CAMERA LUCIDA:

THE MOVING IMAGE AS EVOCATIVE DOCUMENT

FILM FORM, FILM MEANING AND THE
GRAMMATOLOGY OF ARCHIVAL SELECTION

BY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the characteristics of moving image
documents such as they pertain to the selection of films for ar-
chival preservation. It is advanced that both the physical na-
ture of the film record and the nature of the evidence it presents
are prime considerations in the development of archival selection
criteria. Furthermore it is argued that the structure and con-
tent of film are interrelated factors which impact significantly
upon the determination of archival value, and the suitability
of the film record for permanent preservation. Finally, a
major factor affecting selection involves accounting for the
impact of film as a reflector and purveyor of popular culture.
Given the powerful influence of film in moulding popular ideas,
attitudes, and value systems, archival selection criteria must
take into account film of all types if there is to be any future
prospect of assessing the impact of film on society in a given
period.

The sources used for this study include the writings of his-
torians and archivists concerning film as historical evidence and
the archival selection thereof, as well as traditional film litera-
ture. The study proceeds from a consideration of the technical
and structural aspects of film to a content-oriented discussion
involving the reflective and influential nature of the moving
image document. Archival selection is considered in terms of its
necessity and justifiability with regard to the nature of the
film record, and alternative modes of selection are investigated.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

PREFACE

A NOTE REGARDING THE TITLE

Camera lucida is Latin for a light or clear chamber.
The use of the term in this title is intended to be evocative
rather than specific, in a manner similar to the usage of Roland
Barthes in his work of the same name.

> It is a mistake to associate Photography, by reason
> of its technical origins, with the notion of a dark
> passage (camera obscura). It is camera lucida that
> we should say (such was the name of that apparatus,
> anterior to Photography, which permitted drawing an
> object through a prism, one eye on the model, the
> other on the paper); for, from the eye's viewpoint,
> 'the essence of the image is to be altogether outside,
> without intimacy, and yet more inaccessible and mys-
> terious than the thought of the innermost being; with-
> out signification, yet summoning up the depth of any
> possible meaning; unrevealed yet manifest, having that
> absence-as-presence which constitutes the lure and the
> fascination of the Sirens' (Blanchot).[1]

Interpreted as a clear chamber, camera lucida also invokes the
idea of "light through"[2] which informs both the physical struc-
ture and psychological nature of the film medium.

> As archivists we have always been less concerned with
> "shedding light on" the surface of our record from a
> fixed point of view than historians in the past have
> sought to do. We try to illumine the whole corpus of
> our collections and allow the light of relatedness to
> penetrate through our intricate archival reconstructions
> as through the interlace of an illuminated manuscript or
> a stained glass window. We have also re-entered an era
> of 'light through' in a physical sense as we recognize
> the power of the film, and the transparent slide which
> may be just as involving as the stained glass window
> and the stone tracery.[3]

The term grammatology has been appropriated from Jacques

Derrida, and is employed here as being expressive of situating

an analysis of film value within the terms of film reference;

of attempting to establish a framework for a discourse of film

value within which a meaningful discussion of selection criteria

can take place.

[1]Roland Barthes, <u>Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography</u>,
translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981),
p. 106.

[2]Hugh A. Taylor, "The Media of Record: Archives in the Wake
of McLuhan," <u>Georgia Archive</u> 6 (1978), p. 8.

[3]Ibid.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The historian of the twentieth century "faces not a scar-
city but an embarrassment of evidence."[1] The new media-domina-
ted information age has inundated society with a seemingly end-
less universe of information recorded in a variety of formats.
Despite the proliferation of historical sources, historical re-
searchers and archivists alike have clung with tenacity to the
media of print and paper as the prime representative of histori-
cal "fact." This is hardly surprising in view of the fact that
the current generation of archivists and researchers came to ma-
turity in an age characterized by a preponderance of textual me-
dia and appear to exhibit a predilection for the printed media of
record. This situation has resulted in a certain amount of aca-
demic "snobbery against the new media, a feeling that print is the
only place where 'truth' hangs out."[2] Information recorded on
other media has been regarded with reservation or dismissed as being
too much oriented towards popular culture to be of historical sig-
nificance. Contemporary society exhibits a lamentable tendency
to marginalise the importance of products of popular culture on
the basis of their mass appeal and consumption. This has been
illustrated by the lengthy tradition of relegating such mass phe-
nomena as popular music and film to the periphery of contemporary
history instead of subjecting them to the serious scrutiny they
demand, if only in view of the sheer numbers they reach.

There seems to be a widespread and general oblivion of the

degree to which the media- and technology-oriented information
age has permeated all strata of society, transmuting the form
and nature of historical evidence in the process. The archi-
val community, entrusted with the task of preserving records
of historical significance, has traditionally sought out mate-
rial representative of the "interests of historians of centrist
political history."[3] In fact, the very language of archives has
evolved from the medium of textual records, particularly those
produced by an organization or individual in the course of per-
sonal or corporate activity.

Some liberal-minded archivists, speaking from the new fron-
tiers of the "archival edge,"[4] are calling for a re-evaluation of
the archivist's role in society. Hugh Taylor has spoken of the
archivist's duty to take on the role of a modern-day prophet,
acquiring and preserving material with a sense of prescience.[5]
If the record of contemporary history is to be preserved, the
archivists of today and particularly of tomorrow "may have to
assume the shaman's role as keepers of the tribal memory in our
global village."[6] This belief would appear to be especially per-
tinent to the area of the so-called "special" media, which, be-
cause of their essentially ephemeral physical nature, are in dan-
ger of passing permanently out of the archivist's grasp if steps
are not taken to save such records of the post-industrial infor-
mation age.

In order to preserve such records for posterity, the idio-
syncratic physical nature of the new media will need to be consi-
dered insofar as physical form will by necessity influence content.
It is therefore important that archivists "try to understand the

characteristics of the media in . . . (their) custody which are
expressed in 'messages' beyond their literary content, and pass
on this awareness to the user."[7]

A record that needs to be considered in this light is that
of the moving image document, a source that has traditionally
been viewed as a phenomenon of mass culture, but has largely
been ignored as a source for serious research. That film is a
popular art form seems to have worked against its recognition as
a viable historical source, while the very fact of its popularity
should have insured it legitimacy at the very least as a source
affecting vast numbers of people. The very fact that film has
existed as a popular entertainment for close to one hundred
years would seem to imbue it with some sort of historical status.

The present study will seek to present an overview of the
medium of film, or moving images, in light of its nature as a cul-
tural and historical record, capable of both reflecting and influ-
encing society. Considered as such, the implications for the
appraisal and selection of film in archival repositories will be
investigated. The study will attempt to present film as a highly
reflective and influential medium, and will consider such charac-
teristics as they impact upon the development of selection cri-
teria. The very issue of selection will be presented as one deman-
ding justification in light of the nature of the medium, and various
alternatives to the traditional modes of selection will be consi-
dered. The study will concentrate specifically on the medium of
film; the archival preservation of television will not be discussed.

The discussion will proceed from a structural investigation
into the nature of the film medium, its capabilities, limita-

tions and characteristics, including film typologies and avenues
for historical research, to a more content-oriented analysis,
focussing on the medium's potential to reflect and/or distort
various facets of society, as exemplified by both actuality and
feature film. Elements of bias and distortion, propaganda, spon-
sorship, and areas of common abuse will be discussed as they per-
tain to film in general, and with specific reference to the news-
reel and documentary. Feature film in particular will be investi-
gated as a reflector of both overt and covert societal values and
attitudes, as well as a form of mass entertainment. The expression
and source of the attitudes expressed in film, the concept of film
as an indicator of national consciousness, and the reflective
phenomenon of the box office are among the topics to be discussed.
The ways in which moving images impact upon viewing audiences and
society in general will also be considered, including the nature
of the viewing experience, and the issue of film censorship.

Finally, the medium's physical characteristics and reflec-
tive nature will be considered in terms of the implications held
for the selection of moving images for permanent preservation
in archival repositories. Aspects of structure, influence, and
moreover the nature of the evidence contained within the film
document, will be seen to impact significantly upon the issue
of archival selection. The issue of selection itself will be
considered in terms of its necessity, justifiability, and practi-
cality in light of both the volume and nature of the moving image
document.

NOTES

[1] John E. O'Connor, and Martin A. Jackson, <u>American History /
American Film: Interpreting the Hollywood Image</u> (New York:
Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1979), p. ix.

[2] James Quinn, <u>The Film and Television as an Aspect of
European Culture</u> (Leyden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1968), p. 79.

[3] Hugh A. Taylor, "The Media of Record: Archives in the
Wake of McLuhan," <u>Georgia Archive</u> 6 (1978), p. 6.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., p. 5.

[7] Ibid., p. 3.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF THE MEDIUM

AND AVENUES FOR HISTORICAL RESEARCH

If film is to be collected and retained in archival reposi-
tories, a basic knowledge of the medium will be required of both
archivists and potential users. When approaching film as a source
for historical research, due consideration must be paid to its
form and the unique cinematic language by which it communicates,
as the physical nature of the medium impacts upon its potential
for research use. This chapter will examine film structurally,
first examining the physical characteristics of the medium, and
then categorizing film into typologies and outlining potential
avenues for historical research.

Before the researcher can maximize the information contained
within film and understand the ways in which structure influences
both content and meaning, certain technological and theoretical
elements of the medium need to be considered. Just as the resear-
cher approaches the textual document with a critical mind, ques-
tioning all aspects of its content, context, and creation, so must
the film document be approached, bearing in mind that the tech-
nology of film will by its nature be more complex than that of
print and paper.

Image technology had its beginnings early in the nineteenth
century with the invention of a number of optical toys exploiting
a characteristic inherent in human vision known as persistence
of vision. This physiological phenomenon was first described
scientifically by Peter Mark Rogêt in 1824.[1] As a result of

this "defect" in vision, "the brain retains images cast upon the retina of the eye for approximately one-twentieth to one-fifth of a second beyond their actual removal from the field of vision."[2] This phenomenon makes the illusion of motion possible, for when another image takes the place of the first in quick succession, the brain superimposes the two images over the blank space between them. Film is composed of a number of still images which are concatenated into an illusion of continuous motion by the brain. Although the illusion of motion can be created at film speeds as low as twelve frames per second, a standard of twenty-four frames per second eventually became accepted as a general norm for optimal image quality. Until motion picture technology was able to record and project film at speeds sufficient to produce a seamless semblance of motion, a flicker effect was visible on the screen. This effect in early films draws attention to the fact that the image is not continuously upon the screen; in fact, when watching a film, we are actually fixing our eyes on a darkened screen for as much as fifty per cent of the time. Thus the projected film illusion exists only in the mind, by means of a flaw inherent in human vision. Operating in conjunction with persistence of vision is a psychological phenomenon known as "phi effect," defined as "the psychological perception of motion which is caused by the displacement of two objects seen in quick succession in neighboring positions."[3] The combination of these two phenomena makes film "the first communications medium to be based upon psycho-perceptual illusions created by machines."[4]

The basis of moving image technology has thus been scien-

tifically established as a series of still images projected at a speed sufficient to create the illusion of motion. The next crucial structural element to be grapsed by the user of film is the manipulation of these images. Through editing, literally the "cutting" of the film, the filmmaker manipulates images to produce a desired effect. One of the most basic theories operative in the art of editing is that of montage, a concept operating at the level of psychological awareness. The theory of montage was first advanced by Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948), who was active in the experimental Proletkult Theater in Moscow in the 1920s. Eisenstein's theory of montage operated along the lines of Marxist dialectic: "The dialectic is a way of looking at human history and experience as a perpetual conflict in which a force (<u>thesis</u>) collides with a counterforce (<u>antithesis</u>) to produce from their collision a wholly new phenomenon (<u>synthesis</u>) which is not the sum of the two forces but something greater than and different from them both."[5] According to Eisenstein,

> . . . in film editing the shot . . . is a thesis which when placed into juxtaposition with another shot of opposing visual content - its antithesis - produces a synthesis (a synthetic idea or impression) which in turn becomes the thesis of a new dialectic as the montage sequence continues. This visual opposition between shots may be a conflict of linear directions, planes, volumes, lighting, etc., and need not extend to the dramatic content of the shot.[6]

Eisenstein favoured the example of the Japanese ideogram to illustrate the process behind dialectical montage:

child	+ mouth	=	scream
bird	+ mouth	=	sing
knife	+ heart	=	sorrow
water	+ eye	÷	weep
door	+ ear	=	listen[7]

A more sophisticated example can be seen in the following
example, wherein the process of montage synthesizes an entirely
new meaning arising out of the juxtaposition of unrelated
elements:

人   大   曰   東

man   tree   sun   sun tangled in the
tree's branches, as
at sunrise, meaning
now the east.[8]

The theory of montage is illustrative of the depth of control
exerted over material by the filmmaker, the element of selec-
tion or omission, and the psychological ramifications such de-
cisions can hold for the viewing audience. Since one of the
major criticisms levelled at film as a potential source for
historical research has always been its potential for distor-
tion, an understanding of the possible forces operative behind
such distortion could perhaps better equip the researcher to
detect and account for such biases in the film document.

Other elements enter into structure as it affects meaning,
elements including composition, framing, camera lenses, lighting,
the type of emulsion used, focus, and camera placement, all of
which impact upon the single frame, and the shot. The most
basic visual unit of film (after the individual frame) is the
shot, defined as "a single uninterrupted action of a camera."[9]
Shots are combined into scenes, scenes into sequences, and so
on. All elements which impinge upon the make-up and composition

of a shot or scene must be considered as a potential element of distortion, including the possible affecting presence of the camera in actuality film, or film which purports to record empirically "real" events in a truthful manner.

