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Hollywood By-Pass: MoMA, The Rockefeller Foundation, and New Circuits of Cinema

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Rockefeller Archive Center, Workshop on Philanthropies and Culture
August 2004

In 1935 the fledgling Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, announced formation of the Film Library, a department tasked with saving and exhibiting films that had been lost to public view. At this point in American history, the life cycle of a typical film was extremely brief; the bulk of commercial features disappeared quickly from movie screens, never to appear again. Viewing art films and what we today call movie classics was still a highly unusual activity, confined to major urban centers and only a handful of theaters. As such, there was widespread uncertainty about the pairing of such a popular and spectacular amusement with the comparatively elite and sacral space of the museum, striking many as novel and, at times, odd. Why see old films? What was a film museum? What did the ephemeral and entertaining value of film have to do with enduring and edifying proclamations of art?

To be sure, museum art was dramatically different from mainstreet movies; there was clear dissonance between their content, modes of display and manners of looking. Marbled sculptures of gun-toting villains or oil portraits of gravity-defying heroines were — by all official art histories — nonexistent. Paintings were not customarily viewed in darkened theaters by captive, seated audiences. Movies were not accompanied by docent

lectures, dates of origin, or didactic placards. The worlds of movies and museums were notably different and mutually incompatible. Early film screenings at MoMA confirm the peculiarity of this cultural collision. Visitors to the museum's auditorium regularly demonstrated uncertainty about very basic things: how to behave when watching movies in an art museum? MoMA's filmgoers enacted precious little of the dignified and controlled behavior so eagerly sought by museum administrators and film programmers. They talked loudly during screenings. They argued aggressively over seats. They laughed at tragic heroes and weeping women, cackling with abandon at the sight of violent deaths. They arrived to films late and left early, bumping into fellow appreciators, disrupting narrative flow and other forms of attentive engagement. Lacking established norms for watching museum movies, audience members were occasionally participant in saloon-style conflicts. Reaching Hollywood proportions, film viewers engaged in shouting matches, punctuated occasionally by projectile objects. Such bad behavior occurred frequently enough that the library's first curator, Iris Barry, had a slide projector permanently installed in the museum's auditorium, equipped with a slide that read: "If the disturbance in the auditorium does not cease, the showing of this film will be discontinued." If after stopping the film and showing the slide the audience still did not compose itself, the house lights would come up and the show would be declared over. Charles Turner, a regular member of MoMA's early audiences recalls that sometimes Barry's rebuke would come only ten minutes into the picture. To further ensure decorum, and to bolster her own disciplinary capacities, Barry reserved herself a permanent seat in the auditorium, alongside a phone connecting her instantly to the projectionist. She was a common fixture in the theatre, regularly monitoring both image quality and audience

comportment.¹ Taking films seriously at MoMA was neither simple nor obvious, even to otherwise properly civilized museum-goers. It required imposing persistent institutional discipline and entailed recognizing that the museum's film audience would, in fact, persist in misbehaving.

The early history of film at MoMA provides a stage in which the value of the largely ephemeral medium of film -- legally and industrially enshrined as "entertainment" -- was changing. Moreover, this change was being institutionalized at a rather unusual but prominent art institution, America's first museum of modern art, dedicated to not only the traditional aesthetic forms of painting and sculpture but also the new arts of space, motion and the machine. Architecture, photography, film and industrial design were, at least officially, welcomed as equal elements of museum operation. Even still, finding films in an art museum -- including popular Hollywood, European narrative and experimental films -- was unusual for several reasons. Not only did museum-goers express nervous unease with MoMA's unusual curatorial practice, it also enacted surprise that such films -- old and new, domestic and foreign -- could be seen at all. For all of the changes to film style and narrative plainly evident in the popular forms of cinema, and all of the changes to film style and theory evident to the emergent film intellectuals and writers of the period, a crucial material fact of 1930s film culture remained. While the industrial organization, images, ideas, and public spaces collectively referred to as the institution of cinema became an international and highly debated phenomenon, films themselves had not fared so well. Despite the profound influence cinema exercised on conceptions of time, space, knowledge, industry, state policy, and leisure, most films

could not be seen only a year after their initial release. Still beholden to the perils that similarly befell other popular entertainments, once their initial theatrical run was exhausted, many films were recycled for their material-chemical components or were simply dumped into the ocean. In the late 1920s, the shift to synchronized sound further spurred the recycling industry which flourished in the wake of the uncountable silent films deemed more valuable for their silver content than for their seemingly obsolete stories, stylistic innovations, or stars.² The majority of films that remained were swept into ill-kept studio vaults or stock footage warehouses, the survival of their images further threatened by the flammability and fragility of the nitrate stock on which they were printed. Seeing such films, let alone seeing such films in an art museum was a novel development in American culture.

