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Finding film resources: Challenges of formats, policies and intranets

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Abstract

As interdisciplinary cultural studies programs become increasingly prevalent in North America, many humanities-trained scholars find themselves drawn to study film from a similar perspective. Finding source materials such as copies of canon films and appropriate scholarly resources is complicated by library lending policies that do not extend to media items, or foreign films with formats different from those collected by one's institution. This article examines such problematic issues for patrons looking for films and includes personal experiences at several research institutions in both Los Angeles and Paris, with advice and insight for the potential researcher writing about film for academic purposes.

Introduction

In an effort to make their programs more attractive to undergraduates on a globalized campus, language and literature departments are increasingly turning to area and cultural studies approaches. The Internet enhances the classroom experience with audio and video clips of media sources such as music, both contemporary and vintage, as well as broadcast news and advertising previously unavailable without waiting for special, and often expensive, video releases from educational media companies. Advances in technology, including DVDs and DVD players, have made the integration of popular culture into language and literature classes more affordable, and have opened the door to a new canon of texts for scholars previously limited by the publishing conventions of language and literature. Film studies, in the context of area and cultural studies, offer a new avenue for the classical humanities perspective, particularly welcome to scholars trying to find something new to say in a crowded publishing field. Finding appropriate resources to support this new direction, starting with a copy of the film itself, can be challenging even to a seasoned library user.

Film studies offer an interdisciplinary approach that can complement almost any area of study, particularly in the humanities. While the production elements of film are frequently considered, more often than not the same theories of literary studies are applied to the study of a film title, including psychoanalysis, gender theory, anthropology, semiotics and linguistics. The film is considered a text or cultural touchstone, in the same vein as a novel, poem, or song. In terms of research, a scholarly article on a film title may focus on the representation of gender roles in the works of a particular actor or director, or on filmmaking techniques such as the use of a certain camera lens. Lighting, camera work, and sound, can be as significant as the actual narrative of the film. The field is rich for publication from many perspectives, but finding needed resources to study these films is not so obvious, as literary resources and library policies do not necessarily accommodate this new field of study. The primary text, being the film itself, is subject to available formats that differ from country to country. Archival materials, like those for literary studies, can be difficult to locate. Secondary materials, such as filmmaker interviews and film reviews, are subject to indexing in databases. The researcher may have

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to combine high culture and low culture sources (a variation on the sacred and the profane) to flesh out an academic study. Though academic libraries have become increasingly user-friendly with open stacks, soft furniture, and laptop checkout, the policies for media access have not evolved in all libraries, thus making film research especially challenging.

Literature review

Library literature has primarily focused on the management of a film collection and the policies that dictate a collection's use, but until recently, there has been little consideration of patron needs and whether they are being met.

Brancolini and Teach (1994) address the issue of maintaining a film collection in the age just before the DVD revolution. Their focus is on 'film video', but raises excellent points on issues in technical services, public services, facilities management, and budgeting. They correctly maintain that "liking movies" is "not adequate preparation for the position of media librarian." The media curator needs to have an understanding of how audiovisual materials are being used at the institution, often for both recreational and academic purposes. Carr (2002) examines the "precarious situation in which the library's role as a facility of education and research becomes entangled with commercial interests and sensibilities" as the academic library juggles requests for popular titles with collection development policies to support curriculum and instruction. He cites a lack of professional standards in this type of collecting, and acknowledges challenges in the field such as "preserving videos and DVDs, budgeting, determining the best format in which to acquire films, complying with copyright laws, and combating pressures to censor materials." He also raises the question frequently posed anecdotally: if films are readily available from the few remaining local video stores, and online subscription agents such as Netflix, does the academic library need to actively collect them? Handman (2010) considers streaming options and video-on-demand (VOD) in terms of academic licensing. There is hope that streaming media formats will help to solve issues of shelf space, and the loss-theft-damage of physical items, but the licensing for potentially thousands of simultaneous users remains problematic, and indicates that this issue will not be solved in the near future.

Low's philosophical article (2002) applies the phenomenologist theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty to address what he calls the "moral conflict of the film librarian," who must "maintain a balance of *perspectives*, especially a balance of the theoretical, political, aesthetic, high culture with pop culture, etc." with the goals (and policies) of the institution, and suggests deferring to "the national film archives to select and collect high quality material." In many academic libraries, however, it is the curriculum and research of the home faculty that drive many collection decisions, and not because items are on a national list of "must have" titles.