From the beginnings of film technology the medium's capacity for acting as a recorder of historical evidence has been recognized, both by those involved in its inception, and contemporary critics. Following the invention of the kinetograph in 1895, W.K.L. Dickson wrote:

> The advantages to students and historians will be immeasurable. Instead of dry and misleading accounts, tinged with the exaggerations of the chroniclers' minds, our archives will be enriched by the vitalized pictures of great national scenes, instinct with all the glowing personalities which characterized them.[10]

Similar sentiments were expressed by contemporary film critics who described the pioneering work of the Lumière brothers in France, recording events such as workers leaving a factory or a train arriving at a station, as "nature taken alive" or "nature caught in the act."[11] Writing in 1898, Boleslaw Matuszewski was struck by the motion picture camera's novel potential for physical mobility, and the implications this capacity held for the recording of history. What is more prophetic for the film archivist of today are Matuszewski's remarks about the inability of the cameraman or filmmaker to correctly predict which events would have historical significance conferred upon them by the passing of time.[12]

In the 1920s, interest in the use of film for historical documentation spread to historical circles. In the United States, the Iconographical Commission (1926-1934) embarked on

a mission that is still being carried on today -- the quest to categorize film into a hierarchy of typologies useful to historians and historical research. The term "historical film" was employed to describe films "which record a person or period from the time after the invention of cinematography and without dramaturgical or 'artistic' purposes: those films which present a visual record of a definite event, person or locality, and which presuppose a clearly recognizable historical interest inherent in the subject matter."[13] The Commission was anxious to exclude from this definition fictional or feature films and documentaries, genres which involved a certain amount of "personal interpolation"[14] by the filmmaker. Actuality film, already widely disseminated through the standardized format of the newsreel, was considered to be of most interest to the historian as "illusions of objective reality, of events and people, a visual version of newspapers."[15]

The Act establishing the National Archives in the United States (approved 19 June, 1934), recognized the historical capacity of film by including a provision for the preservation of film of historical merit. "Indeed, the unique ability of the motion-picture camera to record events for historical purposes was especially recognized by a provision in the act which authorized, in addition to the motion pictures to be accepted from governmental agencies, the acceptance from non-governmental sources of motion pictures illustrative of American history."[16]

Both John Bradley, motion picture consultant to the Library of Congress, writing in 1948,[17] and Sir Arthur Elton, writing in 1955, compare the recording of images and sound on

film to other more ancient forms of recording information.
Elton likens the film document to other modes of record-keeping
employed throughout the ages: "I want to consider the film as
source material for history in the sense that palimpsest and
parchment, hieroglyph and rune, clay tablet and manorial roll
are source materials - fragments, sometimes fragments of frag-
ments, often defaced by time, and applied to purposes of histori-
cal reconstruction rarely contemplated by the original authors."[18]

In the years following the Iconographical Commission, there
were several attempts to classify films according to their signi-
ficance to the historical researcher. In 1939 the National Ar-
chives of the United States arrived at standards to define cate-
gories of film that would be collected for research purposes.
The major classifications were: factual per se (including news-
reels and other record film of historical significance): factual-
expository (factual films constructed according to some set
mode of composition, including travelogues and educational films);
art-craft (films documenting major technological developments in
the motion picture arts or industry); and "historic" films (those
which have exercised a considerable influence on public opinion
and have in that sense become historic, as, for example, Uncle
Tom's Cabin).[19] This system of classification covers a wide
range of film, but is something less than satisfactory as
much of the classification hinges on the concept of American
"historical significance," which in most instances is bound to
be an arbitrary or subjective decision.

Christopher Roads of the Imperial War Museum, England, has
developed a classification of film into five categories, which

focuses more on the form and structure of the film as it affects its value as historical evidence.[20] The first category includes original actuality or record film in a totally unedited form. The second category involves the same film in a semi-edited condition with excess footage and technically flawed portions excised. Thirdly, there is record film which has been edited into the newsreel or some similar format. The fourth category comprises documentary films, which involve the manipulation of original footage into a single-purposed format and as such are of little value to the historian as primary historical evidence. The final category includes feature films, which are very much secondary sources, according to Roads.[21] This mode of classification is likely to be of more use to the historical researcher, with its emphasis on form and structure rather than on decisions regarding the subjective nature of film content. A similar classification scheme is advocated by William Hughes,[22] who likewise divides actuality film into edited and unedited formats. Newsfilm is distinguished from newsreels on the basis of not being distributed on a regular schedule. In addition to documentary and compilation films, the latter being constructed out of extant footage, Hughes includes what he calls "magazine films," which he defines as being released in series on a regular basis, similar to newsreels, but featuring greater length and depth of coverage.[23]

From the preceding attempts to classify film according to its usefulness to the historian, it would seem that the film of record is generally considered by many to be the most useful form of film document for historical research purposes. The use of feature film as a purveyor of historical evidence is not as

widely accepted, and will be discussed separately.

Present-day historians were for the most part educated in a print-oriented culture and tend to view the film record with distrust, accusing it of a partisanship which does not allow for unbiased communication. The written record has tradition-ally conveyed a sense of "impartiality"[24] which is rarely attributed to film. But film has the capacity to make a unique contribution to the field of historical inquiry, as exemplified by what J.A.S. Grenville refers to as a "kind of eye-witness quality,"[25] referring to the motion picture camera's ability to record events occurring in front of it. A number of unique attributes making film a valuable form of historical documen-tation have been outlined by Arthur Elton:

1) It can show as nothing else the routines of procedure and process, of custom and craft;
2) Film's peculiar command of movement results in its ability to record more or less unselectively every-thing taking place in front of the lens;
3) Film's ability to record the comparative study of personal and crowd psychology in terms of movement, gesture, attitude and set of muscle;
4) Film can also be used directly to present history and an historical point of view.[26]

Elton does modify the fourth point somewhat by pointing out the inevitability of selection and condensation, and how these fac-tors can result in an acquired symbolic value through emphasis and/or distortion.[27] For Elton, the greatest attribute of film would seem to be its ability to act as an unbiased recorder of events taking place in front of the camera, and in this sense, the camera does not lie.

Using film as a source for historical research, Martin A. Jackson has advocated two potential avenues which can be taken:

the viewing of film as simply a visual record, or the viewing of film as a reflection of public opinion at a given moment in history.[28] Historians have traditionally been biased towards the former approach, in which film approximates "reality" by recording straightforward visual information. The latter avenue of research deals less with the issue of historical or visual authenticity and more with the reflection of public attitude at a given time. As such, it is an approach more suited to the feature film in many ways, and will be discussed in that context.

While much discussion has centered around the issue of how historians can use film as an historical record, less attention has been given to the question of just what historians can expect to contribute to the field of historical inquiry through their use of the film document. There has been some discussion concerning the historian's potential role as a mediator in bringing together the diverse elements communicated by the film record into some sort of broader overview of history and society. Stuart Samuels and Robert Rosen write that "given the historian's primary concern with the processes of social development, he is particularly suited to specify the mediating factors that enter into film production - the role of the market, government, political pressures, and mass ideologies, to mention only a few examples."[29] They go on to state that

> . . . we could bring our preoccupation with the
> processes of change to bear on two levels. The first
> could present a synthesized picture of the process
> of filmmaking itself to demonstrate the structural
> links between systems of production, distribution,
> consumption, criticism and social control. . . . The

second level would relate both thematic content and film technique to the specific historical context in which they are developed and consumed.[30]

Others feel the historian is not suited to be the catalyst of such a synthesis. Frans Nieuwenhof feels that

. . . the intellectual tradition stands in the way of the movement towards synthesis, towards overall pictures. The wide approach is repudiated since it is unfeasible with modern specialization in method and research.[31]

Nieuwenhof further states that while it is "doubtful whether historians are the right men in the right place for the ultimate compilation of such 'picturizing' through mass communication media . . . still it is obvious that recognition of the relevance of the mass communication media for the historical picture-making may lead to a totally different attitude of traditional historical research and the presentation thereof."[32]

Whether or not the historian is suited to synthesize a new picture of society through the use of film and similar media, there are further matters to consider when using the moving image document for any serious research purpose. Approaching film as an historical document, the researcher will find it important to be able to establish his source contextually, and may find it necessary to date the film in order to verify its authenticity or establish an appropriate historical context within which to view the film. Both visual internal elements and external evidence may provide clues to establish the period of production. Physical features such as film stock, development process, spacing of sprocketholes, manufacturer's codes

imprinted on the film stock, the presence of a soundtrack (and whether or not it is synchronous), and the type of equipment used (such as zoom lenses, whose appearance in the industry can be accurately dated), all assist in establishing a period of production for a film. The projected film often reveals names of the cast, director, date of copyright, and so on, in the credits. Internal stylistic elements can also provide information derived from styles of editing, lighting, directing, acting, camera placement, and depth of field, as well as more overt visual indicators in the form of architectural styles, landmarks, technological development, clothing styles, and patterns of language and behaviour.[33]

A final consideration is that of textual documentation. This is an important area both for archival repositories which collect film, and potential users of those films. Certain information, if available, can illuminate many facets of the film document which may otherwise remain in obscurity. Textual documentation can include the "dope sheets" that newsreel cameramen kept on every shot, and shooting scripts, which reflect the filmmaking process. Collections such as the British Board of Film Censors script files, accumulated in the pursuit of exercising control over film content, may be of significance to the researcher. Film treatments and scenarios are likewise valuable for tracing the preliminary form of a film through to its definitive final form. The treatment is the first outline or proposal presented to the producer, while the scenario is a more detailed outline, containing a full list of shots and a sequential description of stage and technical actions.[34] Infor-

mation regarding film directors, studios, distributors, writers and editors, can often be gleaned from film company records, if available for consultation, and from film magazines and journals. Back issues of distributors' catalogues can also be consulted to establish the content of individual films and their respective running times. Film timing can be a critical factor in determining which copy of a film is being dealt with, particularly when the film exists in multiple versions as a result of a complex production history or re-cutting for foreign distribution.

The physical nature and structural aspects of the medium impact significantly upon the film document's value and potential as an historical record. Full utilization of the medium's informational capacity is only possible in conjunction with a thorough understanding of the document's structure, and the ways in which form can influence content. Such knowledge is critical not only for researchers wishing to use the medium, but also to the archivists who must select and care for the film documents in their custody. As the issue of selection hinges upon the intrinsic value of a record, all elements which may potentially impact upon value must of necessity be recognized. Inasmuch as form influences content, it is the first element to be considered when assessing the film record's value and usefulness. Next, the moving image document will be considered in terms of content and the implications content holds for its use as a record for historical research.

NOTES

[1]David A. Cook, <u>A History of Narrative Film</u> (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1981), p. 1.

[2]Ibid.

[3]James Monaco, <u>How to Read a Film: The Art, Technology, Language, History, and Theory of Film and Media</u>. Revised edition. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 445.

[4]Cook, <u>A History of Narrative Film</u>, p. 2.

[5]Ibid., p. 171.

[6]Ibid., p. 172.

[7]Ibid., p. 173.

[8]William Jinks, <u>The Celluloid Literature: Film in the humanities</u>. Second edition. (Beverly Hills: Glencoe Press, 1974), p. 8.

[9]John Harrington, <u>The Rhetoric of Film</u> (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1973), p. 9.

[10]John B. Kuiper, "The Historical Value of Motion Pictures," <u>American Archivist</u> 31 (1968), p. 385.

[11]Eugene C. McCreary, "Film and History: Some Thoughts on Their Interrelationship," <u>Societas</u> 1 (1971), p. 54.

[12]Anthony Aldgate, <u>Cinema and History: British Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War</u> (London: Scolar Press, 1979), p. 3.

[13]Ibid., p. 6.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid., p. 3.

[16]Dorothy Arbaugh, "Motion Pictures and the Future Historian," <u>American Archivist</u> 2 (1939), p. 106.

[17]Kuiper, "The Historical Value of Motion Pictures," pp. 385-386.

[18]Arthur Elton, "Film as Source Material for History," <u>A.S.L.I.B. Proceedings</u> 7 (1955), p. 207.

[19]Arbaugh, "Motion Pictures and the Future Historian," p. 109.

[20] Christopher H. Roads, "Film as Historical Evidence," _Journal of the Society of Archivists_ 3 (1966), p. 184.

[21] Ibid.

[22] William Hughes, "The evaluation of film as evidence," in _The historian and film_, edited by Paul Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 55-56.

[23] Ibid., p. 56.

[24] Penelope Houston, "The Nature of the Evidence," _Sight and Sound_ 36 (1967), p. 90.

[25] J.A.S. Grenville and Nicholas Pronay, "The Historian and Historical Films," _University Vision_ 1 (1968), p. 3.

[26] Elton, "Film as Source Material for History," pp. 209-210.

[27] Ibid., p. 210.

[28] Martin A. Jackson, "Film as a Source Material: Some Preliminary Notes Toward a Methodology," _Journal of Interdisciplinary History_ 4 (1973), p. 78.

[29] Stuart Samuels and Robert Rosen, "Film and the Historian," _American Historical Association Newsletter_ 11 (1973), p. 33.

[30] Ibid., pp. 32-33.

[31] Frans Nieuwenhof, "The Relevance of Audiovisual Mass Communication for the Historian," in _Studies in History, Film and Society 1: History and the Audio-Visual Media_, edited by Karsten Fledelius, et al (Copenhagen: Eventus, 1979), p. 311.

[32] Ibid., p. 316.

[33] Hughes, "The evaluation of film as evidence," p. 49.

[34] Pierre Sorlin, _The Film in History: Restaging the Past_ (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 28.

CHAPTER III

THE MOVING IMAGE DOCUMENT
AND SOCIETAL REFLECTION

In today's visually-oriented society the creation of
images and their mass consumption has become an increasingly
significant activity. The moving image record has evolved into
a highly sophisticated medium capable of recording information
about real events, and about society and its perception of it-
self. The medium functions in a multi-faceted role stemming from
its context of inventive creation, its capacity to create an image
of society and also project the image back to society, and the
degree of influence it wields over the viewing audience. Film
has the ability to reflect, distort and affect the way in which
society perceives contemporary issues, and itself. The reflected
image has the potential for distortion, and it is this charac-
teristic which has resulted in a good deal of distrust directed
at the medium both as a recorder of empirically "real" events
and as a purveyor of works of creative imagination. Both actuality
and feature film can be viewed as a reflection of a given society
at a particular moment, and although both are inherently biased
in one way or another, they remain valuable if largely untapped
resources for historical, societal, and cultural investigation.