The Film Library has been frequently identified as key to the history of film, most commonly because of its validation of film as an art.³ There is a certain common sense in the field of film studies about MoMA's importance, one that has been long denied any thorough examination of the multiple forces shaping what it did and how it did it. To be sure, the relationship of film to ideas about art in general has an important and long history in the field, for instance, long ensuring its entrenchment in the humanities rather than the social sciences. Indeed, there is a considerable body of literature which treats film's formal, institutional, and discursive ascendance to the status of the respectable arts as a sacred moment in the development of the medium and, by extension, of the discipline. Usually marked by especially accomplished auteurs (Griffith, Eisenstein, Hitchcock, Godard) or by particular innovations to film form (continuity editing,

montage, deep focus, jump cuts), the moment of “film art” has undergirded some of the most basic assumptions of cinema studies. For instance, the most widely used introductory text book in film studies is entitled *Film Art*.⁴ Yet, far less is understood about the material and institutional imperatives which were built to sustain the idea that film was an art as had been done for other cultural forms (the library for books; the museum for art; the theatre for drama; the opera for music). Circuits of film exchange, modes of film criticism, the resources for research and writing, and most importantly, the possibility of actually seeing films again were largely non-existent.

Following from this, in what time I have left, I want to discuss MoMA’s Film Library as a crucial site for understanding changes to our most basic ideas about and practices of cinema. In short, with the founding of the Film Library, considerable steps had been taken to alter the ephemeral condition of film’s cultural and material life. The Rockefeller Foundation, a prominent philanthropy, provided the bulk of the long-absent funds required to design and build a new kind of American film institution. Armed with an ambitious plan, library staff began hunting for films in both obvious and unusual places: basements, attics, junk shops, scrap firms, and the poorly maintained vaults of production companies extant and defunct. They collected a considerable range of films: old and new, popular and eclectic, American and European. Production material, film stills, memoirs, correspondence, journals, books, magazines, pamphlets, and exhibition materials were also eagerly sought out. The Film Library gradually became an archive assembled from film history’s sprawled and varied remains. Feeding the interest in specialized and repeat viewing, it also became an elaborate exercise in non-theatrical distribution and exhibition. Relying on the emergent network of 16mm projectors, 35mm

films were selected, reduced in size, and arranged into programs. Packaged and circulated to national and international educational organizations, or shown at the museum itself, they were accompanied by production information, notes, and lectures. MoMA not only reimagined but participated in building a national film economy, one that circumvented the virtual monopoly on film exhibition held by Hollywood, and that fomented the idea that watching moving images in small, specialized audiences could and should be an integral facet of public life and civic participation. In short, perhaps most significant of the Film Library's interventions was its attempt to extract individual films — American and not — from the commercial, corporate, and official regulatory restraints that limited their movement, their means of expression, and their influence, providing the privileges as well as the prescriptives of art institutions more generally.

MoMA's Film Library, today known as the Department of Film and Media, has influenced generations of filmmakers, critics, and scholars. Although I will be dissecting the conditions of possibility undergirding the Film Library's earliest years, it is essential to note that its sixty-five year contribution to film research, writing and to a lesser degree film style is immense. Through its films, its collection of books, pamphlets, journals, correspondence, clipping files, and other secondary materials — and also its film stills collection — our understanding of film aesthetics, politics and history has been inestimably shaped and enriched. Filmmakers such as Martin Scorsese, Sidney Pollack, Jean Luc Godard, Stanley Kubrick and countless others have acknowledged the importance of watching films at MoMA for the development of their own craft. Film study programs and film societies at universities, museums, libraries, were literally made

possible by MoMA's circulating film programs, and continue to be prominent if fading elements of film study programs today. Indeed, the first professional organization of film scholars, now entitled Society for Cinema and Media Studies, then titled the Society for Cinematologists, grew out of annual meetings hosted by MoMA's film department.⁵ It is one of the longest running art film exhibitors in the United States⁶ and the first sustained North American film archive outside of explicitly commercial circuits, influencing the equally important institutions and archival projects that emerged alongside it or after it: the National Archives, The Library of Congress, George Eastman House, the American Film Institute. It co-founded the first international consortium of film archives, International Federation of Film Archives (FIAPF) and sponsored the first comprehensive index to film literature.⁷ It is an early and enduring publisher of film criticism and research. Countless books have been written using its resources.⁸ It is a powerful purveyor of tastes and a shaper of the canon of films we call great. It has facilitated the emergence of the field of film studies and inestimably shaped the direction that study would take by providing the material infrastructure for the object-oriented analysis of a medium that was previous to its establishment experienced as an ephemeral cultural form. MoMA's Film Library is a crucial site for making sense of cinema. Its earliest years provide insight into the generative moment of its enduring contributions to what is now a certain common sense in the cultural field: seeing films again matters.

