinema* (pp. 3–12). John Libbey & Company. <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy1401/99179461-d.html>
- Hiramatsu Morishima, E. (2015). Japanese American National Museum. In H. Ling & A. W. Austin (Eds.), *Asian American History and Culture: An Encyclopedia: An Encyclopedia*. Routledge.
- Homiak, J. P. (2004). Timothy Asch, the rise of visual anthropology, and the Human Studies Film Archives. In E. D. Lewis (Ed.), *Timothy Asch and Ethnographic Film* (pp. 185–204). Routledge.
- Homiak, J. (2013, January 27). *History of the Human Studies Film Archives*. https://web.archive.org/web/20130127234352/http://www.nmnh.si.edu/naa/guide/film_history.htm
- Imperial War Museum Film and Video Archive Handbook – A User’s Guide*. (1997). Provided by Jane Fish, Senior Curator – Film, Imperial War Museum.
- Kuiper, J. (1985). Film as a Museum Object. *Cinema Journal*, 24(4), 39–42. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1224896>
- Latsis, D. (2016). The Beginnings of Cinema as a Museum Exhibit: The Cases of the Smithsonian Institution and the Science Museum in London. *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists*, 16(1), 17–34. <https://doi.org/10.5749/movingimage.16.1.0017>
- Lomax, A. (1971). Toward An Ethnographic Film Archive. *Filmmakers Newsletter*.
- McIsaac, P. M., & Mueller, G. (Eds.). (2015). *EXHIBITING THE GERMAN PAST: Museums, Film, and Musealization*. University of Toronto Press.
- Meden, J. (2021). *Scratches and glitches: Observations on preserving and exhibiting cinema in the early 21st century*. Synema Gesellschaft für Film und Medien.
- Mkadmi, A. (2021). *Archives in the Digital Age: Preservation and the Right to be Forgotten*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Olgado, B. S. (2019). Save Point/s: Competing Values and Practices in the Field of Video Game Preservation. In N. G. Taylor, C. Christian-Lamb, M. H. Martin, & B. Nardi (Eds.), *Information in Contemporary Society* (pp. 411–418). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-15742-5_39
- Protas, N. (2019). Where Does the History of Museum Education Begin? *Journal of Museum Education*, 44(4), 337–341. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10598650.2019.1677020>
- Robinson, D. (2006). Film Museums I Have Known and (Sometimes) Loved. *Film History*, 18(3), 237–260.

- Sachatello-Sawyer, B., & Fellenz, R. (2000). Coming of Age: A National Study of Adult Museum Programs. *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 43(2), 147–156. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2151-6952.2000.tb00010.x>
- Schildkrout, E. (1991). Ambiguous Messages and Ironic Twists: Into the Heart of Africa and The Other Museum. *Museum Anthropology*, 15(2). http://ftp.columbia.edu/itc/anthropology/schildkrout/6353/client_edit/week11/schildkrout.pdf
- Schwan, S., & Dutz, S. (2020). How do Visitors Perceive the Role of Authentic Objects in Museums? *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 63(2), 217–237. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cura.12365>
- Schwartz, C. (Ed.). (1983). Keeping Our House in Order: The Importance of Museum Records. *Museum News*, 61(4), 38–48.
- Smith, B. (1995). Archives in Museums. *Archives and Manuscripts*, 23(1), 38–47.
- Smither, R., & Walsh, D. (2000). Unknown Pioneer: Edward Foxen Cooper and the Imperial War Museum Film Archive, 1919-1934. *Film History*, 12(2), 187–203.
- Sorenson, E. R. (1975). To Further Phenomenological Inquiry: The National Anthropological Film Center. *Current Anthropology*, 16(2), 267–269.
- Staff of the Pacific Film Archive. (1996). The Pacific Film Archive. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 16(1), 39–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01439689600260071>
- Vacche, A. D. (Ed.). (2012). *Film, Art, New Media: Museum Without Walls?* In *Film, Art, New Media: Museum Without Walls?* Palgrave Macmillan.
- Van Bogart, J. W. C. (1995). *Magnetic Tape Storage and Handling: A Guide for Libraries and Archives*. Commission on Preservation and Access, 1400 16th St. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED384356>
- Wasson, H. (2018). “Some Kind of Racket”: The Museum of Modern Art’s Film Library, Hollywood and the Problem of Film Art, 1935. *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, 9(1), 5-29. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cjfs.9.1.5>
- Watson, H. (2005). *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema*. University of California Press.
- Wythe, D. (Ed.). (2004). *Museum Archives: An Introduction* (2nd ed.). Society of American Archivists.

About the author

Peyton Moriarty is a Library & Archives Assistant at the Museum of Anthropology at UBC. She has worked for and with the Smithsonian's National Anthropological Archives, the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, and the American Museum of Natural History, with a focus on museology, institutional records, cultural resources, and public history.