The type of film record traditionally considered by the
historical researcher to be the most reliable for research pur-
poses is that of actualtiy film, or film that purports to convey
an accurate record of reality as it was recorded by the camera.

Historically speaking, the most common form of actuality film
is the newsreel. During the first half of this century newsreels
packaged current events into an extremely rigid and standardized
format which reached a wide viewing public. While the newsreel
was once a major source of news and information for a large num-
ber of people, it is today regarded as a highly biased and dis-
torted source of record film, due to its limitation of coverage
and manipulation of content. In addition to examining the na-
ture of the newsreel's distortion and propagandizing, perhaps
one of the main values of the newsreel as a source of actuality
film is the opportunity to view what contemporary cinema audiences
actually saw themselves.[1]

Newsreels have come to be regarded as being biased towards
the entertaining rather than the educational or informative.
Many of the newsreel companies were subsidiaries of the feature
film conglomerates, and it was the feature film with its poten-
tial for monetary gain that the conglomerates were concerned
with promoting. Hence the newsreel preceding the feature was
subjected to a certain amount of self-imposed censorship by
the industry, in order to present topics calculated not to
annoy the customers, or to inflame public opinion.

> . . . The newsreels show us today what their producers
> thought yesterday's audiences wanted to see as enter-
> tainment; the newsreel is also a primary source for
> what the controlling elite, whether through formal
> censorship or through informal influence, wanted the
> movie audiences - the popular masses - to know or
> believe . . . . It was entertainment and not educa-
> tion that motivated the newsreel makers.[2]

Humourist Oscar Levant has described the newsreel generically

as "a series of catastrophes, ended by a fashion show,"[3] a
view which seems indicative of some sort of popular consensus.
In 1937 a Paramount news editor offered an explanation for this
phenomenon:

> The theatre managers who have to show our newsreels
> do not think their function is to educate. They go
> to great effort in their theatres to set up the de-
> sired atmosphere of romance, happiness, music and
> soft light, and along comes a newsreel with the latest
> race riot or something else that makes the audience
> hot.[4]

As an entertainment item, newsreels were forced to concentrate
on the ceremonial side of life, with the emphasis on "sports,
fads and fashions, parades, bathing beauties, ship launchings,
and mere curiosities."[5] While such subjects may not always be
what the historian is seeking, newsreels may constitute a rich
source of documentation concerning popular influences upon public
taste and attitude, as well as a rich source for documenting
contemporary trends in self-imposed censorship. The newsreel
may also be considered as a form of mass communication and stu-
died for its implications as such.

The editing of "news" items into an entertainment package
should lead a researcher to treat newsreels as distorted or
"directed" images of society, rather than as strict representa-
tions of historical "fact."[6] The researcher using newsreels
as source material needs to consider the elements of selection,
omission and sequencing that contribute to the evolution of a
news "story," as well as the subjective and possibly misleading
nature of voice-over commentary.

A further element contributing to distortion constitutes

what Christopher Roads refers to as a "bias towards a record
of what occurred by day under reasonable weather conditions,"[7]
drawing attention to the fact that film is a vulnerable and
ephemeral medium and is thus better suited technically to
periods of calm and favourable physical conditions. This fact
often works against the survival of records made in the arenas
of war and natural disaster.

The very presence of the camera in a given situation may
also result in a certain amount of distortion. Arthur Marwick,
however, feels the camera has an important involuntary function
in recording an event, however biased the message it intention-
ally wishes to convey.[8] Where newsreels are concerned, Mar-
wick states that "the message that such a film wishes to put
forward is described as 'the witting testimony,' and the term
used to describe the amount of information a film might con-
tain is 'the unwitting testimony.'"[9] Unwitting testimony
could conceivably include such features as the physical envir-
onment, lifestyles, and patterns of behaviour, portraiture
(that is, how people actually appeared at a given time), the
concrete reality of particular situations, and what Marwick
refers to as the "crash course"[10] function of archival footage,
alluding to film's potential to reveal in an instant what would
require pages in print. The nature of unwitting testimony
reinforces the camera's capacity to function as a neutral obser-
ver in a given situation. As a "witness to the catastrophic
events of our epoch, it retains a level of objectivity that is
often beyond the capacity of the agitated human participant."[11]
Examples of this can be seen in contemporary news coverage.

As a neutral recorder of visual images, actuality film has the further capacity to record those social groups traditionally ignored until recently by conventional historical sources. The historical researcher will surely benefit from film's ability to capture the culture and iconography of the "man in the street," the underprivileged, ethnic minorities, women and children; in short, those social groups who have for the most part been deprived of a written history. Actuality film also has a similar role to play in anthropological and ethnographic studies.

At the opposite end of the spectrum lies the potential of actuality film to create symbols evocative of a particular era. "Cameramen have provided us with a kind of shorthand visual imagery for this century: a British political crisis means a crowd in the rain outside Number Ten; the Depression means cloth-capped men on street corners; the General Strike, a shot of idle machinery or empty railway lines; the Battle of Britain, that shot from Fires Were Started of fire-hoses snaking away down a London street after a raid."[12] The power of film to fashion such potent visual imagery for an age has influenced us to such a degree that it has become difficult to envision the early part of this century in anything other than black and white. It is this power which makes actuality film a difficult historical source to dismiss, whatever its shortcomings as an unbiased record.

Apart from contemporary newsfilm, and with the demise of the newsreel, the most common form of actuality film being produced today is the documentary. The French who first used the term documentaire were referring to travelogues or educa-

tional travel films.[13] The term "documentary" was first used in the contemporary sense by John Grierson, in an anonymous review of Robert Flaherty's Moana: "Being a visual account of the daily life of a Polynesian youth, . . . the film has documentary value."[14] "Formally structured non-fiction films"[15] gradually came to be described as "the creative treatment of actuality."[16] "Creative" should perhaps be considered the operative term here, for regardless of the filmmaker's intentions, some degree of bias is always imparted to the documentary film. "Formally structured" is also a crucial term; documentaries are not simply hundreds of feet of footage tacked together arbitrarily. They are organized and structured in a manner that will best serve to promote the filmmaker's intentions. The fact that documentaries are compiled from actuality footage has often imbued them with an undeserved aura of authenticity and respectability. Those who see through the veneer of "reality" that many documentaries purport to convey, often react violently to the documentary's claim of superiority over the fiction film. Marcel Ophuls, director of The Sorrow and the Pity, writes:

> As I've pointed out whenever and wherever I can, documentaries - or whatever their directors care to call them - are just not my favorite kind of movie watching. The fact is that I don't trust the little bastards. I don't trust the motives of those who think they are superior to fiction films, I don't trust their claim to have cornered the market on truth, I don't trust their inordinately high, and entirely undeserved, status of bourgeois respectability.[17]

The extreme example of manipulation in the documentary

context is the use of the documentary format as a tool for spreading propaganda. While the historian may peremptorily dismiss such film as being blatantly manipulative and a highly distorted version of "reality," the propaganda film can provide societal insights of a sociological and psychological nature. Propaganda films are

> . . . consciously made to promote certain goals, to persuade, to unite, and to stimulate to action. It is this consciousness, this purposiveness, which gives to the propaganda film its distinct value for socio-psychological analysis. . . . In the propaganda film, the attitudes and values of a society, normally the backdrop for dramatic action, come into the foreground to stand naked for analysis.[18]

Another issue closely related to propaganda is that of sponsorship, an element that also must be taken into account when ascertaining the veracity of the film record. Sponsorship has traditionally been more of an issue with the documentary and compilation film than with the feature film industry, as neither the documentary or compilation are particularly commercial in nature. Because of this fact, an element of compromise in the form of sponsorship has often entered into their production. Considered as record film, sponsored film does provide some degree of insight into the motives of the sponsoring interest by "revealing the views which they wanted the public to hold on the vital issues of the day."[19]

Film would seem to possess the capacity for recording aspects of reality with a degree of veracity unparalleled in the textual record. By the same token it possesses an almost equal capacity for falsification:

> Contrary to some popularly held beliefs the camera
> does lie and it can lie very consistently and for
> the general public very effectively. It is this
> facility that film has for not telling the truth
> which creates the greatest abuse of film as an his-
> torical source.[20]

All documents invite falsification. The film record, because

of the number of hands involved in its creation and its manner

of production, has long been regarded by historians with a

great deal of suspicion. One of the major reasons for this

suspicion, and one of the more frequent areas of abuse in

actuality film is the use of stock-shots, wherein a totally

unrelated shot is substituted for the real thing (usually for

reasons of convenience and expense, and not necessarily to

deliberately mislead), without acknowledging the source or

the misrepresentation involved. Stock-shots have a long

history of use and abuse in all types of films, as do recon-

struction sequences, whereby an attempt is made to re-enact

an historic event without acknowledging its removal from reality.

Such patterns of falsification have confounded historians for

years, leading many to advocate methods of identifying the

offending shots and sequences. Christopher Roads has sugges-

ted filmmakers employ colour tinting of reconstructed sequences,

to distinguish them from actual record film.[21] Penelope

Houston advocates the use of footnotes to accompany compilation

films for the same purpose.

> Reconstruction should be identified, not allowed to
> masquerade as the real thing. Doubtful attributions
> might be acknowledged; distinctions might be drawn
> between firsthand material which can be exactly iden-
> tified, and material which has already been put through
> one propagandist mincer or another. . . .[22]

Historian William H. McNeill is even more adamant on this point,
which he carries to its somewhat illogical extreme: "Only if
an historical idea is used to dictate how footage should be
arranged and selected can the wisdom and insight of our pro-
fession find expression in this kind of filmmaking."[23] A
similar sentiment is echoed by J.A.S. Grenville and Nicholas
Pronay: "Ideally both the 'technical' and 'scholarly' halves
of . . . a film project should both be historians by training."[24]
Perhaps the most extreme view on this point is that expressed
by Fritz Terveen, who states that an analysis of form and tech-
nique should be determined for every shot,

> . . . and must be attached as accompanying text or
> critical apparatus in a written form in order to
> enable it to be used for research purposes. Only
> thus can a sequence of shots be placed exactly in
> its appropriate historical context. This is a task
> which can be carried out only by the historian in
> collaboration with scientifically trained experts.[25]

The foregoing discussion has outlined what constitutes the
most common form of abuse in record film, that of the falsifi-
cation of the film record which is presented as a representa-
tion of "reality." At the other end of the spectrum there is
a confusing situation which occurs when shots are extracted
from fictional films and presented as historical fact. This
situation more typically arises with a historical re-creation
film such as Eisenstein's _Strike_ (1924), which looks so old
and "real" that it has become imbued with a false aura of
authenticity. This has resulted in a certain amount of con-
fusion and has propagated a continued pathology of abuse:

"Sequences from his [Eisenstein's] historical recreations of revolutionary Russia have been presented, in documentary and compilation films as authentic footage."[26] Another case involves footage supposedly of the Russian Revolt of 1905 depicting the events of "Bloody Sunday" (09 January, 1905). In reality, the footage was from a 1925 film, 9th of January, by V.K. Viskovskij. The complete 1925 film was not discovered until 1956, revealing a long tradition of misuse of the Bloody Sunday footage as actual footage of an historical event.

If a researcher is attempting to seek out and compensate for areas of abuse and distortion, or to ascertain a filmmaker's particular mode of selectivity, it may be of benefit to consult precisely that footage which is absent from the final edited form. A good deal more footage is shot than ultimately appears on screen, and it is sometimes the excised footage that may be of more historical interest to the researcher. The existence of such out-take material (known simply as "outs" in the industry) can provide valuable evidence in order to construct a more comprehensive picture of the filmed event. The removed footage may have been excised for reasons of political or social sensitivity, as well as for the more mundane reasons of length or technical inadequacies. Whatever the reasons, this type of material, if available for consultation, should not be overlooked by the researcher seeking to complement existing footage.

In contrast to actuality film, fictional film, constituting
the creative treatment of some situation or event, either real
or imagined, demands a considerably different approach on the
part of the researcher to extract information captured in the
process of conscious or unconscious societal reflection. Like
actuality film, the fictional or feature film has the capacity
to both reflect and distort various, facets of "reality." In
the case of the feature film, the reflection applies to the
value systems and attitudes of society, as well as to more
overt iconographical displays. The value of the fictional
film may not lie in what the historian would necessarily con-
sider to be strictly "historical," but rather in a broader
sense of societal and cultural documentation. Arthur Elton
advocates an approach to the feature film which posits it
as a valuable artefact of popular culture, existing within an
anthropological context:

> The fiction film gives a clue to the point of view
> of its time, and the popular attitude towards life.
> Fiction films are today's folklore, and will be as
> useful to the historian, or at least to the anthro-
> pologist, as the ballad and the fairy tale.[28]

Reflection in the feature film can take many forms, and can
operate on many levels, from unconscious manifestations of pre-
vailing societal concerns to self-conscious presentations of
propaganda, ranging from mild suasion to blatant coercion.
As in the actuality film, the feature film can bear unwitting
testimony to immutable physical "truths." For example, on the
strictly physical level, the camera may consciously or unconscious-
ly capture the iconography contained within the environment.

In the course of their spatial conquests , films of
fiction and films of fact alike capture innumerable
components of the world they mirror: huge mass dis-
plays, casual configurations of human bodies and inani-
mate objects and an endless succession of unobtrusive
phenomena. As a matter of fact, the screen shows
itself particularly concerned with the unobtrusive,
the normally neglected.[29]

In addition to capturing the physical reality of a given society

at a given time, the subject matter of fictional film can func-

tion as a barometer for current public concerns and the prevail-

ing attitudes regarding these concerns. Whether or not such

information can be regarded as "historical fact" is likely to

be the stumbling block as far as historians are concerned.