The Philanthropic Foundations of Film Study

When MoMA was founded, its future was by no means secure. Despite obtaining an official mandate from the museum, the Film Library had no consistent source of revenue

or other financial support. Museum trustees were polite and tolerant but not forthcoming. Hollywood moguls were suspicious and kept their distance. The idea of “free movies” had long been known to cause waves of nausea amongst them. It was the funding supplied by the Humanities Division of the Rockefeller Foundation that made the project possible at all.

Support for the Film Library resulted from a marked shift in the Humanities Division’s official mandate, which had recently been charged with reorienting their funding away from “cloistered” research and towards individuals and organizations interested in “the obvious sources of influence of public taste today.”⁹ The Rockefeller officers were encouraged to divert funds away from universities and scholars considered unfriendly to present-day concerns and socially useful knowledge and towards more relevant and engaged projects that would better serve “human thought and feeling.” New communications media such as radio, film, and the popular press were singled out as crucial elements of any such project. These media were collectively only beginning to receive measurable attention in universities during this period. The foundation was especially interested in research that explored contemporary media in relation to their ability to contribute to democratic models for education and to promote “a culture of the general mind.” With regards to film, foundation officials were uninterested in censorship and unpersuaded by the effects-research growing out of projects such as the Payne Fund Studies. They were far more concerned to effect change in the manner in which people watched and understood movies, seeking to engender discrimination in film viewing. This, it was believed, would provide a defense against the deleterious influences of mass

media and a corrective to the damaging effects of propaganda – commercial, foreign, and domestic.¹⁰

The Humanities Division, under the leadership of John Marshall, orchestrated many projects pertaining to media, particularly, projects which formed the basis of communications research in the United States. These projects include the Princeton Radio Project; the Princeton Public Opinion Research Project; the Princeton Shortwave Listening Center; the Office of Radio Research at Columbia University and the Totalitarian Communications Research Project at the New School of Social Research. Individual researchers who benefited from support include Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Wilbur Shram, Norbert Wiener and Gregory Bateson.¹¹ This new mandate also included considerable support for public institutions, libraries, museums, individual research projects, and community groups that would foster the means of thinking engagement with the contemporary world.

As far as film is concerned, there were, of course, influential Griersonian precedents already operational in London, and under development in Ottawa. Rockefeller officials were keenly aware of John Grierson's work with various projects to marry documentary cinema with British nation-building. They considered his model necessary to but absent from American corollaries. Marshall's interest in coordinating and furthering the civic possibilities of film education and educational film were evident in the concurrent funding of the American Film Centre (AFC), headed by Donald Slesinger, founded in 1938, and based in Rockefeller Center in New York. The film center acted primarily as an information resource to educational film exhibitors, filmmakers, and public service agencies. In general, the AFC linked those who needed educational films

with those interested in making them, serving as a coordinator in the educational film field. Its initial mandate was broad and included several major goals: 1) research into audience habits and preferences; 2) establishing cooperation among schools and Adult Education groups; and 3) assisting MoMA in forming a national network of film societies. Brett Gary reports, however, that the AFC primarily became deeply embroiled in assisting with the needs of state agencies.¹² In addition to the AFC, the Rockefeller funded General Education Board also supplied money to form the School Film Libraries Association, and other projects to facilitate the use of films in public libraries as well as schools and universities.¹³ Also important to note is foundation support for film societies outside of the United States. Indeed, throughout the latter half of the 1930s, the foundation funded the growth of Canadian film societies, established on principles similar to MoMA's Film Library.¹⁴ Collectively, these projects should be understood as linked closely to Marshall's vision for new models that productively paired media with public and general education. This impetus irrefutably influenced the shape taken by MoMA's Film Library. Its exhibition programs as well as the scholarship conducted with its resources grew directly from Rockefeller mandates.

Initially, Marshall believed that MoMA provided opportunity to fund an organization with aspirations of national significance which, like the AFC, sought to link educational organizations and institutions, and to better develop educational distribution channels. He was less interested in film art or in art films than in finding film's civic place within projects to elevate standards of public engagement. His conception of film education included educating *with* film as well as *about* film.¹⁵ Most importantly, Marshall was committed to generating a particular kind of film viewing public. This

audience was, he imagined, essential for eventually influencing the kinds of films available not just in outside of movie theatre but inside of them as well. Of the Film Library's project he wrote:

If it succeeds, it will organize a new audience for films much as the Carnegie Library organized a reading public which was previously non-existent. And, if such an audience exists for films that cannot now be shown theatrically, its existence should give substantial encouragement to the production of new films of educational and cultural value.¹⁶