Using data collected from regional and listserv surveys, Bergman (2010) discusses trends in policies and procedures regarding video collections in academic libraries. She cites the "historical model," where collections were built based on faculty requests, student access was limited, and stacks were closed. Though the circulation model for print resources has moved toward one of open stacks and accessibility, in many libraries the video collection remains a "limited access special collection" where interlibrary loan (ILL) is not considered, though ALA's *Guidelines for media resources in academic libraries* (2006) encourages resource sharing, including media items. Bergman suggests reevaluating media collections policies and cites survey data from Albitz and Bolger (2000), who comment that "despite a long history of sharing resources to advance scholarship and teaching, many libraries have yet to fully embrace the idea that information is information, whatever form it takes." This prevailing attitude can be especially frustrating for researchers of foreign films that are not archival materials, yet not readily available in all markets.

Marcia Jean Pankake considers how film is being used for academic purposes (1993), and includes findings from a special program at ALA Annual in 1992, sponsored by the Western European Studies Section (WESS) of ACRL. She asks several key questions, "As librarians . . . what do we mostly bookish people have to do with film? What are teachers, scholars, and students doing with film today? How can we better support the study and teaching of film?" Almost 20 years later, many of these same issues are still relevant, as technologies continue to develop and patron expectations change. By including papers from the program – Steve Hanson on effect of American movies on film production in Europe; Anne Schlosser on resources that support the production and study of film; James Winchell on French film and gender, and Nancy Goldman on the organization and management of film libraries and archives – Pankake illustrates the diversity of the film medium for a variety of scholarly interests within academia. While none of these essays specifically outlines the difficulties in procuring copies of films for more than just entertainment purposes, it is highly likely that unless the patron lives in a

major metropolitan area with multiple resources, he or she has encountered difficulty in finding copies of films with limited theatrical release and/or distribution. This is especially problematic for those who analyze independent, foreign, or "art" films in the areas "between the coasts" where limited releases do not screen at the local multiplex. Film scholars look to find copies of the films reviewed in the *New Yorker* or the *New York Times*, whether restored prints of classic films or newly released "future" classics, and expect the libraries of their academic institutions to help them locate these copies.

Looking for films and resources

American academic libraries in the 21st century are committed to serving the patron's needs in the most expeditious way possible through the acquisition and management of both print and electronic resources. If the item is not in the collection of the patron's home institution, the interlibrary loan department finds a peer institution that owns, and hopefully will lend, the needed materials. When researching a film, however, the situation becomes complicated, as few institutions circulate their media collections to their own patrons, much less allow for interlibrary loan. Though VHS and DVDs are certainly easier to circulate than vintage 16mm prints, they are still fragile, are prone to theft, and can go out of print. Patrons requesting films from other continents, with foreign formats that may not be compatible with local players, add an extra wrinkle to an already difficult search. According to the *OCLC Policies Directory*, there are 3768 active OCLC libraries with an "academic" classification in the United States. Of these, 36 percent (1340) "auto deflect" media titles, meaning they do not even consider the loan requests. In a regional survey conducted by Albitz and Bolger (2000), more than half (67 percent) of respondents were willing to request video titles for their patrons, less than half were willing to lend their holdings, and many had additional restrictions based on patron status. For example, a library may lend a title, but will require that the patron watch it in the ILL department, which may not be equipped with a viewing station. Those who do not lend video titles, according to Albitz and Bolger's survey, cite compelling reasons: tapes and discs are more fragile than books and can be damaged in transit or by an inattentive patron, the high cost of "educational" titles (as opposed to popular titles) makes it difficult to replace a lost or damaged item, as the items go out of print easily. But these concerns can also be applied to print titles: they can be damaged, and they can go out of print. If the item cannot be purchased, either because it is out of print or does not fit the collection development policy of the home institution, and cannot be loaned, the researcher must consider going to the source, in this case, the holding library, if research funds allow. Researchers should be prepared for policies to be different from those at their home institutions. With only 330 periodicals indexed, databases such as the *Film and Television Literature Index* can be hard to justify for institutions without film and television production departments. The Modern Language Association's international bibliography, a more standard database in many academic libraries, includes some film criticism, but does not completely overlap the coverage of *Film and Television Literature Index*. Patrons searching for particular film-related resources may be tempted to head to the holding library, perhaps between semesters or during their research travel, but they should be reminded that holdings and policies at other institutions can be varied, all affecting the research experience.