Paul Smith laments the unfortunate tendency of historians to

seek out only the types of films which purport to present

fact and "reality;" the fiction film is "held to be of its na-

ture antithetical to fact and reality, to be make-believe and

invention, in which fact and reality can be shadowed but not

directly conveyed."[30]

Fiction film not only suffers from the so-called stigma

of creative invention, but also from a long tradition of

triviality resulting from its widespread dissemination through-

out the strata of society. It has already been remarked that

contemporary society exhibits an unfortunate proclivity towards

marginalising the significance of products of popular culture

because of their mass appeal. The continued tradition of

pushing such mass phenomena as popular music and film to the

periphery of contemporary history has caused film to have
been recognized as a popular phenomenon while it has large-
ly been dismissed as an historical source. Because of this,
only actuality film has gained some respect for itself as a
purveyor of historical evidence, while "the fiction film has
borne longer and more deeply than other types of film the stig-
ma of being merely trivial and ephemeral popular entertainment,
a vehicle of diversion and escape for uneducated or semi-edu-
cated masses brutalised by their toil, which could have no
relevance to the concerns of serious history."[31] Only the
historical re-enactment has been considered to fall within the
historian's sphere of interest, but this too has usually been
rejected as "falsifying and distorting historical reality."[32]
The so-called "problem" of relating the content of films to
reality is not confined to fiction films, but applies to all
categories of film, and thus should not be touted as a reason
for ignoring the fictional film as an historical source.
Film does not always purposively attempt to reflect reality,
but more often than not "refracts" it.[33]

In order to utilize fictional film as source material
a broader framework of reference is needed. The feature film
must be considered within the context of its creation and
production as well as its reception in order to realize its
full potential and maximize the amount of information that
can be gleaned from it. Of course, the same can be said of
conventional textual documentation.

> It is a fundamental principle of historical work that
> documents are evidence not only of a more or less
> mediated reality to which they have explicit refer-
> ence but also of the process of mediation itself
> and of the mentality and intent of their originators,
> as well, perhaps, as of their receivers. . . . Film
> itself is a part of reality, and films are the pro-
> ducts of real actions and processes, mental and
> physical, capable of exercising real influence on
> those who see them. The reality constituted by
> film is just as much a proper object of the histor-
> ian's attention as that apparently perceived on
> film.[34]

Considering fiction film as the product of a mediation pro-

cess, a crucial factor to take into account is that of whose

attitudes are being expressed in the film product. Film is

not so much an individual art, although films are made by

individual filmmakers, as a corporate art, and the product

of a community. To this end, there has been considerable

discussion concerning the concept of a national consciousness,

as reflected in a nation's filmic output. This concept is

in direct opposition to the auteur theory, which has tradition-

ally conceived of films as the exclusive products of an indi-

vidual, "seen as existing largely outside history, expressing

a vision which owed little to social formations, to geographi-

cal or political boundaries."[35] Edward Buscombe argues against

this theory, stating that the individuals creating the films,

regardless of how unique their vision, have themselves been

formed in a social process. "American films are neither sim-

ply the unmediated expression of a collective consciousness,

nor individual acts of self-expression, but the products of

some possibly rather complicated relationship between the two."[36] On the other hand, Paul Smith feels films need to be considered within the framework of a collective consciousness in order to obtain not only some idea of how films were created, but also how they impacted upon their audiences.[37] He goes on to assert that it will not suffice to simply detect films illustrative of society's preoccupations, but that it is "necessary to go further and to examine what it is that their specific appearance in film can tell us about the provenance, nature, dissemination and influence of those ideas."[38] Smith offers no answers, but feels it is important to at least _ask_ how films can help historians to define, locate, mediate and disseminate such ideas.[39]

Buscombe does not believe in the idea of a national consciousness, and cites the traditional divisions in Ameria which Hollywood has perpetuated rather than transcended, such as the "northern and protestant tradition,"[40] which has resulted in a separate cinematic tradition for minority groups. On the subject of class divisions, the assumption that film was created as a mass entertainment pandering to the "ordinary" majority is also rejected by Buscombe, who states that there is no evidence as to whether middle and working classes in fact attended the same films, and whether Hollywood was acting on the demands of a single audience or a divided one.[41] During the heyday of Hollywood in the first half of this century, those involved in the production of films, or in the regula-

tory institutions controlling film production and content, hailed mostly from the middle class, as did the critics who reviewed the films.[42] These facts, according to Buscombe, point to the absence of any sort of collective consciousness operative behind the creation of American films.

The seminal work in this area is still Siegfried Kracauer's study of German film from 1918 to 1933, which has been blamed for "helping bring on Hitler through sheer morbidity."[43] Kracauer writes: "It is my contention that through an analysis of the German films deep psychological dispositions predominant in Germany from 1918 to 1933 can be exposed - dispositions which influenced the course of events during that time and which will have to be reckoned with in the post-Hitler era."[44] The expressionist films made between the wars, characterized by morbid psychological subjects presented in a grotesque and highly stylized manner, came to be epitomized by Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari (The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, Robert Wiene, 1919). The film was described by one critic as "the first significant attempt at the expression of a creative mind in the medium of cinematography,"[45] while another critic wrote:

> It has the odor of tainted food. It leaves a taste
> of cinders in the mouth.[46]

The nightmarish decor and lighting effects of expressionist film sought to "portray subjective realities in objective terms, to render not simply narratives but states of minds, moods, and atmosphere through the medium of the photographic image . . . ."[47]

The resulting films were felt by Kracauer to expose the German

soul in all its depravity, ultimately to bear fruit in the rise

of Hitler. According to Kracauer,

> What films reflect are not so much explicit credos
> as psychological dispositions - those deep layers
> of collective mentality which extend more or less
> below the dimension of consciousness. Of course,
> popular magazines and broadcasts, bestsellers, ads,
> fashions in language and other sedimentary products
> of a people's cultural life also yield valuable
> information about predominant attitudes, widespread
> inner tendencies. But the medium of the screen
> exceeds these sources in inclusiveness.[48]

An approach to feature film antithetical to the idea

of film as a reflection of collective consciousness is that

which views film as an escape valve through which society

seeks relief from its overwhelming pressures and preoccupations.

Many argue against this view, believing that even in seeking

relief from everyday pressures society will unconsciously

reveal its innermost secrets. Andrew Sarris cites social cri-

tics of the left who argue against just such a theory. They

state that even the most escapist films are revealing in what

they covertly say about society.

> Hence the old King Kong was presumed to be the
> unconscious product of Freud's Civilization and
> Its Discontents, whereas the new King Kong has
> been reportedly programmed to illustrate Fanon's
> Wretched of the Earth. The Graduate was considered
> 'significant' precisely because it evaded the ills
> of Vietnam, and poor Caligari was blamed by Kracauer
> for helping bring on Hitler through sheer morbidity.[49]

This opinion is backed up by Hugh Gray (in the introduction to

André Bazin's <u>What is Cinema</u>? vol. 1, 1967), who sees in the cinema the opportunity to anticipate the ultimate confrontation between man and automation.[50] This opportunity will occur only as long as film functions in the capacity as a reflector and not merely as a purveyor of escapist pleasure.

> Too many for too long, notably in the United States, have preferred to think of it simply as an avenue of escape <u>par excellence</u> from a high-pressure life, for which we are ever seeking - a new world, as it were, to live in. But such so-called paths of escape, pleasant as they are to wander in, are in reality each but a cul-de-sac. The more we see the screen as a mirror rather than an escape hatch, the more we will be prepared for what is to come.[51]

Returning to the issue of considering film as just such a reflector, the question to be asked is exactly what is the screen reflecting? It would seem to be reflecting the attitudes and values of some social group, but there is no easy or simple answer to the question of whose attitudes are expressed in films, or to what extent such attitudes correspond to those of society in general. In the narrowest sense, it could be assumed that the attitudes expressed are those of the social aggregation involved in the production of films, and in the context of the American mass film, those attitudes in most cases would have their origins in the Hollywood film factory. The question to be asked in this context is to what extent do the attitudes and values of Hollywood correspond to those of society in general? Sociologist Leo Rosten has studied the Hollywood film industry of the 1930s and 1940s, and found Hollywood to be "an index of our society

and our culture,"[52] casting the values of American society
into stark relief. Whether or not this tenet is accepted,
it would appear logical to assume that the creators of a
film should assume some responsibility for the content of
a film, whether or not the content is a reflection of an
individual or society in general.

As a reflector of society and a purveyor of attitudes,
feature film can be approached in two ways, according to
Eugene C. McCreary. It can be considered as the work of one
man, usually the director, whose total work can be examined
to reveal recurrent themes, formal styles, and "elements of
film language revelatory of one man's relationship to the
society and epoch in which he lives or lived."[53] In this
approach, the researcher must come to terms with the role of
the director and his potential function as a distiller of
public awareness:

> The director's is rarely, if ever, a seminal mind.
> His importance lies elsewhere - in popularization,
> in vulgarization of contemporary intellectual
> currents, or in bringing to essentially mass audiences
> a heightened awareness of a contemporary situation
> and its implications.[54]

Thus the director is considered as an individual shaped by
society, and reflective of the undercurrents operative in
that society, rather than as a creative and original mind
operating outside the boundaries of society.

McCreary's other approach involves an examination of
the total film production of a society at a given moment, to

reveal a common body of attitudes, values, and concerns; film
as a societal mirror, as it were.

Feature films can also act reflectively in a more subtle
manner, in their function as "indicators of covert culture
values."[56] As a product of popular culture, film can be
studied for what it betrays both overtly and covertly, some-
times revealing underlying contradictions or tensions through
covert values in direct opposition to openly acknowledged
values. An example of this can be seen in the depiction of
blacks in early American films, particularly in D.W. Griffith's
The Birth of a Nation (1915), in which malicious portrayals of
racial stereotypes had to be excised from the original film,
while at the same time there was no desire to present "asser-
tive, competent, virile black heroes."[57] The result of this
conflict between overt and covert cultural values was the
evolution of the neutral, harmless image of the black, epi-
tomized by the "Aunt Jemima" stereotype.

As a medium of reflection, a mirror of socio-cultural
attitudes and iconography, film as a visual record needs to
be subjected to specific analyses in order to maximize the
value of the information contained therein. The major con-
temporary approaches to the analysis of film can be roughly
classified into two categories, according to whether the
analysis is centered on content or structure. The structural
analysis approach examines larger units of cinematic meaning,
while the sign analysis approach (centered on content) exa-
mines single units of meaning within both the visual and

audio components of film (what Karsten Fledelius refers to
respectively as the "macro-plane" and the "micro-plane").[58]
A complete film analysis would have to combine both approaches.

According to William Hughes, we rarely explore the con-
tent of visual images beyond the level of mere recognition,[59]
and ignore the capacity of film to present a plethora of imagery
which can be subjected to the above outlined forms of analyses.
Film considered as a recorder of such images is an important
source of study for semiologists, who analyse film in terms
of the symbols it contains. Peter Wollen (in his influential
Signs and Meaning in the Cinema, 1969), has borrowed a tricho-
tomy of cinematic "signs" from philosopher C.S. Peirce:

> -The Icon: a sign in which the signifier represents
> the signified mainly by its similarity to it, its
> likeness;
>
> -The Index: which measures a quality not because it
> is identical to it but because it has an inherent
> relationship to it;
>
> -The Symbol: an arbitrary sign in which the signifier
> has neither a direct or an indexical relationship to
> the signified, but rather represents it through
> convention.[60]

This type of film analysis has been termed a "structuralist
reformulation of the theory of authorship,"[61] in which "film
is no longer posed as a communication but as an artefact which
is unconsciously structured in a certain way; the author is
no longer seen as the creative source but as an effect of
the film text."[62] According to this view, film is not so
much a product to be consumed by culture, but is a product

of meaning in which the "reading" of the film is emphasized.[63]

The structural approach seeks to provide a larger framework within which to perform an analysis of the micro-plane. The analyst looks for patterns or structures which impinge significantly on film content, patterns which may or may not have been consciously included by the filmmaker. In such analysis the rhythm of the film's edited structure may act as a guide by emphasizing or anticipating key elements of expression or content.[64] In these analyses, the reflective nature of film is taken as a given, and this nature is exploited by subjecting the visual information contained within a film to rigorous scrutiny and classification.

A further avenue for the study of the feature film as a reflective phenomenon is that of critical reactions. The box-office success is often panned by critics, while the box-office failure is often of more merit in terms of the cinematic medium. Both the success and failure can be significant in documenting societal concerns; "whereas the exceptional film will point to the soft spots of a society, the unexceptional run-of-the-mill movie testifies broadly to that society's political, social and economic consensus."[65] The term "consensus," however, conjures up visions of Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany and their respective propaganda machines, which churned out films "indicative of what the totalitarian regime wanted its population to believe, reinforcing acceptable latent convictions about other nationalities while supporting

the basic ideals and policies of the governing elite."[66]
In Soviet Russia, historiography followed a development para-
lleled by the depiction of Russian history in feature films.
"The 'truth of the past' was to be communicated to the present
so that Russia's people could be motivated by it, as in the
case of Sergei Eisenstein's <u>Alexander Nevsky</u>."[67]

Returning to the role of the box office, it would seem
that films cannot be considered as purely <u>unmediated</u> reflec-
tions of any sort of mass or individual consciousness due to
the context of their creation and production. In any dis-
cussion of film as a reflective medium, the role of the box
office must be considered a critical element. The film indus-
try is a corporate art concerned primarily with monetary gain.
Thus films are viewed more as a product than art, and moreover,
as a product which must cater to an existing market in order
to sell. If the film industry can be assumed to operate under
a system of patronage, the ticket-buying public would have to
be considered the ultimate patron. Therefore, in order to
ensure its survival, the industry must of necessity concern
itself with providing a satisfying product for its consumers.

It has long been felt that success at the box office
"was to be obtained by giving the people what they wanted; i.e.
something to which they could relate and which therefore reflec-
ted themselves."[68] Dissenters from this opinion doubt the
value of the box office as a barometer of public preference
for a variety of reasons.