Following from this plain commitment to growing distribution and exhibition circuits, the foundation issued special one-time grants to the Film Library to fund targeted programs. For instance, through 1935 and 1937, Jay Leyda was funded specifically on several distinct grants to 1) research and write film program notes, 2) to study the organization of film materials in the US and Europe for loan and rental, and 3) to help with developing the circulating educational programs of the library.¹⁷ This was in addition to his research on Soviet film which was also funded by the foundation.¹⁸ Indeed, a great deal of the research generated at MoMA reflects the foundation's interest in documentary film, as well as its investments in understanding contemporary media more generally. Well-known documentarians such as Paul Rotha and Basil Wright were invited to take up research residences at the Film Library. Rotha accepted the invitation, delivering a series of lectures on documentary film methods and "the creative presentation of facts as we find them in everyday life." He advocated that film could and should be used for combining aesthetic and civic experiments: fusing the cinematic with the citizen.¹⁹ Marshall also brokered grants to Siegfried Kracauer, (now-canonical film theorist,) to

study at the Film Library, which culminated in the publication of his seminal socio-psychological study of Weimar and Nazi cinema, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*.²⁰

The initial money donated by the foundation represented the bulk of library funds, and — more problematically — was intended as a temporary seed grant. As such, John Abbott and Iris Barry (director and curator respectively) needed to shape their future grant requests, and indeed the library itself, in accordance with Marshall's ideas, which depended heavily on increasing the accessibility to and the means by which educational film viewing might occur. Abbott and Barry continually documented their activities in this field by highlighting their circulating programs and their program notes. An appendix to a 1937 report on the library's activities, authored by Abbott, articulated a role for the Film Library that fashioned it primarily as a national coordinator for educational film activities, with a view to growing a production house as well as a training school for filmmakers.²¹ Throughout, Marshall pushed Barry and Abbott to target the creation of film study circuits. Marshall was well aware that the difficulties of this were numerous and included the basic expense for museums, colleges and study groups of both buying 16mm equipment and also renting the library's programs. He nonetheless persisted.

By 1938, Marshall conceded that among all American organizations funded by the Rockefeller foundation that the Film Library's activities were "the most visible and important for organizing specialized audiences with tastes for classics, documentaries or non-entertainment driven films," acknowledging their early success with creating an extensive specialized and educational service through travelling film programs.²² Yet, Marshall remained unsatisfied with their success, recommending that they hire a field

agent to further explore opportunities for film study, and to resolve the distribution problems that continued to plague them. He also began to informally as well as formally pressure the library to gear their activities even more in this direction. Only two years into the foundation's support for the library, he explicitly asked that money it gave in the future be channelled toward the library's services to distributing films to educational institutions.²³

The library was encouraged to lower rental prices, to more actively work to form film societies, and to increase the number of touring lectures.²⁴ The Film Library, according to the foundation, needed to increase its audience, partly, it reasoned, so that through film rentals it might become self-sufficient. Expanding the audience, it was believed, would also better ensure that the goals of fostering appreciation and of influencing the kinds of film produced would more likely to succeed. The library politely agreed with Marshall, and made efforts to focus more on the "effort to organize its potential audience" and to concentrate its efforts on educational work through course offerings in schools, colleges, and universities." This resulted in the hire of Douglas Baxter, who was tasked with assessing and resolving MoMA's distribution needs. His report indicated that the main barriers to increased screenings were lack of funds and equipment; objection to inability to charge admission; and basic disinterest among the educational community.²⁵

Important to note here is that the Rockefeller Foundation was notably disinterested in sanctifying film art or in fortifying the Film Library as a singular site in which individual films would become cherished relics. It primarily conceived of films less as objects and more as pedagogical activities that corresponded more effectively to

the new mediated environments in which people lived. The Film Library was best conceived as a method for mass education and as an early contributor to the formation of a national infrastructure to facilitate this. There is little evidence that either Marshall or any other foundation officer assumed close scrutiny of film library acquisitions in general or of individual films in particular, or that it took any clear steps to control its curatorial affairs or to limit its internationalism. The idea of the specialized and attentive audience was an idealized abstraction, posed against the mass, whose specifics seem to have been largely accepted by MoMA and the foundation.

Circulating Programs – Library Successes

During its first 10-year, MoMA's film offerings expanded and their programming diversified. Yet, there remained numerous impediments to library success. The agreement that the Film Library had struck with the industry governing exhibition of their films proved to have lasting and sizable impact. This agreement stipulated that all user groups must qualify as educational and non-profit — no admission could be charged. The effects of this were twofold. On the one hand, it was restrictive. It meant that anyone who wanted to see one of their films either had to become a museum member and live in New York, or they had to join or perhaps form a study group somewhere else. On the other hand, it served as a catalyst for further institutionalization of a particular ideal of cinematic engagement, providing a formative influence on the emergence of an American film society movement. The founding of such groups was encouraged in film library catalogues and brochures throughout the period.²⁶ Forming a film society made potential

renters readily identifiable under the institution's remit. Closely linked to the emergence of a film society movement is the marked increase of interest in university-level film study throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Film societies commonly — though not exclusively — formed under the aegis of established organs of higher education. It was these organizations that became crucial to MoMA's success, actively renting films and also lending legitimacy. In turn, the film library programs and film notes fundamentally changed the material conditions in which film study evolved in the United States.