Film research experiences in Los Angeles

If studying the American film industry, it would make sense to go to the heart of the American film industry: Los Angeles, California. But knowing where to go in Los Angeles is not necessarily obvious, and the city offers multiple and varied resources, each with its own policies. Known worldwide for its annual Oscar awards, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences offers extensive resources for the study of film, including the Margaret Herrick Library (MHL) and the Academy Archive. The MHL, beautifully landscaped and easily visible on La Cienega Boulevard in Beverly Hills, is intended for frequent visitors. A reading room is located upstairs, accessible after signing in with a security guard for a day pass, and leaving most of one's belongings in the locker area. Though it is a library, the rules are more like that of an archive: patrons may not make their own photocopies, and notebooks with pockets are not permitted. It is easy to underestimate what is available on site, since the online catalog does not include everything in the inhouse database. If studying American film, the MHL is an exceptional facility, but there is not a space for screening the films themselves. The MHL, as documented both by W.L. Reuter (1993) and Linda Mehr (2007), has reference works and a photo database, production files, biography files, and general subject files, but its most notable asset is the screenplay archive. Scholars who want to see how a screenplay might have changed during production will want to consult this collection. Since it is

essentially a collection of unpublished manuscripts, however, photocopying is not permitted.

The Academy Archive, on the other hand, is not intended to accommodate large numbers of researchers at once. With minimal signage, it looks like any other office building on a side street in Hollywood. It is a great resource for someone writing about the preservation of film, or for someone looking for an otherwise unavailable copy of a film nominated for an Academy Award in any given year. The offices of the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) are located here, and there are occasional programs for the public. Films must be requested in advance, and in some cases, a screening copy must be made to accommodate a visit. Interested patrons must work from a list of Academy Award nominees on sites such as Oscars.org, since the archive does not have its own publicly-searchable database. Films must be watched onsite, but the space is a classroom with a large television, and is not designed for multiple visitors. The catalog is essentially a list of award winners, but they are also collecting in other areas, such as home movies and documentaries. The most impressive feature at the Academy Archive is not even visible to the average visitor: the cold storage warehouse, which houses thousands of reels of film at 40 degrees Fahrenheit to preserve it from further deterioration. Visiting patrons would be given viewing copies only.

Located on a small campus in the Hollywood Hills, the American Film Institute (AFI) is best known for its annual 100-lists, such as '100 Heroes and Villains,' for its workshops for up and coming filmmakers, and for their prestigious film festival in the fall. The collection of the Louis B. Mayer Library of the AFI exists to meet the needs of filmmakers, rather than film scholars. The Mayer Library answers questions about technical matters, and holds transcripts of AFI seminars and oral histories. A non-AFI fellow would not know of the existence of such seminars, much less these transcripts. The library has a small collection, but does not have an area for screening films, as those are in the AFI itself. According to the library's staff, the most common question they receive is, "I was in an episode of [title] in [year]; can you help me find a copy of it?" Like the MHL, the Mayer Library has a script archive, though it is less comprehensive. If researching a particular filmmaker, like Martin Scorsese, Fritz Lang, or Sergei Eisenstein, the AFI's archives are a great resource. But the AFI's library collection is not intended for extended use by non-fellows, and the library's holdings are not available to the public to search.

The University of Southern California (USC), in the heart of Los Angeles, is known for its School of Cinematic Arts, with notable alumni ranging from George Lucas and Robert Zemeckis to Judd Apatow and Jason Reitman. USC's Cinematic Arts Library is a departmental library with open stacks on the basement floor of the Doheny Memorial Library. The service desk is for the Louis B. Mayer Film and Television Study Center, a collection with limited circulation, and the David L. Wolper Center for the Study of the Documentary, an archival collection. There are two terminals with catalog access, including the database *Film and Television Literature Index*. Otherwise, patrons must rely on wireless Internet access. The A/V screening area is in sight of the circulation desk, which maintains the collection behind the desk. Films may be checked out by faculty for classroom screenings or placed on reserve, but may not be checked out by students, and therefore not loaned to other institutions.