> Firstly, because it cannot tell you whether the
> audience might like not only what it is getting
> but also other things which it is not getting.
> Secondly, people pay for a film before they have
> seen it. Box office receipts therefore strictly
> only record how many people have seen a film, not
> how many people liked it, or thought it expressed
> what they felt.[69]

This argument raises some pertinent and seemingly irrefutable

points. However, it was in fact countered by Siegfried Kra-

cauer some thirty years or so before it was written:

> It has occasionally been remarked that Hollywood
> manages to sell films which do not give the
> masses what they really want. In this opinion
> Hollywood films more often than not stultify
> and misdirect a public persuaded by its own
> passivity and by overwhelming publicity into
> accepting them. However, the distorting in-
> fluence of Hollywood mass entertainment should
> not be overrated. The manipulator depends
> upon the inherent qualities of his material . . . .[70]

It is Kracauer's belief that public discontent with what is

being served up by the filmmaking industry will be immediate-

ly be reflected by decreasing box-office receipts, a situa-

tion which the industry will quickly attempt to remedy by

altering its tactics. But even Kracauer admitted that a

box-office hit may cater to only one of several co-existing

demands, and not necessarily to a particularly specific or

even prevalent one.[71] What Kracauer believes to be ultimate-

ly of more importance than box-office popularity is the popu-

larity of the specific motifs of films, particularly those

motifs which recur both in box-office successes and box-office

flops alike.[72] It is these motifs which testify to the broad consensus of society and which reveal the most about the society which produced them.

The film medium has thus demonstrated its ability to function as a sort of societal mirror. As a document revelatory of cultural iconography as well as the conscious and unconscious manifestations of societal attitudes and desires, the moving image record occupies an integral part of the fabric of modern society and as such unquestionably constitutes a component of the archival record of contemporary society.

NOTES

[1]Judith H. Gann, "Reflections on the Authenticity Question," in <u>Studies in History, Film and Society 1: History and the Audio-Visual Media</u>, edited by Karsten Fledelius, <u>et al</u> (Copenhagen: Eventus, 1979), p. 185.

[2]K.R.M. Short, <u>Feature Films as History</u> (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1981), p. 17.

[3]William Hughes, "The evaluation of film as evidence," in <u>The historian and film</u>, edited by Paul Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 56.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Pierre Sorlin, <u>The Film in History: Restaging the Past</u> (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 15.

[7]Christopher H. Roads, "Film as Historical Evidence," <u>Journal of the Society of Archivists</u> 3 (1966), p. 187.

[8]Anthony Aldgate, <u>Cinema and History: British Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War</u> (London: Scolar Press, 1979), p. 12.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Hughes, "The evaluation of film as evidence," p. 52.

[12]Penelope Houston, "The Nature of the Evidence," <u>Sight and Sound</u> 36 (1967), p. 92.

[13]David A. Cook, <u>A History of Narrative Film</u> (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1981), p. 220.

[14]Forsyth Hardy, editor, <u>Grierson on Documentary</u> (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p. 11.

[15]Cook, <u>A History of Narrative Film</u>, p. 220.

[16]Hardy, <u>Grierson on Documentary</u>, p. 11.

[17]Jay Scott, "Just facts . . . unfortunately," <u>Globe and Mail</u> 07 February (1986), p. 12.

[18]Eugene C. McCreary, "Film and History: Some Thoughts on Their Interrelationship," <u>Societas</u> 1 (1971), pp. 65-66.

[19]Hughes, "The evaluation of film as evidence," p. 64.

[20]Roads, "Film as Historical Evidence," p. 184.

[21]Houston, "The Nature of the Evidence," p. 90.

[22]Ibid.

[23]William H. McNeill, "The Historian and Historical Films: The Present State of Things and a Look at the Future," <u>Journal of Higher Education</u> 29 (1968), p. 391.

[24]J.A.S. Grenville and N. Pronay, "The Historian and Historical Films," <u>University Vision</u> 1 (1968), p. 4.

[25]Fritz Terveen, "Film as a Historical Document," <u>University Vision</u> 1 (1968), p. 24.

[26]K.M. Larose, "Preserving the Past on Film: Problems for the Archivist," <u>Archivaria</u> 6 (1978), p. 143.

[27]Niels Skyum-Nielsen, "The Use of Stills from Fictional Films as Historical Documents," in <u>Studies in History, Film and Society: History and the Audio-Visual Media</u>, edited by Karsten Fledelius, <u>et al</u> (Copenhagen: Eventus, 1979), p. 3.

[28]Arthur Elton, "Film as Source Material for History," <u>A.S.L.I.B. Proceedings</u> 7 (1955), p. 208.

[29]Siegfried Kracauer, <u>From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film</u> (London: Dennis Dobson Ltd., 1974), p. 7.

[30]Paul Smith, "The Fiction Film as Historical Source: Problems and Approaches," in <u>Studies in History, Film and Society 1: History and the Audio-Visual Media</u>, edited by Karsten Fledelius, et al (Copenhagen: Eventus, 1979), p. 202.

[31]Ibid., pp. 201-202.

[32]Ibid., p. 203.

[34]Ibid., pp. 204-205.

[35]Edward Buscombe, "America on screen? Hollywood feature films as social and political evidence" in <u>Politics and the Media: Film and Television for the Political Scientist and the Historian</u>, edited by M.J. Clark (London: Pergamon Press, 1979), p. 27.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Smith, "The Fiction Film as Historical Source," p. 206.

[38]Ibid., p. 207.

[39]Ibid.

[40]Buscombe, "America on screen?", p. 27.

[41]Ibid., p. 28.

[42]Ibid.

[43]Andrew Sarris, Politics and Cinema (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 9.

[44]Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler, p. v.

[45]Ibid., p. 3.

[46]Ibid.

[47]Cook, A History of Narrative Film, p. 115.

[48]Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler, p. 6.

[49]Sarris, Politics and Cinema, p. 9.

[50]André Bazin, What is Cinema? vol. 1 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), p. 7.

[51]Ibid.

[52]Hughes, "The evaluation of film as evidence," p. 68.

[53]McCreary, "Film and History," p. 55.

[54]Ibid., p. 57.

[55]Ibid., p. 55.

[56]Hughes, "The evaluation of film as evidence" p. 71.

[57]Ibid., p. 72.

[58]Karsten Fledelius, "Film Analysis: the Structural Approach," in Politics and the Media: Film and Television for the Political Scientist and the Historian, edited by M.J. Clark (London: Pergamon Press, 1979), p. 106.

[59]Hughes, "The evaluation of film as evidence," p. 51.

[60]James Monaco. How to Read a Film: The Art, Technology, Language, History, and Theory of Film and Media. Revised edition. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 133.

[61]Claire Johnston, "British Film Culture," in Media, Politics and Culture: A Socialist View, edited by Carl Gardener (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1979), p. 84.

[62]Ibid.

[63]Ibid., p. 85.

[64]Fledelius, "Film Analysis," pp. 2-3.

[65]Short, Feature Films as History, p. 32.

[66]Ibid.

[67]Ibid., p. 33.

[68]Jeffrey Richards, Visions of Yesterday (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. xv.

[69]Buscombe, "America on screen?", p. 26.

[70]Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler, pp. 5-6.

[71]Ibid., p. 7.

[72]Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIETY AS AUDIENCE:

FILM INFLUENCE AND IMPACT

Viewing the film medium as a sort of societal mirror, a further issue worthy of consideration is that of the impact of the reflection constituted by the moving image document. Does the message conveyed by film impact significantly upon those who partake of it? Opinion on this issue ranges from that of it being a non-issue to the more commonly held belief, at least in sociological circles, that "feature films exert the most powerful influence in our lives, an influence which in all probability is stronger than that wielded by press and radio."[1] Thus wrote J.P. Mayer in 1946, adding that "value patterns, actual behaviour, (and) the outlook on life generally, are manifestly shaped by film influence."[2] Over twenty years earlier, the impact of film upon audiences had been proclaimed in positively Victorian tones by Donald Ramsey Young: "Social standards are influenced by motion pictures . . . and . . . by the fact that the audience, often young boys and girls, are packed in narrow seats, close together, in a darkened room."[3] This attitude, focussing as it does on the physical environment of the theatre-going experience, was still being echoed in 1942 by U.E. Harding: "We are defaming our morals, corrupting our youth, inflaming our young people, exciting

passion, debauching our children, making prostitutes and criminals through picture-going!"[4]

Today, a more rational view is being propagated through a sociological approach, as exemplified by the work of I.C. Jarvie, who focuses on the social significance of film-going, and the influence of films on groups of people.[5]

> Their unintended social significance stems from
> . . . the fact that they tell stories; stories
> convey information and ideas; information and
> ideas affect the way people act; and stories
> meld people together into audiences -- this
> too affects the way they act. The social conse-
> quences of being an audience are the most impor-
> tant and usually underrated.[6]

Jarvie interprets the story-telling aspect of film content as a form of social control, and supports this tenet by outlining the three major categories of social interaction, as defined by social psychologists, which can potentially be influenced by film-going: "the initiation of both children and adults into the rules, obligations and privileges of social groups (socialization); the effects of social groups on the develop-ment of the individual (personality formation); and the unique characteristics taken on by people in groups (collec-tive behaviour)."[7] According to Jarvie, there are two facets to film as a social phenomenon: content and context. In terms of the sociological model, Jarvie believes context to be more influential than content: "learning, socializa-tion, personality formation, and even the way people form

into and behave in groups may be influenced by movie content;
while socialization, personality formation and group behavior
are certainly affected by movie context."[8] Contrary to the
views of Ramsey Young and Harding, Jarvie believes that the
context of film-going can contribute in a positive way towards
"normal and healthy socialization, personality formation and
group behavior."[9]

The extent of film's psychological impact is determined
not only by the social context of film-going, but also by the
nature of the film-viewing experience itself. The conditions
under which a film is viewed may at first seem to confer a
passive role upon the film-goer, but the very illusory nature
of film as perceived by the viewer involves participation,
both voluntary and involuntary, conscious and unconscious:

> Film is founded upon an illusion and the illusion
> is achieved only through the spectator's unwilled
> and unconscious participation. Most cinematic effects
> depend upon the spectator entering the theater with
> a whole series of visual reactions formed by his
> daily experience.[10]

The evolution of the spectator's increasing participation can
be traced throughout the early history of film, via the work
of Edwin S. Porter, D.W. Griffith, and the Soviets.

> The Brighton School in Britain and Edwin S. Porter
> in the early years of the twentieth century . . .
> decomposed the continuous scene into its component
> shots and the spectator was asked to create the
> temporal and spatial continuity himself. Then
> Griffith in alternate montage . . . asked the spec-
> tator to achieve the psychological unity of two

> spatially separated but temporally parallel events.
> The next step was taken when the Soviet school of
> documentary realism systematically extended Griffith's
> practices of alternate montage to symbolic parallels.
> The conceptual unity was to be created and emotionally
> enlarged by the spectator himself through his identi-
> fication of two factually quite distinct events pos-
> sessing parallel implications.[11]

Thus it can be seen that the film-goer has had an increasingly

active role in the film experience, first through the juxta-

position of opposing shots which had to be combined to achieve

the unity of the story line, and then through the Soviet

system of symbolic montage.

Existing quite separately from the filmmaker's

power of manipulation of images and the psychological ramifi-

cations such manipulation holds for the audience, and yet opera-

ting in tandem with such effects, is the actual physical environ-

ment of the cinema which makes the total film experience possi-

ble. The audience enters into a realm of darkness and isola-

tion, becoming more susceptible to manipulation and suggestion.

> In a movie theater, the only source of light, sound,
> and motion is the screen. This means that the
> spectator's attention is automatically and almost
> forcibly concentrated upon what the screen is con-
> veying. The eye may wander, but very little; it
> is almost impossible to ignore motion or light.[12]

The high resolution of the big screen image in conjunction

with the dense amount of information film is capable of con-

veying, has created a very "hot" medium in McLuhanesque terms,

a medium which is capable of wielding a powerful influence

over its audience. The viewer enters into the film experi-
ence willing to suspend disbelief, willing to give up indivi-
dual identity for a time in the darkened theatre, to enter
a trance-like state. The cinema has become "a shrine at which
modern rituals rooted in atavistic memories and subconscious
desires are acted out in darkness and seclusion from the outer
world."[13] The cinema audience takes on an identity that is
something more than the sum total of its parts; it becomes a
mass entity capable of acting collectively.

> The audience in the cinema is plural. . . . At the
> same time, the audience is singular: It is the im-
> pacted solidarity of so many individuals congrega-
> ted to give up or escape their uniqueness . . . .
> Only a mass as hardened as a fighting unit could
> endure the implacability of a screen pretending to
> be an animated wall, but actually an inert surface.[14]

The mass aspect of the film audience enables the powers be-
hind the production of films to manipulate en masse. "The
audience in the movies typifies the modern crowd, that sham-
bling mass of humanity, so large that it is measured in sta-
tistics, a herd that authority tends, feeds, pacifies, and
regulates: This is the crowd that goes to the factory, the
supermarket, and the bank, the material of armies and mobs."[15]
This crowd that has been observed in such complimentary terms
has itself become a commodity that is sought out by the mass
film industry. Because of the crowd's collective nature, it
is capable of being manipulated in terms of statistics by
those who are behind the production of films, and the crowd re-
flects the effects of such manipulation through the phenomenon

of the box office. The box office becomes a barometer of
public preference, indicative of the satisfaction or dissatis-
faction of the film-going mob with the product it has been
served.

Recent discussion on the film-going experience has cen-
tered on the purported kinship between the state of the film-
viewer and the state of dreaming, or the state "between waking
and sleeping, in which he (the viewer) abandons the rationality
of daily life while not yet completely surrendering to his un-
conscious."[16] The darkened environment of the cinema, the
continuous yet rhythmically interrupted nature of the pro-
jected image, and the lack of social contact work together to
create a semi-hypnotic state in the viewer, in which inhibitions
are suppressed, and the unconscious is more susceptible to
suggestion. Paul Monaco has described films as "dreamlike
reflections of shared, collective concerns of the mass, na-
tional audience."[17] This view is not entirely shared by Ed-
ward Buscombe, although he agrees there is a kinship between
films and dreams. "For just as, according to Freud, dreams
are not the direct expression of our unconscious desires,
but a distorted representation of them after the work of
repression has been performed, so with movies, whatever in
them does correspond to the audience's own thoughts and feel-
ings has been worked upon by other factors."[18]

The relationship between films and dreaming has been
carried even further, by comparing the physical characteris-

tic of rapid eye movement (R.E.M.) in sleep to the "flicker"
effect sometimes discernible on screen, as well as to the
eye movements of the film viewer as he or she watches the
film.