MoMA's film programs and program notes allowed the still-unusual idea that films could be studied to shift from local, specific, and sometimes eclectic projects to a nationally organized, highly coordinated system that could be run with regularity and reliability. Film Library programs offered the advantage of expert curation, reliability and authoritative sanction; they were based on a standardized set of films and also on regulated methods for analysis around which curriculum could be established and maintained. The didactic intertitles, inserted by library staff to all of their circulating films, served as automated film lectures, inexpensively distributed and reproduced with each film projection. Screenings of MoMA programs were held at Dartmouth, Stanford, Bryn Mawr, Mount Holyoke, Smith, William and Mary, Vassar College and The New School for Social Research. Films were hired by the Universities of Chicago, Pittsburgh, Washington, Minnesota, Missouri, and California-Berkeley. New York, Princeton, Brown, Cornell, Colgate, and Indiana University filled out the list.²⁷ It should be noted that MoMA's films were used in a surprising range of university departments, including Visual Education, Drama, Public Speaking, Art and Archeology, Fine Arts, Economics and Sociology. Library programs were also frequently shown in language departments.

Film societies concurrently proliferated at many of these same institutions, fed almost exclusively by MoMA's programs.²⁸ Library staff also directly implicated themselves and their programs in the burgeoning discourses of film study and appreciation. Barry, for instance, gave lectures in courses offered at three New York-area universities: The New School for Social Research, New York University, and Columbia University.²⁹ Film Library programs were announced regularly in national publications such as *The National Board of Review Magazine*, a primary organ for promulgating ideas about better films and film appreciation. MoMA's press releases, picked up by national newspaper syndicates, also persistently reiterated the importance of studying, thinking and talking about the films it showed. Indeed, throughout the late 1920s and 1930s film study at university gained visibility. Courses emerged at Columbia, Harvard, Stanford, Iowa, UCLA, NYU, The New School for Social Research Syracuse and USC.³⁰ Many of these courses demonstrate a surprising catholicity in their approach to what constituted the study of cinema, indicative of a field still very much in gestation. Courses were taught in English departments, extension programs, psychology departments, education faculties, Great Books programs, art history departments. The study of film had not yet hardened within disciplinary boundaries; it had not yet been clearly defined as the study of a fine art or a mass medium or a popular entertainment.

The use of MoMA's programs also spread to appreciation clubs, amateur and art associations, as well as to previously established educational groups, and museums throughout the United States and Canada. The remarkable coordination of this new audience came despite the seeming constraints of MoMA's agreement with the industry.

Nonetheless, the inability to charge admission to screenings did indeed prove a hindrance. This fact alone put even the most industrious film societies in rather awkward and sometimes ironic positions. For instance, in order to actually pay for MoMA's film programs, the Dartmouth Film Society began to book commercial films and charge admission in order to earn money to pay for the library's "non-commercial" and "educational" films.³¹

Despite what may seem a relative success for the new exhibitor, the library as well as the Rockefeller Foundation remained unsatisfied with the comparatively small percentage of the film going audience they had attracted. Clearly one of the problems facing the library in its quest to generate a studios audience for cinema was material. Potential audiences and rental groups lacked some of the most basic requirements for participating in the study circuit. Many simply did not have access to a film projector. Additionally, those interested in renting or buying necessary equipment possessed widely varying kinds of spaces, with different seating arrangements, and unreliable power supplies.³² Voltages, frequencies, and amperages varied. Early on, the Film Library anticipated that such variables would present a problem. As such, they discussed supplying projectors along with their films, and even generated a scheme to act as a broker for the purchase of adequate projection systems. Yet, these did not come to fruition and well into 1940, technical problems combined with a general shortage of funds continued to hinder groups interested in library programs.

The vast majority of Film Library programs circulated in 16mm format. Yet, despite the explosion of the 16mm gauge nationally and internationally, penetration of the format was by no means complete. Further, the cost of 16mm projectors was still

relatively high during this period, taxing small groups and institutions with meagre and even modest audio-visual budgets. For instance, in 1935, AMPRO sold a silent 16mm projector for \$135.00 (the equivalent of \$1811.17 in 2003). Victor sold its 16mm sound projector for as much as \$395.00 (\$5299.34 in 2003). Self-projection technology was itself developing rapidly, with various silent projectors and later sound projectors introduced throughout the period. Constantly improving machines adapted to continually discovered needs; new units were marketed throughout the decade. Such contraptions featured adaptable lenses and more powerful bulbs to accommodate viewing spaces of varying dimensions. In order to manage these complexities, Barry suggested early-on that the library might circulate its own projector and screen with the programs, creating a self-contained theatre impervious to the constant changes and high costs. She estimated that this would cost the library \$575.00 (\$7714.23 in 2003) – a sizable portion of their available budget.³³