On the Westwood campus of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), the film collection is an archive, much like the Academy's archive. In terms of size, it is second in the United States to the Library of Congress, and much of its collection is stored offsite. The staff is small, and shares a service desk with another department. Items must be requested in advance, and are placed in the A/V department upstairs. Patrons are directed to an individualized workstation which corresponds with a grid at the front desk; only library employees are allowed touch the items. Behind the front desk are decks in various formats, such as VHS, Beta, DVD, Laser Disc, but the researcher's individual station only has access to the buttons for play, stop, rewind, and fast-forward, some of which have rubbed off from repetitive use. The UCLA collection includes extensive television and newsreel archives, including television commercials, in addition to film collections from organizations and high profile individuals in the film and television industry. Materials are not loaned to other libraries, nor are they allowed to leave the building, or department. Advanced notice is required in order to bring materials from offsite storage.

Film research experiences in Paris

If studying European films, it makes sense to go to Europe, and if studying French film, one would logically go to Paris. But European libraries can be rather different from their American counterparts. Like in many European countries, access to scholarly research in France is a more formalized process. A researcher must be prepared to present himself to library staff with appropriate credentials before having access to the collections. Scholars will need documentation of their position as a scholar, in addition

to documentation to explain what resources are needed for the project at hand. The researcher will also need to justify why this particular institution, as opposed to somewhere else, is the best place to conduct the project. The process can be intimidating, especially since French librarians have been known (to me) to point out the flaws in a research project to the user, but should not be daunting. The concept of "user friendly" services is more American than European; in Europe, the integrity of the collection is more important than sparing the researcher's (my) feelings.

The Bibliothèque du Film (BiFi), just by nature of its name, is a logical place to start. Located on the upper floors of the Cinémathèque de France in the 12th *arrondissement*, it is the "foremost European library devoted exclusively to documenting world cinema from its origins to present day" (Rossignol 2009). Patrons must present themselves at the *acceuil* and, after a brief interview and webcam photo, a library identification card is issued. Items must be left in a locker (*vestiaire*), and no bags are permitted in the library past the security gate. Any variety of pens, laptops, and notebooks are allowed, but no bag to put them in. Print materials, including bound journal volumes, are available for consultation, but there are no online versions of any seminal journal titles, including *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Though there is wireless access, there are fewer than five public stations with access to the BiFi's intranet. The intranet includes press dossiers in TIFF format, but these files cannot be saved to a disk storage device, and are not searchable by keyword. They are associated with film titles, and with the names of actors and directors, but not cross referenced. They can be printed at a cost of EUR 0,30 (about US$ 0.40) per page, but those copies are watermarked as a reproduction. To watch a film, the BiFi ID card must be presented with a second form of ID in order to watch the film on site, right in front of the desk. The reading room is an attractive space, but is less than comfortable for extended sessions. The Internet is only available wirelessly, making any simultaneous research using sources such as the *Internet Movie Database* (http://www.imdb.com) difficult to impossible, even while consulting the electronic press dossiers. The archival collections, however, are impressive: an extensive photograph collection, production archives, distribution archives, and collections of correspondence.

The Bibliothèque Nationale de France François Mitterand (BNF) site on the Rue de Tolbiac in the 14th *arrondissement*, which opened in 1997, has a media room (*Salle Médiathèque*) located in Salle P downstairs. Nicknamed the "TGB" for "très grande bibliothèque" (very large library, a play on words for the high speed train TGV, *train à grande vitesse*), researching at the BNF-Tolbiac is exceedingly imposing, and finding Salle P requires going through a set of massive doors, a turnstile, and down a long escalator. Also located in Salle P is the Institut national de l'audiovisuel (INA, or Inathèque), which archives television and radio recordings, but despite sharing a service desk, use of each collection requires a separate appointment. Like all of the collections at the BNF, anyone researching film in Salle P will need to consult with representatives of both the INA and the BNF itself. The BNF accreditation process can be especially intimidating as, like at the BiFi, an interview is required for each section of the library that a patron will be using, represented by a different staff member, even when these sections are in the same room.

A patron must make an advance appointment to use the BNF's media collection so that the requested materials can be uploaded to the assigned workstation. It is the same concept as the UCLA collection, except that here the formats are loaded onto a computer. This is especially useful for watching "DVD extras" that might be unique to the European release of a film. The BNF's Gallica catalog interface is searchable in Salle P, but Internet access is only available via wireless connection.