> The eye movements of the dreamer are not random
> but are 'associated with the visual characteris-
> tics of [his] dream.' The same is true of watch-
> ing a movie: 'The film spectator occupies a
> fixed seat, but only physically. . . . Aestheti-
> cally he is in permanent motion as his eye iden-
> tifies with the lens of the camera, which perma-
> nently shifts in distance and direction.'[19]

Similarly, the instantaneous cuts in film have been likened
to the instantaneous nature of transitions in dreaming.[20]

Amos Vogel sees a further powerful determinant operating
upon the unconscious in the darkness which lies at the very
heart of image technology:

> The very darkness enveloping the viewer is more
> complete than he realizes; for the essence of
> cinema is not light, but a secret compact be-
> tween light and darkness. Half of all the time
> at the movies is spent by the transfixed victims
> of this technological art in complete darkness.
> . . . Could it be precisely during the periods
> of total darkness . . . that our voracious sub-
> conscious, newly nourished by yet another pro-
> vocative image, 'absorbs' the work's deeper
> meaning and sets off chains of associations?[21]

Thus the periods of darkness which interrupt the projected
images could be viewed as a powerful influence which causes
the subconscious to absorb the images it is presented with
on a deeper level. Reinforcing this power of darkness is
the primitive influence of the image, which pre-dates verbal

communication and is assumed to act upon a deeper level of
the subconscious. Vogel states that

> . . . In man's evolution, images antedate words
> and thought, thus reaching deeper, older, more
> basic layers of the self. . . . As holy today as
> in man's pre-history, the image is accepted as if
> it were life, reality, truth. It is accepted on
> a feeling- rather than mind-level.22

From the foregoing discussion there would seem to exist
some degree of consensus regarding the power of the film
medium to exert a certain amount of influence over its audi-
ence, be it through the power of the image, the power of
light and/or darkness, the nature of the theatre environment,
or the social context of film-going. It is perhaps this
very potential for power and influence that has worked against
the medium where the issue of controlling the content of film
is concerned. If there was not some concern about the influ-
ence of film content, there would be no need for the institu-
tions which seek to regulate film content. The very fact of
the existence of such institutions would seem to reinforce
the idea that film influences its audience in no uncertain
terms.

The regulation of film content can take two forms: cen-
sorship, and control. The distinction between the two has
been defined as follows:

> Censorship constitutes the legal imposition of
> restraints upon the production, publication, and
> sales of some photograph, film, art object, book,
> magazine, or other reading material in order to

make it unavailable to the general public as well
as upon the production or performance of any public
entertainment. . . . Control is practiced by those
who have no legal authority to censor or threaten
to censor but use persuasion and even coercion to
restrict freedom of speech.[23]

There are several problems arising from the issue of film cen-

sorship regarding the dual position of film as an art form

and a popular cultural artefact. In addition, there are prob-

lems arising from the position in society of the persons or

regulatory agencies which seek to restrict the content of

film.

The first law of censorship - and probably the only
important one not inscribed on the statute books -
is this: in a democracy, the more popular the art
form, the greater the demands for censorship of it.
This theorem has two corollaries. First, the quality
of the art has little to do with the matter. Second,
those who arrogate to themselves the privilege of
exercising censorship may or may not be cultured,
unbiased and/or sincere.[24]

In 1948 the United Nations passed the original version

of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the embodi-

ment of the concept of freedom of expression, as contained in

Article 19: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and

expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions with-

out interference and to see, receive and impart information

and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."[25]

Since this declaration was passed restrictions dealing with

libel, national security, war propaganda, and the advocacy of

hatred have been added.[26] Such restrictions would appear to

have little to do with film as an art form or popular enter-

tainment.

Film censorship can range from the cutting of a single image, a scene, or a script, to radical re-editing of an entire film. Why are films subject to this kind of censorship? According to Judy Wolfe, it is because films are believed to be the most influential of today's media, and it is assumed that people

> . . . tend to believe what they see on the screen
> more readily than what they read in books or hear
> on the radio. The corollary of this is that be-
> haviour will be modified as a result of seeing cer-
> tain emotions or beliefs or actions portrayed on
> the screen.[27]

The power of film to influence behaviour has been translated into different modes of action by various governments at different times. The cinema has been widely used for propagandizing in both the eastern bloc and the third world, while in the western hemisphere censorship has been concerned more with portrayals of pornography and violence, "in the hope that this will reduce perverse, contrary, or abusive behaviour in the population."[28] I.C. Jarvie has accurately pinpointed a basic flaw in the so-called logic of censorship, in that while it is assumed that people have no defenses to resist blatant suasion, it is nonetheless assumed that "a privileged few . ... can resist manipulation and hence can and should protect the rest."[29] Jarvie also advocates the belief that the influence film is capable of wielding over an audience is extremely limited due to varying audience reactions arising out of diverse social, cultural, political and economic contexts of

film, and that no two audiences will react in the same way to
a given film because of the nature of the audience's composi-
tion.[30]   Andrew Tudor puts forward an argument against censor-
ship by stating that at best the viewer's response to film is
mainly emotional, and is therefore only a temporary effect:

> Indeed, if the medium can be said to have any charac-
> teristic in and of itself it is surely this high de-
> pendence on a predominantly emotional effect. . . . It
> does not follow that the movies are therefore an out-
> standingly powerful medium of persuasion. Long-term
> attitude change is very different to short-time emo-
> tional involvement.[31]

The degree of influence of film thus seems to be an issue of
dispute where censorship is concerned.

Whatever the influence of the film medium, censorship it-
self remains an undisputed fact. Many arguments in favour of
censorship have been presented, but the main reasons behind
the practice of censorship would seem to fall into three broad
categories: "protection of community standards, morality, or
religion;"[32] "enforcement of a dominant culture;"[33] and "pro-
tection or promotion of a given political regime."[34] According
to Judy Wolfe, there seems to be a somewhat incestuous relation-
ship between these competing imperatives:

> Where there is censorship to protect a political re-
> gime, the first two reasons for censorship will also
> be found. Where there is discrimination, there may or
> may not be political censorship but there will be an
> insistence on the maintenance of community standards.[35]

Censorship seems to exist in its most severe form during and
directly after periods of instability, upheaval, and revolution.

For example, under the Allende government in Chile many films
were produced by Chile Film. Following the overthrow of the
Allende government, the military destroyed the film industry
by dismantling Chile Film. Many of the country's leading film
directors, including Eduardo Paredes, were killed, while several
others fled into exile.[36] A similar situation exists even today
in South Africa, a country currently besieged by widespread
civil and political unrest. Rigorous control is maintained
over films and "unpleasant truths"[37] are routinely excised.

> 'Miscegenation is, of course, not permitted, and
> a major character - the black secret agent - was
> cut from Live and Let Die by the distributors be-
> fore it was sent to South Africa, because of her
> relationship with James Bond.' Violence of any
> kind is not permitted in films that are to be
> shown to black audiences.[38]

Although the major impetus for censorship usually stems
from state authorities, there also exists a good deal of self-
regulation within the industry itself, either in anticipation
of what the authorities would perceive as objectionable, or
so the film receives a less restrictive audience rating, or be-
cause it in fact supports the status quo.[39] Hollywood is ob-
viously a good illustration of this model, as censorship is
often operative during the pre-production process itself.

In conclusion, it would seem that there exists some sort
of consensus concerning the ability of the film medium to not
only reflect certain facets of society, but also to wield con-
siderable influence over those who partake of the reflections,

despite the opinions of dissenters like Andrew Tudor. Why else would censorship exist, if not to "protect" certain elements of society from unpleasant or unpalatable "truths" about itself? If film did not demonstrate a considerable impact upon its audience, censorship would not be an issue. It would appear that censorship seeks to compromise the reflective nature of the film medium by darkening a portion of the mirror's surface and interrupting the intended message.

> If the filmmaker is a member of society and if the message presented in a film is a product or a reaction to the society then it may be fairly said that the film is a reflection of that society. The message may not be a pretty one, but the question must be asked: is the pain in the message about that society caused by the film or by the society? It seems rather than attempt to improve the face of society, the censor would rather break the mirror.[40]

The debate over censorship would seem to reinforce both the reflective and influential aspects of the film document. As a peculiarly powerful and integral component of the tissue of society, the film document must be considered for archival preservation with specific reference not only to its physical nature, but moreover to the reflective and influential nature of its content.

NOTES

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[5] I.C. Jarvie, Movies as Social Criticism: Aspects of Their Social Psychology (Metuchen, N,J,: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1978), p .ix.

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[10] Eugene C. McCreary, "Film and History: Some Thoughts on Their Interrelationship," Societas 1 (1971), p. 63.

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[17] Paul Monaco, Cinema and Society: France and Germany During the Twenties (New York: Elsevier, 1976), pp. 10-11.

[18]Edward Buscombe, "America on screen? Hollywood feature films as social and political evidence," in <u>Politics and the Media: Film and Television for the Political Scientist and the Historian</u>, edited by M.J. Clark (London: Pergamon Press, 1979), p. 26.

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[20]Ibid., pp. 8-9.

[21]Vogel, <u>Film as a Subversive Art</u>, p. 10.

[22]Ibid., p. 11.

[23]Perry C. Cotham, <u>Obscenity, Pornography, and Censorship</u> (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1973), p. 79.

[24]Murray Schumach, <u>The Face on the Cutting Room Floor: The story of movie and television censorship</u> (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1964), p. 3.

[25]Judy Wolfe, "The Filmmaker and Human Rights: Some Reflections," in <u>Forbidden Films: The Filmmaker and Human Rights</u>, edited by Marc Glassman (Toronto: Toronto Arts Group for Human Rights and blewointmentpress, 1984), p. 4.

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[27]Ibid.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid., p. 5.

[35]Ibid.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Ibid., p. 6.

[40]Ibid., p. 7.

CHAPTER V

ARCHIVAL SELECTION OF THE MOVING IMAGE DOCUMENT

If film can be viewed as a medium of reflection, the pro-
blem for the archives concerned with preserving film becomes
one of selecting which moving image documents to retain as a
valuable representation of such reflection. The issue of se-
lection is complicated by the fact that, having come of age
in an era characterised by printed media, many archivists
today are either unfamiliar with the characteristics of other
media, or consider it too ephemeral or popular to constitute
a major research resource for the twentieth century. The
significance of the so-called "special" media in the context
of the new information age needs to be clarified for the bene-
fit of archivists and researchers alike, but in the meantime,
steps must be taken to preserve such records in order to com-
plete the historical "picture" of contemporary society that
is being created by the holdings in archival repositories.

The moving image document has demonstrated itself to be
capable of recording diverse facets of contemporary culture
and society, from empirically "real" events and popular icono-
graphy to the conscious or unconscious manifestations of so-
cietal values. As such, the medium must be considered to con-
stitute a major informational record of this century, a record
which could reasonably be assumed to be of considerable histori-

cal significance. Therefore it would follow that such a record should be preserved for the future benefit of researchers.

Given the quantity of moving images produced by society, the issue for archives is how much to retain. If all moving images can be considered as reflective of society in some way, how is the archivist to decide which to preserve for posterity and which to reject? This is a crucial issue for the archival community, and is an issue on which there has to date been little consensus. The extremes of current opinion run the gamut from the view that absolutely everything should be preserved, to the advocation of modern records management techniques to designate production elements and related documentation for archival retention during the film production process itself.[1]

One of the basic problems thwarting the development of selection criteria is the widely-held belief that "the present is singularly ill-equipped to decide what will prove to be of historical significance in the future."[2] Indeed, it is nearly impossible to predict accurately which events or cultural artefacts will have the mantle of historical importance conferred upon them by the passing of time. The alternative to such acts of near-prescience which by necessity cast the archivist into the role of a modern-day prophet, is to cover all conceivable bases by collecting everything. This is an alternative supported by many archivists and historians.

As far as the historian is concerned, film and
television are media of mass communications first
and foremost. The historian needs, ideally, the
whole of what the . . . public was given through
the media in order to be able to apply statistical/
analytical methods.[3]

This view is supported by Clive Coultass, who believes that

the entire process of selection could be avoided by preserving

as much as possible:

Decisions about what to preserve and what to reject
are so arbitrary and suspect that it is better in
principle to keep everything. Any kind of film in
time becomes interesting to someone.[4]

Coultass believes that even the most mundane films can have

informational value, and that this sort of value must be

differentiated from a film's potential artistic value.[5] In

terms of mass communications, and in an effort to preserve

the totality of events recorded by the media, Coultass advo-

cates universal retention on international terms in order to

maintain "a visual record of contemporary events on an interna-

tional scale."[6]

The main drawback of selection would seem to be that by

its very nature it throws the archivist into the unenviable

position of having to make godlike decisions of life and

death for films, whether or not such powers are deserved.

This argument against selection has its origins early in the

history of film archives. Indeed, Henri Langlois, one of the

original founders of the International Federation of Film

Archives (F.I.A.F.), "maintained that any selection criteria

was indefensible, that no archivist had the right to play

God in determining which films would live and which would die."[7]

This sentiment was also voiced by some of the early propaga-

tors of general archival theory, who, while acknowledging that

some amount of selection was necessary, felt that selection

by the archivist was incorrect.

> Some archival theorists argued that triage, or
> selection, while evidently necessary, should be
> the responsibility of the administrators directly
> involved in generating the documents in the first
> place. Hilary Jenkinson held that this reduction
> should take place before the documents reached the
> archives, and that it was the archivist's task to
> conserve all the records entrusted to the archives.[8]

This type of selection as it pertains to film will be discussed

later.

In addition to the overt informational value contained

in film, it has been argued that "all films . . . have some

sociological value, regardless of how prosaic the subject

matter or the treatment."[9] Sociological value potentially

embraces not only the reflective quality of moving images, but

also the impact and influence film exercises over its audience.