The cost of renting the programs themselves was also a problem. Initially, the library intended to work by annual subscription, charging a membership fee of \$250.00 (\$3,191 in 2003) per year for use of its services. Judging this to be utterly prohibitive, they began to charge per program: \$25.00 (\$319 in 2003) for a two-hour film program in either 35mm or 16mm gauge if booking the whole series; \$40 (\$510 in 2003) for the same program if not. After criticism from the Rockefeller Foundation, as well as reports from the field that their programs remained beyond affordability, the library lowered its prices, differentiating rental rates by film gauge, and making the structure of available programs more flexible.³⁴ Despite this, total revenue for film rentals dropped during the following year in approximately the same ratio as the price reduction, possibly indicating

that the price reduction was either inadequate or irrelevant.³⁵ Further, it became increasingly evident that film rentals, once held to be the primary method by which the library might wean itself from outside support, could simply never provide a self-sustaining source of income for the library. Barry estimated that the library was only able to earn somewhere between 5 and 10% of its operating costs back through income earned by film rentals.³⁶

Conclusion:

The Film Library emerged seeking to blend, balance, and further inflect films with the institutional edicts of preceding cultural institutions. It sought to coordinate resources, circulate select films, and advocate for distinct modes of interpretation. In doing so, the Film Library also disrupted some of the more staid and conventional aspects of traditional cultural institutions, particularly of museums. It did so by invoking the relatively novel and modern assertion that in addition to paintings and sculpture the material of everyday life — buildings, photographs, advertising, machine parts — constituted valuable sources of aesthetic, historical, and intellectual contemplation. By situating film within this institutional claim, it contributed directly and indirectly to a national, highly-mediated, and modern dialogue on the means by which elite, middlebrow, populist and industrial logics of film's value might convene at the sites of art.

In short, the project to transform cinema from its status as a passing and mass entertainment to an edifying and educational activity grew out of the impulse to arrest the seemingly endless circulation of ephemeral images, securing them in time and space, moving them away from the location of commercial cinema and relocating them

(sometimes the same images and sometimes not) elsewhere as part of an imagined and physical strategy of stabilization. This was neither an ideologically benign nor simple impulse. It was tied both to class-inflected projects to reform cinemagoers deemed ignorant or dangerous as well as to alternative models for cinema that sought to integrate moviewatching with organized modes of cultural engagement that might be critical not just of industry but also of middlebrow and religious moralizing. This included protection from the rising forces seeking to regulate film content according to spiritual and other ostensibly moral dictates, as well as from the raucous frisson of popular movie houses. Reworking the most basic material infrastructures in which films circulated and were seen was not achieved only by MoMA's efforts but by an emergent network of individuals and organizations who long fought to adapt cinema to uses other than those allowed by commercial cinema. Yet, MoMA became one of most authoritative and centralized forces seeking to broker this transformation. Its philanthropic underpinnings are an under-considered element in the history of this shift, a fundamental transformation of the conditions in which movies became institutionalized as modes of thinking, writing and debating modern life.

¹ Charles L. Turner, "Witnessing the Development of Independent Film Culture in New York: An Interview with Charles L. Turner" interview by Ronald S. Magliozzi, *Film History* 12, no.1 (2000): 72-96.

² For an excellent overview of the various industrial, legal, material and practical reasons that silent films disappeared see David Pierce, "The Legion of the Condemned - Why American Silent Films Perished," *Film History* 9 (1997): 5-22.

³ Many of these articles tend to celebrate MoMA's declaration that film was a legitimate art without full consideration of the many factors that shaped the film library, and that made it possible in the first place. They do, however, provide provide useful

introductions to the history of the department, especially good is Mary Lea Bandy's "'Nothing Sacred": Jock Whitney Snares Antiques for Museum," *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: Continuity and Change*, vol. 5, Studies in Modern Art (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1995), 75-103; See also Alison Trope, "Le Cinema Pour Le Cinema,"; Bill Mikulak "Mickey meets Mondrian: Cartoons Enter the Museum of Modern Art," *Cinema Journal* 36.3 (1997): 56-71. Peter Capatano, "Creating 'Reel' Value: The Establishment of MoMA's Film Library, 1935-37," *Film & History* 24, nos.3-4 (1994): 28-46. Raymond J. Haberski, *It's Only a Movie: Films and Critics in American Culture* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 2001), 81-101. For a recent and prominent example of this see David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

⁴ David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2003).

⁵ Meetings of film teachers began in 1957 and continued in 1958 and 1959. Hosted by Richard Griffith and Margareta Akermark, the early participants in these meetings founded the Society of Cinematologists (SoC) in 1959. The name of this association was later changed to Society for Cinema Studies in 1968. For more on the founding of SoC, see Jack Ellis "The Society of Cinema Studies: A Personal Recollection of the Early Days" *Cinema Journal* 43, no.1 (Fall 2003): 105-112.

⁶ Horak suggests that the Little Theater in Rochester, NY, is in fact the oldest art theater. Founded in October 1929, it is still in operation. For more on this see Horak, *Lovers of Cinema*.