The television and radio recordings offered by the Inathèque are invaluable for anyone looking for filmmaker interviews to supplement the film reviews and interviews found in newspapers and magazines. The Inathèque was examined by both Amblard and Amit in a special issue (2002) of *Bulletin des bibliothèques de France*. The database onsite is much more extensive than what is online, and it requires training from staff before using, as it uses a Mac-based platform only. Patrons use the database and interpret its color-coding to request items to be pulled from the closed stacks that have not already been digitized. Extra training may be necessary depending on the format of the items. This can be frustrating for a user; in my case, the INA had more material than I could have imagined on the director I was researching. Had I been able to know this in advance, from looking at their online catalog, I would have rescheduled my research visit, spending more time in Salle P than at the BiFi.

The archives of the Centre National du Cinéma et de l'image animée (formerly the Centre National de Cinématographie) also have an office in Salle P but they are separate from the BNF/INA service desk. Much of the CNC's archive is housed off site, but their intranet collection is searchable in Salle P only. Therefore a patron must come into the library to see if something relevant to his/her research exists, but then

come back on another day after the item has been retrieved, if it is not available electronically. Like many other libraries with intranets, they have not migrated their records to a publicly-searchable accessible database. Depending on the initial software used for an institution's intranet, proprietary issues may complicate the transfer of data from what is essentially an accession list to something more universal, like an online catalog. Funding and manpower issues frequently limit the upgrade of information to a public setting, much to the frustration of traveling researchers who make plans and write grants based on what they can see from their home institutions.

Comparison

The libraries visited have several things in common despite the differences in their collections. None is set up to accommodate a user wanting to stay for more than a leisurely search, which can be considered problematic when consulting collections that cannot be loaned out. At the BiFi in Paris, the post-modern aluminum chairs are not designed for long-term ergonomic seating, yet are used in both the reading room and at the viewing stations. At UCLA, the viewing stations do not come with much desk space for writing or using a laptop. The Academy archive is not equipped for scholarly visits, yet the Herrick Library does not have viewing stations at all. Closer to an ideal workstation is at the Cinerobothèque in Montreal, with a second location in Toronto, where the holdings are limited to productions of the National Film Board of Canada. The Cinerobothèque offers 21 viewing stations, each featuring a variation of a dentist's chair, with speakers surrounding the headpiece, and a touchscreen monitor within reach. Their collection includes over 10,000 Canadian films. Also common to several institutions – the Inathèque and the CNC in Paris, and both UCLA and the Herrick Library in Los Angeles – is that there is more in the collection than is searchable in the library's online catalog, primarily due to the use of intranets which cannot be shared outside of their local networks. For the traveling researcher, the absence of accurate data can lead to poor planning, especially disappointing when not enough time has been allocated on the itinerary for a particular institution. Ultimately, I was grateful to find any crumbs of information in each of the libraries I consulted, which was more than I had been able to find from my home institution.

Conclusion

Locating a useable copy of a specific title will always be the biggest challenge for patrons studying film for academic purposes. Unlike digital or and photocopies that can be made for books and journals, format and copyright issues prevent making digital copies of video content, and holding library policy may prohibit interlibrary lending because formats can be fragile and often go out of print. Until all films are available as streaming media, and even that may be problematic, it may be necessary for a patron to consider visiting other libraries when his/her home institution cannot acquire a copy of the film itself. Foreign films present particular challenges because not all films released in other countries are released in the United States in a compatible format. Using French film as an example, though comedy films are typically more successful at the box office in France than dramas, few French comedies are released in the United States on Region 1 DVD. Finding popular press for film can also be challenging, as it is not indexed by most databases, except for major newspapers found in LexisNexis. Attempting to contact a librarian off site may or may not be effective, as it may be difficult to determine who does what just from an institutional website, but a local employee might be able to tell the patron if there is more to be found onsite, for example, in an intranet, than what is in the online catalog. My own research trips in both Los Angeles libraries and in Paris would have been scheduled differently had I been able to access the institution's intranet catalog in advance of my visit, as the library holdings of several institutions were greater than I had anticipated. Maintaining a library's film collection requires more than just selecting titles and replacing damaged copies. When making library policies, it is necessary to consider how the collection will be used, not only at the local level, but by the cooperative community.

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