In the Manuel d'Archivistique (Paris, 1970), film is

classified into three major categories: oeuvres dramatiques,

oeuvres artistiques, and documents d'historiques, and it is

proposed that only documents historiques should be retained

by archives.[10] However, in the course of defining the term

"historical," the manual concludes that

> . . . not only do actualities qualify . . ., but
> fiction films that reflect the manners, mores, and
> language of the society that produced them qualify
> as well. Such an interpretation could embrace all
> moving images, particularly when the impact of the
> images in relation to the mass audience they attract
> is considered.[11]

This approach, supporting as it does the concept of total

retention, has been attacked in terms of the possible conse-

quences it would have if put into action: filling the vaults

"with material of marginal value (ephemera in terms of content

and form) until there is no storage capacity left for records

of obvious value (based on form, content or association)

. . . ."[12]

An alternative to total retention is what could be termed

"modified total retention." This approach, which has not

gained much popularity, involves the retention of all moving

images for a certain set period at which point it is presumed

that the passing of time will have provided some semblance of

historical perspective.[13] While such an approach would relieve

the pressure on present-day archivists, otherwise forced to

make godlike decisions concerning selection, it would likely

pose extreme and possibly insurmountable difficulties regar-

ding storage space, at least initially, not to mention prob-

lems arising from establishing some sort of consensus on re-

tention and disposal schedules. Such practical obstacles to

total retention have caused some film archivists, grappling

with the morality of destroying moving images, to advocate

the establishment of a "world-wide network of archives,"[14]

which would conceivably make it both possible and practicable

to preserve all moving images and eliminate the contentious

issue of selection.

However attractive the proposition of total retention may

seem, at least in theory, it seems unlikely to translate into

universal practice due to overwhelming problems concerning

storage space, international coordination, and mounting costs.

It would seem that the concept of total retention is workable

only in the "ideal world," and that selection of some sort

is the only really feasible alternative at present, despite

the possibility of new storage technologies in the not so dis-

tant future. "Even with the possibility of applying the emer-

ging technologies of the videodisc and the digital encoding of

moving images to the development of new, low-cost storage me-

diums and instantaneous modes of diffusion, this generation of

moving image archivists will still have to apply appraisal

policies to prevent the archives from sinking under the weight

of accessions, and the researcher of the future from drowning

in a sea of redundant, and trivial images."[15] This last issue

raises the one overwhelmingly positive aspect about selection:

the elimination of so-called "ephemera" from valuable storage

space, a cost-effective measure which has always been one of

the key arguments on the side of selection.

Implicit in the concept of selection of moving images is

the issue of appraisal, in order to determine the suitability

of the document for retention or disposal. To date no specific definition for the appraisal of moving images has been presented, but there is something to be gained from examining the concepts contained in a standard definition of appraisal as it applies to textual records. mAppraisal has been defined as "the process of determining the value and thus the disposition of records based upon their current administrative, legal, and fiscal use; their evidential and informational or research value; their arrangement; and their relationship to other records."[16] This definition has more relevance to textual records of corporate, government, or private creation, but some points of significance can be gleaned by ascertaining areas of relevance to the film medium. Appraising the historical significance of moving images is problematical because moving images themselves cannot always be categorized as having evidential value in the Schellenbergian sense, that is, those records "necessary to provide an authentic and adequate documentation of its the creating body's organization and functioning,"[17] nor can they always be judged for their value to administrative or legal use, although fiscal use could perhaps be loosely translated as pertaining to the potential of the feature film for monetary gain. The arrangement of moving images is not usually a significant factor, unless this concept is applied to the edited structure within the film or the accompanying textual documentation. Moving images can have significant relationships with other film records, either in subject matter, context, or treatment, or by being

the products of the same filmmaker or director or cinematographer.
While moving images themselves are most likely to be of infor-
mational value (that is, containing information on persons,
places, subjects, and so on[18]), and hence have high research
value, they are intimately linked to textual records of high
evidential value.

> It should be clear, based on any understanding of
> the way in which moving images are produced and
> distributed throughout the world, that the end
> product, the images themselves, have little or
> no evidentiary value. The related documentation -
> production files, financial and personnel records,
> contracts and correspondence - may reveal how the
> production company or administrative entity . . .
> functioned, but the value of the end product, while
> it may speak volumes to the producer's purpose,
> is primarily informational.[19]

At the 1980 Belgrade Conference UNESCO formulated a
"Recommendation for the Safeguarding and Preservation of
Moving Images" designed to cover "those moving images which
are intended for communication or distribution to the public
or are made for documentation purposes."[20] The Recommendation
was "to protect moving images from being destroyed."[21] The
introduction of a mandatory system of deposit for nationally-
produced moving images was recommended, although no details
on such a system were given, apart from specifying such pro-
ductions be preferably deposited in the form of pre-print
material.[22] The Recommendation lamented the subjective nature
of selection and the fact that sheer volume often necessitated
a denial of the ideal situation in which all moving images

would be preserved. While specifics are avoided, particular
mention is made of those moving images "which, because of
their educational, cultural, artistic, scientific, and histori-
cal value, form part of a nation's cultural heritage should be
retained on a priority basis."[23] A provision is also made
to the effect that moving images should not be disposed of
until a future date allowing for some degree of historical
perspective.[24] Such guidelines do not state much that is not
already known by archives involved in collecting film.

Few archives have developed fully articulated guidelines
concerning selection, rejection, and disposal of film material.
Even international authorities like Unesco and F.I.A.F. would
appear to be hedging the issue when they state that "every
archive must develop its own criteria for acquiring films,"[25]
bearing in mind the proposed shape of a repository's collec-
tion, including the types and physical formats of films to
be acquired. The preservation of nationally-produced films
seems to be an agreed-upon priority, but the basic problem
of selection would appear to be an issue that has to be resol-
ved by the individual repository, in accordance with its gene-
ral mandate and facilities. The function and purpose of a film
archive will be significant in developing selection criteria,
although the matter of determining a repository's function
may be less than clear. Ken Larose has categorized the gene-
ral purposes of a film archive into three basic functions:

     . . . to document an art form; to record a mass
     medium; and to be the repository for motion picture

images of real people, events, and places. It is
tempting to add a fourth function, that film archives
are expected to house visual records for future use
by historians.[26]

The application of this type of definition could conceivably

constitute a call for total retention, embracing as it does

films judged valuable for artistic merit, as well as those

films documenting both actualities and a contemporary mass

phenomenon. It has already been stated that such mass reten-

tion seems only practicable in the ideal situation, while in

the real world some degree of selection will have to take

place in view of the volume of available material. The re-

pository's aim in this respect has been described by Vladimir

Opela of Czechoslovakia as the attempt "to preserve all re-

cords of permanent documentary value while leaving out less

valuable documents,"[27] with documentary value being deter-

mined by both the importance and range of the content of the

film record, as well as the form and degree of authenticity

of the record.[28] According to Opela, any assessment of moving

images has to take into account "their future practical utili-

zation, the period in which they were made, and in the case

of foreign-made records, the copyright and the possibility of

acquiring the record from its originator."[29] Examples of

further criteria used to determine what moving images are wor-

thy of retention include: content and treatment; aesthetics;

those films documenting the history and technological develop-

ment of the industry; films illustrative of milestones, "firsts," box-office successes, trends, "stars," the work of certain directors, producers, cinematographers, and so on;[30] films "reflecting the political and social character of a period and environment;"[31] film adaptations of famous works of literature; remakes of successful films of the past; films awarded at important film festivals; and films illustrative of certain genres and national "schools" of filmmaking, and their development.[32] Still other criteria include: films reflecting the influence of other media and the completion of existing collections;[33] films documenting ethnic or racial minorities; films which "challenge contemporary community standards and/or censorship laws on what is acceptable in subject matter, treatment or form;"[34] and those films which "explore the relationship between the audience and the screen, or which reflexively examine the image-making process."[35] Also considered are "variant versions of moving images regarded as 'classics' which are valuable for film study and for the purpose of film restoration; 'outtakes' from such productions if significant in documenting the process of production; and 'cuts' made from such productions on demand of censorship authorities."[36]

The development of selection criteria can be made less arbitrary for certain periods in film history for which all or most films are preserved for reasons of rarity and poor representation in existing collections. For example, any

film produced prior to 1920 is always acquired, and it is usual-
ly only for films from the period later than the mid-1920s that
selection becomes operative. The American Film Institute (Li-
brary of Congress) bases its principles of selection on survi-
val rates for certain periods of film development:

    a) <u>1894-1920</u>: Perhaps 15% of the features survive
       and possibly 10-20% of the shorts. Therefore
       <u>all</u> film from this period, regardless of country
       of origin should be preserved.

    b) <u>1921-1930</u>: The survival rate for features has
       grown from 12% to 20% over the past twelve years.
       Using the AFI Catalog as a base, some selection
       should be made when encountering routine B fea-
       tures of obscure companies whose output is ade-
       quately represented, and no socially redeeming
       elements can be discerned.

    c) <u>1930-1935</u>: With a number of notable exceptions,
       the bulk of the studio output still exists and is
       more or less under control, and virtually all of
       the b/w films will end up being preserved from
       these companies. Some selection is needed for
       the B product and small company productions . . . .[38]

A further selection issue involves the physical makeup of
the film base itself, particularly those films on a nitrate
base. Because of its inherently unstable chemical composi-
tion cellulose nitrate deteriorates quickly and must be stored
under strictly controlled conditions in order to retard deteri-
oration of the image, and possible ignition. This type of
film stock was phased out and replaced by a more stable ace-
tate base in the early 1950s. Therefore <u>all</u> films produced
before circa 1950 on nitrate base (only 35 mm stock is invol-
ved) should be collected and transferred onto acetate "safety"
stock before the image has deteriorated beyond salvage.

Certain categories of film have traditionally been rejected by archival repositories. These include: stock footage lacking proper identification or textual documentation; out-takes (because of sheer volume); pre-production and distribution elements including subtitle bands, main and concluding titles;[39] material already present in the holdings or duplicated in other archives; amateur compilations, productions and home movies; material which is incomplete or in poor physical condition; material available only at unreasonable cost or with heavy restrictions on use; and foreign films otherwise available in the country which are already preserved in the F.I.A.F. archive of the country of production.[40]

Some revision of the above-outlined classification would seem to be called for, at least with regard to out-takes, certain production elements, and amateur footage, where content may reasonably be seen to override the intractable nature of the footage's format. Rejection of film material should not take place without due consideration of the content of the material contained within a cumbersome form. A case in point is that of out-takes, which often constitute a valuable record of censored or otherwise sensitive or "undesirable" material, as well as technically inadequate or repetitious footage. For example, the present author recently spent several weeks at the National Film, Television and Sound Archives in Ottawa, organizing a collection based on Allan King's _Warrendale_ (1966), a documentary filmed in a residential treatment center

for emotionally disturbed children. The collection, consisting of 615 cans of film (containing over one thousand rolls of 16 mm film), was almost entirely comprised of out-take material, most of which was to be retained by the repository based on the content of the material. The documentary had originally been commissioned by the CBC, who refused to air it upon completion for reasons of profanity. Warrendale, despite the controversy surrounding it, went on to a limited theatrical release, and shared top honours at the Cannes film festival with Antonioni's Blow-Up. The controversial nature of the treatment depicted in the film (Warrendale director John Brown's "holding" therapy, wherein children vented their rage while being pinned down by two or three staff members) resulted in the closure of the clinic shortly after filming was completed. Thus, the record constituted by the outs was valuable for a variety of reasons: the documentary was a Canadian production by an eminent Canadian documentary filmmaker; it won international acclaim; it was controversial in nature, both in terms of its production history and the treatment depicted; it was noteworthy for the time in terms of the shooting ratio (some forty hours of original footage were eventually edited down to approximately one hundred minutes); and today still stands as a landmark in cinema verité documentary history.

It would therefore seem reasonable to assume that outs and similar film material should be judged by content, and not solely by their physical structure. The same could be said of amateur film, which, while it is sometimes less than optimal in technical

terms, may contain unique or otherwise undocumented material. Certain production elements may also prove valuable. If the repository does not already possess a reasonable copy of a certain film title, it may be more cost-effective to make a composite print from the appropriate printing elements, if it has such at its disposal, than purchasing a composite release print commercially.

Many of the decisions involved in carrying out the types of selection outlined above, subjective and arbitrary as some of them are, could be avoided altogether if a certain amount of selection was exercised before material reached the archives. There has been some call for the implementation of modern records management techniques during the production or even pre-production stage of filmmaking.

> All production elements (negatives, prints, video-tapes, etc.), and related documentation, should be identified, designated, and scheduled so that the disposition of the elements can be controlled at every stage of the production/diffusion process. The short term (3-5 years) retention of the broadest possible selection of moving images should be the objective, to provide opportunity for a final selection with some sense of historical perspective.[41]

Such a system would appear to satisfy both the proponents and opponents of the practice of selection. It would retain a broad sample of valuable material while weeding out the more ephemeral elements before anything arrived at the archive, while taking into account the fallibility of contemporary judgements concerning historical significance. However, this system would require close cooperation between film archives

and the film industry, and such coordination seems to be
the exception, rather than the rule. One such exception is
the Films Archives of the Czechoslovak Film Institute. "All
national film productions are systematically monitored, and all
production elements, whether negatives or prints, domestic or
foreign, in all categories of production, are scheduled either
for retention for a period of years, and then disposal at the
end of that period, or for deposit with the Archives for long
term retention."[42] This program controls all significant pro-
duction elements from the time they are created to the point
of their ultimate archival disposition. Control to such a
degree is likely possible only in countries where film pro-
duction is centrally controlled by the state.[43] Difficulties
possibly encountered in such a system include both the time
involved in itemized scheduling, as well as reaching a con-
sensus on periods of retention and the ultimate disposition
of film elements. In addition, related textual documentation
should ideally be included in the scheduling process, inclu-
ding material created during production (production files,
correspondence, receipts, scripts, graphics), as well as the
by-products of distribution (critical reviews, interviews,
press books, and so on).[44]

In conclusion, the alternatives regarding the selection
of moving image documents in an archival setting would appear
to fall into two broad categories: to select, or to not
select. By far the easiest to justify in terms of satisfying

all potential needs of future users would be to practice no
selection and preserve everything. This practice would elimi-
nate the need to second-guess the needs of future researchers.
It would also remove a good deal of responsibility from the
shoulders of the beleaguered archivist, who is forced to act
presciently by the very nature of selection, and is the one
who will be blamed when future users discover the record they
need was not preserved. The reflective nature of the moving
image document would also seem to count in favour of saving
everything, as every film record reflects something about
society, and thus could conceivably be of interest to someone,
sometime.