⁷ Harold Leonard, ed., *The Film Index: A Bibliography, The Film as Art, Volume 1* (New York: Museum of Modern Art and W.H. Wilson Company, 1941).

⁸ Among the early books written using Film Library resources: Iris Barry, *DW Griffith, American Film Master* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1940) Bosley Crowther, *The Lion's Share: The Story of an Entertainment Empire* (New York: Dutton, 1957); Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian Film* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1960); Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947) and *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960); Lewis Jacobs *Rise of the American Film: A Critical History* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1939); Arthur Knight *The Liveliest Art: A Panoramic History of the Movies* (New York: Macmillan, 1957); Arthur Calder-Marshall, Paul Rotha and Basil Wright, *The Innocent Eye: The Life of Robert J. Flaherty* (London: Hutchinson, 1961); Kenneth MacGowan, *Behind the Screen: the History and Techniques of the Motion Picture* (New York: Dell, 1965).

⁹ Bill Buxton "Reaching Human Minds: Rockefeller Philanthropy and the Social Sciences, 1935-39" in *The Development of the Social Sciences in the United States and*

Canada: The Role of Philanthropy edited by Theresa Richardson and Donald Fisher, Ablex Publishing Co.: Stamford Connecticut, 1999), 177-192.

¹⁰ quoted in Buxton, 180

¹¹ For an overview of the Rockefeller Foundation's activities vis-à-vis communications and media see Brett Gary *The Nervous Liberals: Propaganda Anxieties from World War I to the Cold War* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1999).

¹² *Ibid.*, 109-114

¹³ The Foundation also supported film projects at Yale, University of Minnesota and elsewhere. Additionally, in April 1940, the Rockefeller Foundation granted the American Library Association \$5,500 to explore this question. The results are published as Gerald Doan McDonald, *Educational Motion Pictures and Libraries* (New York: American Library Association, 1942). Additional film education projects were also funded by Rockefeller's General Education Board. These projects include healthy appropriations for The American Council of Education, The Progressive Education Association, and the Visual Education Unit of the University of Minnesota. See Buxton "Reaching Human Minds", 184-185. For more on the funding of film by the Rockefeller's see Bill Buxton "Reaching Human Minds". The Carnegie Corporation also funded experiments in setting up cooperative film circuits to help libraries cost-effectively integrate films into their services. These projects began in 1948. For more on this see Grace T. Stevenson, "Public Libraries," *Sixty Years of 16mm Film, 1923-1983*, edited by Film Council of America (Evanston, Illinois: Film Council of America, 1954), 123-129.

¹⁴ The National Film Society of Canada (NFS) was established "to encourage and promote the study, appreciation and use of motion and sound pictures and television as educational and cultural factors in the Dominion of Canada and elsewhere." quoted in Yvette Hackett "National Film Society of Canada, 1935-1951: Its Origins and Development" in *Flashback: People and Institutions in Canadian Film History* edited by Gene Walz (Montreal: Mediatexte Publications Inc., 1986), 138 The NFS was established as a national organization. Local chapters followed. The NFS is an example less of a series of local and organic initiatives but more the efforts of a few who presumed themselves worthy and capable of speaking to questions of the national through film. It was also funded by the Carnegie Corporation. See Hackett "National Film Society of Canada," 135-165. See also Acland, "National Dreams, International Encounters".

¹⁵ "RF Aid to the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, 1935-1949" (RF 1.1 RG Series 200 R; Box 251, Folder 2993; Rockefeller Archive Center).

¹⁶ John Marshal "Inter-office correspondence" 28 March 38 (RF 1.1 200 R Box 251 Folder 2986; Rockefeller Archive Center).

¹⁷ These grants totalled approximately 8,500 dollars. “RF Aid to the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, 1935-1949,” (RF 1.1 RG Series 200 R Box 251 Folder 2993; Rockefeller Archive Center).

¹⁸ Jay Leyda’s previous research in Russia and his later work at the Film Library also resulted in the translation and publication of Sergei Eisenstein’s writing, *The Film Sense* (1942) and *Film Form* (1949), published together as: *Film Form and Film Sense*, trans. and ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Meridian Books, 1957). Also crucial was his book *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (New York: Collier Books, 1960). This book is dedicated to Barry and indebted to the Film Library’s resources, as well as a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. Pieces of it first appeared in the Film Notes generated for the Film Library’s travelling and in-house film programs. This grant was also brokered by Barry.

¹⁹ A lecture he gave at the National Board of Review during his stay was published as: Paul Rotha, “The Documentary Method in British Films,” *The National Board of Review Magazine* 12 (November 1937): 3-9. His books up to the point of his visit included *The Film Till Now* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930); *Celluloid: The Film Today* (London: Longman’s Green, 1931); *Documentary Film* (London: Faber and Faber, 1935) and *Movie Parade: A Pictorial Survey of Cinema* (London: Studio Publications, 1936). It is worth noting that Rotha was only 23 when he published his first sweeping overview of world cinema. He was just 30 when MoMA invited him to be visiting scholar. It was his first book that proved so influential to Barr in his second major visit to Europe. He brought along a copy of Rotha’s tome as a guide for films he ought to see.