The main problem lying in the way of total retention is
that of inadequate storage space and lack of funds to ensure
the facilities necessary for the maintenance of such a collec-
tion. In the face of cut-backs and decreased archival spending,
it seems unlikely that this situation will change in the near
future, so unless there are drastic improvements in low-cost
storage technology, the only viable alternative would seem to
be to practice some degree of selection while attempting to
preserve the broadest and most comprehensive sampling of the
available moving image informational universe. The nature of
a repository's collection will have to be determined by the re-
pository's overall mandate, bearing in mind the general cri-
teria established by authorities like Unesco and F.I.A.F. con-
cerning the significance of the moving image document, and
such preservation imperatives as the documentation of national

film production.

The issue of selection could be considerably simplified
by the utilization of records management techniques to cull
ephemera before it ever arrived at a repository to confound the
archivist. The scheduling of production elements would not only
be an efficient way to control a substantial portion of the
film record, but would also allow for the development of some
semblance of historical perspective before the ultimate dispo-
sition of the record was reached. The implementation of manage-
ment of this type would require close cooperation with the
film industry itself, and while it would initially involve a
good deal of effort to set up, in light of the savings in time
and money it would bring to archives, it would seem to be well
worth the effort. This type of endeavour appears to work best
in a nation where filmic output is centralized under one
authority, and there is one national film archive. Although
this system could be implemented in a country such as Canada
which does not have a centralized film industry, it would be
much simpler to implement in conjunction with a single na-
tional film archive. The existence of one major national film
archive per country would seem to simplify other matters as
well. If a nation houses several competing film repositories
there will be a greater risk of duplication of effort and
competition, both of which would result in a less than optimal
use of available resources. In this situation, individual
repository mandates would increase in prominence and importance,
and would necessitate the evolution of clearly-developed, arti-

culated and specific selection criteria. As the development
of such seems to be impossible with just one major film reposi-
tory currently in Canada, it would appear that for reasons of
resources and expenditure, the idea of one major film archive
per country is the most viable at present. It would not be
in the best interests of cost-effectiveness to duplicate the
sophisticated equipment necessary to house and access film all
across the country, when a centralized film archive could ade-
quately preserve those film records representative of a nation's
filmic output.

In the final analysis, it would seem that the nature of
the film document should dictate the most appropriate mode of
selection. The development of any selection criteria will of
necessity have to take into account not only the physical struc-
ture of film (including condition and film base, and moreover,
age), but also the typology of the film and its informational
content. For certain categories of film, such assessment
may be sufficient. For others, like the feature film, apprai-
sal must also take into account the position of film in society,
particularly with regard to its reflective nature, popular
appeal, and influence.

NOTES

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[7]Kula, The Archival appraisal of moving images , p. 2.

[8]Ibid., p. 23.

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[13]Ibid., p. 45.

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[23] Ibid.

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[25] Kula, The Archival appraisal of moving images, p. 27.

[26] K.M. Larose, "Preserving the Past on Film," Archivaria 6 (1978), p. 137.

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[28] Ibid., pp. 10-11.

[29] Ibid., p. 12.

[30] Kula, The Archival appraisal of moving images, pp. 42-43.

[31] Blažena Urgošikova, "System of Archival Selection of Moving Images in the Prague Film Archive," in Problems of Selection in Film Archives by the International Federation of Film Archives (Brussels: F.I.A.F., 1980), p. 17.

[32] Ibid., pp. 17-18.

[33] International Federation of Film Archives, Problems of Selection in Film Archives (Brussels: F.I.A.F., 1980), pp. 134-135.

[34] Kula, The Archival appraisal of moving images, p. 95.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Larry Karr, "The American Situation," in Problems of Selection in Film Archives by the International Federation of Film Archives (Brussels: F.I.A.F., 1980), p. 58.

[38] International Federation of Film Archives, Problems of Selection, p. 134.

[39] Karr, "The American Situation," pp. 61-62.

[40] International Federation of Film Archives, Problems of Selection, pp. 135-136.

[41]Kula, <u>The Archival appraisal of moving images</u>, pp. 96-97.

[42]Ibid., p. 31.

[43]Ibid., p. 32.

[44]Ibid., p. 89.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Society is presently overwhelmed by an efflorescence of
information recorded in a variety of diverse forms. The
characteristics and morphology of the special media constitu-
ting the records of the post-industrial information age are
effecting a change in the form and nature of contemporary his-
torical evidence. The preservation of historical records has
traditionally fallen to a nation's archival repositories,
which increasingly find themselves in a position of having to
act prophetically in order to preserve records which may become
imbued with historical significance by the passing of time.
The capacity to act with prescience may be crucial in saving
many of the new media which are in danger of disappearing due
to their ephemeral nature, combined with a general lack of
regard for their research potential. In order to preserve
such media, archivists and researchers alike need to be cog-
nizant of the extent to which the new media of record have
permeated society, as well as the degree of their influence.
The present study has concentrated on one such medium, that
of filmic moving images, with specific reference to issues
concerning the medium's physical morphology, as well as how
the reflective nature of content impinges upon the selection
of moving images for permanent archival preservation.

In the case of film, a long tradition of benign neglect
due to its position as a product of mass popular culture has

significantly impaired its acceptance as an historical record.
Film has long been recognized as a mass phenomenon, but the
so-called "stigma" of mass popularity has thwarted its recog-
nition as a societal document of historical import. As a
phenomenon of mass culture, the film document occupies a unique
dual role in the fabric of contemporary society due to its re-
flective nature, and the influence it wields over its audience.
Throughout its history, film has demonstrated the ability to
not only reflect or "refract" manifestations of societal con-
cerns, but to also influence and manipulate its audience through
the message it conveys. The following present-day example is
offered to illustrate both the reflective and influential na-
ture of film. In recent years Hollywood has produced a num-
ber of films reflecting the anti-Soviet sentiment resulting
from strained East-West relations. Films like Red Dawn, Rambo,
and Rocky IV were recently cited at a Soviet press conference
as having spawned a pathology of hatred against the Soviet
Union. The reaction to such condemnation is already apparent
in the American film industry, as exemplified by the announce-
ment of production of The Russkies, in which a Soviet spy
submarine is stranded in a small town on the American coast.
The film is being touted as the antithesis of those films which
have traditionally portrayed the Russians as maniacal enemies
of the West.

    This example is illustrative of film's potential for
both reflection and distortion. A knowledge of the nature of
the medium should make apparent those factors contributing to

distortion and thus make it possible to account for such when
utilizing the film document as a research tool. If film is to
be preserved for future use, those who select and care for it
will need to understand the physical characteristics of the
medium, as well as the ways in which physical structure influ-
ences content. As the medium itself can operate as an infor-
mational factor of the record, an awareness of both form and
content will enable the archivist to convey pertinent infor-
mation to the user. Selection criteria cannot be developed
without first understanding the physical nature of the docu-
ment, as well as the nature of the evidence presented by the
document. In the case of the film record, structure is opera-
tive in determining content, and as such, the two elements
are crucially interwoven and cannot be considered in total
isolation.

The ramifications the nature of the film document holds
for the development of selection criteria are manifold. Per-
haps the primary factor hindering the articulation of concrete
selection criteria is the impossibility of endowing contemporary
judgements of historical artefacts (particularly those of popu-
lar culture) with any semblance of historical perspective. Con-
temporary value judgements are often marred by bias and subjec-
tivity, and in many cases are just plain wrong. Because of
this factor, as well as the fact that _any_ film could conceiva-
bly be of importance to someone, sometime, selection becomes
a moot point. A further factor hindering selection concerns
the reflective nature of the film document. If all film can

be considered to constitute some form of societal reflection,
how can it be possible to dismiss summarily a portion of that
reflection as being irrelevant, ephemeral, or trivial? Se-
lection therefore cannot be reasonably justified, at least
on such grounds. Ideally, then, the archival repository should
concern itself with collecting all moving images, representa-
tive as they are of some aspect of society and human endeavour.
If such a scheme of total retention is not practicable, either
in terms of storage space or expenditure, steps could be taken
to increase the possibility of its realization. Possible modes
of action could conceivably include international cooperation
to avoid duplication of effort, and cooperation with the film
industry to earmark essential film records while dismissing
obvious ephemera.

Leaving aside the most obvious impracticalities of total
retention, a further critical element would be the determina-
tion of exactly what constitutes "everything." Obviously,
"everything" would not be a literal term, and would perhaps
be more indicative of a philosophy of selection rather than
a dogmatic hoarding of everything celluloid. The archival
value of film documents will have to be determined by an
analysis or appraisal expressly designed for the celluloid
record, an appraisal that takes into account the physical make-
up of the document and the nature of the information contained
therein. The concept of no selection would therefore be indi-
cative of a philosophy of selection which would retain all film
of intrinsic archival value, after having determined exactly

what constitutes archival value in terms of the moving image
document.

Determining the value of the film record is a problema-
tical point, involving as it often does subjective and/or arbi-
trary value judgements. While there appears to exist a general
lack of consensus among the world's film archive authorities
regarding specific selection criteria, certain points seem to
have emerged to function as guidelines, however vague. Selec-
tion appears to be regarded as a necessary evil, undesirable
and ultimately indefensible, yet necessary under present-day
conditions to implement certain preservation priorities, such
as the preservation of film of national production, and the
filmic output of certain historical time periods. For film
covered by these areas, the concept of selection seems to be
largely inapplicable. For these categories, the term "every-
thing" is indeed literal. In the case of film not covered
by these categories, issues of form and content appear to
govern decisions regarding archival value, with form often
winning out over content where certain production elements
and the sedimentary by-products of filmmaking are concerned.
The present author would like to suggest that content is deser-
ving of more careful consideration in those cases where an in-
tractable physical structure threatens to negate the potential
value of the record's content. Such is the case with out-takes,
amateur footage, and certain production elements, where tech-
nical inadequacies or an unedited structure have traditionally
assumed priority over informational value, regardless of the

potential research value of the record.

The position of film in society, its function as both
purveyor and reflector of popular culture, its influence and
vast popular appeal -- these are all elements which have signi-
ficant impact upon the selection of film for archival preser-
vation. The nature of the evidence presented by the film docu-
ment is intimately intertwined with the physical structure of
the record. The physical form which encompasses the informa-
tional content of film will necessarily affect film content to
a very high degree, but it should not be allowed to completely
overwhelm the intrinsic value of content. If selection is neces-
sary, film must be evaluated according to its physical structure
(including its age, condition, and stock), typology, and content
(including both "witting" and "unwitting" information). This
limited assessment may be sufficient for actuality footage, but
for other categories, such as fiction film, additional elements
of appraisal will enter into the picture, such as the role of
film in society, particularly its reflective nature, popular
appeal, and degree of influence. For example, a repository
constrained by budget limitations may decide to concentrate on
box-office successes, in order to retain a representation of
those films which testify in the broadest sense to mass public
preference. Another repository may focus instead on only
national film production with the realization that if the
archive does not preserve the nation's filmic output, compre-
hensive preservation will not be guaranteed by any other col-
lecting body. Space and budget permitting, a repository should
ideally concern itself with retaining as broad a sampling as

possible of all types of films produced, in order to maintain
a representative sampling of the cinematic product consumed
by the populace at a given time. Such sampling could conceiva-
bly include not only box-office successes and films deemed to
be of artistic value, but also the box-office "flops," indepen-
dent productions, films that have been the subject of contro-
versy and censorship, films elevated to "cult" status, and
the endless run-of-the-mill B grade films (including horror
and exploitation products) which cater to a specific but size-
able common interest group typifying sub-genres of public taste.
The goal of selection should ultimately be the retention of
the broadest possible sampling of the available moving image
universe, in order to insure the widest coverage of contemporary
society for future research use.

If there are several repositories in a given country col-
lecting film, the issue of selection is bound to be further
complicated by overlapping preservation imperatives, and the
need for clearly-articulated selection policies, if only to
avoid competition and duplication of effort. Therefore, the
simplest solution would seem to be the establishment of one
major film archive per country, possessing the equipment neces-
sary to properly maintain and access moving images. The cost
of such equipment alone would seem to necessitate such a move.
Local and provincial archives need not be prevented from ac-
quiring small collections of local interest which fall under
their mandate, although they may find it necessary to utilize
the technical resources of the national archive from time to

time.

The preservation scenario which envisions one major film archive per country would increase the feasibility of implementing film records management techniques in conjunction with the film industry. While such a program would ideally work most efficiently in a country housing one film archive and a centralized national film industry, it could conceivably be implemented in a nation with a decentralized film industry. Problems of coordination and cooperation would likely be insurmountable if both the film industry and film archives were decentralized.

Taking into account the realities of decreased archival spending and the remote possibilities of new low-cost storage formats, it would appear that for the majority of film archives some form of selection may be the only viable alternative in order to cull the more ephemeral records and thus insure the survival of the most valuable moving image documents. Determining what constitutes value would appear to be the biggest challenge for film archives seeking to establish selection criteria. Such judgements are by nature likely to be somewhat subjective, but contemporary value judgements can be made more objective by considering the moving image document in terms of both physical structure and informational content, as well as the interrelationship between the two. In addition, the role of film in society, particularly the feature film, with its capacity to manifest both conscious and unconscious value systems and to sway its audience, must be considered a

critical element in ascertaining the value of the film document. Value can take many forms in the film record, some more obvious than others. Selection criteria must take into account both films of obvious value, such as artistic and box-office successes, propaganda and film of high informational value, as well as films of less obvious value, such as the popular "B" product, horror and teen films, which cater to a specific and sizeable market, and as such, testify to some sort of mass consensus.

Once decisions regarding what constitutes "value" have been established for the individual film archive, the goal of selection would ideally embrace the retention of the entire universe of "valuable" film documentation, in order to best serve all conceivable future research needs.

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