²⁰ (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947). Further grant money also paid Kracauer to write two reports on Nazi Propaganda: “Propaganda and the Nazi War Film,” (1942) and “The Conquest of Europe on the Screen: The Nazi Newsreel, 1939-1940,” which preceded the well-known book.

²¹ One interesting thing to note is that this appendix is not a part of the Film Department’s collection. Strangely, while the report is held in the Study Center’s special collections, this section is only available at the Rockefeller Foundation Archives. While it is difficult to know for sure precisely why this is the case, it is tempting to speculate that it was not included in the report that was forwarded to trustees.

²² John Marshall, “Inter-office Correspondence,” 28 March 1938 (RF 1.1 200 R Box 251 Folder 2986; Rockefeller Archive Center).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ “The request to the Foundation is for general support, but it is recommended that the proposed grant of \$70,000 be made toward the expenses of maintaining and extending the Library’s collections and of making its services available to educational organizations.” “Grant Action” (RF 1.1 200 R Box 250, Folder 2983; Rockefeller Archive Center).

²⁵ Douglas Baxter, "A Report on the MoMA Film library," 1940 (RF 1.1 200 R Box 251, Folder 2998; Rockefeller Archive Center). It should also be noted that general lack of coordination plagued efforts at forging film art circuits generally throughout this period. The film department's records are fittingly filled with Barry's letters to various distributors, collectors, and exhibitors trying to track down prints for library programs.

²⁶ Such entities satisfied the legal agreement arranged with studios. No other formal institutional affiliation was necessary. See for example "Conditions of Rental," *Film Library Bulletin, Museum of Modern Art* (1940): 21-22.

²⁷ I would like to acknowledge Dana Polan for his assistance with sorting through this generative moment in the early history of American film study. For more see Dana Polan, "The Emergence of American Film Studies" *In the Absence of Films* edited by Jon Lewis and Eric Smoodin (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming).

²⁸ Film Library staff claimed success in catalyzing film societies in Buffalo, Los Angeles, Washington and at Bryn Mawr, Haverford, Harvard, and Dartmouth, among others. (*Film Library Bulletin*, 1938-39 (Department of Film Series, Special Collections, Film Study Center, Department of Film and Media, Museum of Modern Art, NY): 4.

²⁹ Leyda also lectured at New York University during this period. For more on staff activity during this period see "Film Library Report (1937)," 34-35. See also chapter 4 of this book.

³⁰ In 1927, Will Hays and president of Columbia University, Nicholas Murray Butler commissioned a committee to explore the feasibility of a "Motion Picture School of Technology" to assist in training to those either already in the industry or those hoping to gain employment in the industry. Studio heads were consulted as the plan developed in order to better serve their interests. The program resembled a production-oriented training school. The committee was headed by Carl E. Milliken (MPPDA) and James C. Egbert (Columbia). See "Proposal for Establishment of a Motion Picture School of Technology," 1927: Colleges: Columbia (Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America Archive, Motion Picture Association of America, New York) (hereinafter cited as MPPDA Archive). I am grateful to Richard Maltby for supplying me with copies of relevant MPPDA documents.

³¹ Douglas Baxter to John Marshall, "A Report on the MoMA Film Library," 1940 (RF 1.1 200 R Box 251, Folder 2998; Rockefeller Archive Center) 18.

³² "General disinterest" was also cited as a fourth reason. Among those interested, a general lack of coordination plagued efforts at forging film art circuits throughout this period. The film department's records are filled with Barry's letters to various distributors, collectors, and exhibitors trying to track down prints for library programs. Ibid.

³³ Film Library, Museum of Modern Art, “Cost of Circulating a 16mm Projector,” in Report on the Film Library, Appendix G (RF 1.1 200 R Box 251 Folder 2996, Rockefeller Archive Center) I have been unable to find evidence that this ever happened.

³⁴ Costs for film rentals in 1937: feature film 16mm \$15 (the equivalent of \$191.46 in 2003); feature film in 35mm \$30 (\$382.92 in 2003); One instalment of special programs 16mm \$10 (\$127.64 in 2003) and in 35mm \$20 (\$255.28 in 2003); Short subjects 16mm \$2 (\$25.53 in 2003); 35mm \$4 (\$51.06 in 2003).

³⁵ “Annual Report on the Film Library,” 1939 (Department of Film Series, Special Collections, Film Study Center, Department of Film and Media, Museum of Modern Art)

³⁶ Iris Barr to Rockefeller Foundation [report] March 1948 (NAR RG 4, Series 111: 42 Box 139, Folder 1367; Rockefeller Archive Center).