FRAMING THE PRACTICE OF FILM CURATING

A Thesis

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By

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ABSTRACT

Framing the Practice of Film Curating is an attempt to learn more about what film curating is and what the film curators do. This is a significant undertaking because it is the first of its kind and will hopefully prove to be a valuable resource for those working in the field. Because film is often understudied among the curatorial studies of all arts, this investigation attempts to create an introduction to the curatorial practice of film by reviewing the historic origin, examining the current development and addressing some major issues for the good of future.

It is important to note that this research was limited by the lack of information regarding film curating and film curators due to the limitation of the author’s personal reach. Available information was supplemented by the author’s own knowledge of the field.
Dedicated to my extraordinary parents who have always been supportive for the life choices I made for myself.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ...................................................................................................................... ii
Dedication .................................................................................................................. iii
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................... iv
Vita ............................................................................................................................... v
List of Tables .............................................................................................................. viii
List of Figures ............................................................................................................. ix

Chapters:

1. Introduction ............................................................................................................. 1
   Film, Movie and Cinema ......................................................................................... 4
   Issue of History ....................................................................................................... 5
   Issue of Art .............................................................................................................. 7
   Methodology ........................................................................................................... 10

2 A Brief History of Film Exhibition ....................................................................... 14
   Amusement Park ..................................................................................................... 16
   Traveling Exhibition ............................................................................................... 17
   Vaudeville Theatre .................................................................................................. 18
   Era of Nickelodeon ................................................................................................. 19
   Specialized Theatre ................................................................................................. 21
   Art House Cinema ................................................................................................ 25
   Non-profit World .................................................................................................... 29
   - Film Society Movement ..................................................................................... 29
   - Film Archive ....................................................................................................... 30
   - Film Exhibition ................................................................................................... 35

3 Institutionalization of Film Curating .................................................................. 39
   Collective Definition of the Field .......................................................................... 43
   Professional Association and Connection ............................................................ 49
   Emergence of A Center-periphery Structure .......................................................... 53
     - Archiving .......................................................................................................... 53
     - Public Grants .................................................................................................... 54
   Film Festival ........................................................................................................... 57
4 Professionalization of Film Curating

Specialized Knowledge and Skills ................................................................. 66
Formal Institutions for Transmitting Knowledge .......................................... 71
Systematic Evaluation and Standards ............................................................ 75
Lifelong Learning Expectation ..................................................................... 79

5 Digitization, Culture Broker, and Education ............................................. 79

Digitization .................................................................................................. 82
- Impact on Aesthetics .................................................................................. 84
- Impact on Production ................................................................................ 84
- Impact on Exhibition ................................................................................ 85
- Impact on Cinephilia ................................................................................ 87
- Impact on Film Exhibition ....................................................................... 89
Curator as Culture Broker .......................................................................... 92
- Audience .................................................................................................. 95
Education .................................................................................................... 100

Bibliography ............................................................................................... 107
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Public Grants – Access to Artistic Excellence I, Media Arts</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Indicators for Institutionalization of Film Curating</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Indicators for professionalization of Film Curating</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Film curating is a young profession, so young that not many people are aware of its existence, and even fewer would have a clue if asked what film curators do or why such a profession exists. This thesis is my attempt to find an answer to these questions and get a better understanding of how this profession was born, where it is now and what issues and challenges it faces.

Like many in the field of arts administration, the selection of this topic comes from a strong personal interest in an art discipline. For me, it is film. In the summer of 2005, I met Jerome Poynton, a New York-based independent film producer, on my flight to New York. A long delightful conversation about film localized my long wandering thoughts about where I am going to stand in the arts. When he suggested I do an internship with Anthology Film Archives, all the haunting moments and images from the hundreds of films I had seen finally found a focus and became the answer to the future with a career goal. After the summer internship with Anthology Film Archives, I invested all my spare time in accomplishing a graduate minor in film studies in the hope that one day these knowledge will become important to what I do. In the summer of 2006, I
interned as a programming assistant at Chicago Filmmakers. I participated in the whole process of the Chicago International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival. Working with filmmakers, reviewing and selecting films for the film festival, I enjoyed working, I found an opportunity to realize the value of what I know about film, and more importantly I got to exert an influence on my audience through programming. Determined to better understand what film curating/programming means through practice, I convinced Chris Stults, the Assistant Curator of Film and Video at Wexner Center for the Arts, of my passion and value in film curating and started working as a curatorial assistant in January 2008. By the point when I needed to finalize a topic for this thesis, I had accumulated some knowledge and experience in film and film programming, so I decided to take the chance to research film programming, which I hope to do in the future.

Looking back at my own experience, I often wonder how long it would take for me to realize film is what I want to work with if I had not met Jerome on the flight and was never introduced to Anthology Film Archives, or would I ever? The reason was not the ignorance of my passion for film but the absence of research related to film in the field of arts administration or museum studies. Another reason is a deeply imbedded perception of film as entertainment. Most students in my graduate program develop their interest and career goals in visual art, music, dance, and art history, so there is a lack of awareness of film being an option as a research subject or career option.
This absence was confirmed by my search of literature. Despite its popularity and fast growth, film and video remains almost invisible in curatorial studies. Due to the lack of literature, it took quite a while for me to locate the key words for a literature search because few people have ever read anything about it. Eventually, literature, mostly about history, emerged with the key words “film exhibition”. Having history as the entrance for my research, the first questions to be answered here: At which point of history was film programming formed? Why was film programming born? What were the historic conditions that made film programming and curating necessary and possible?

The second chapter is an examination of the history of film exhibition that provides a contextual understanding of film programming. The next two chapters discuss the institutionalization of film programming and professionalization of film programmer. Different from the historical account in the second chapter, these two chapters are analytical and focus on the current status of the field and profession of film programming. As an ending to this thesis, the last chapter will take film curating back to cultural curating and discuss the particular challenges film curating faces and its potential role in the transition of museum. The discussion will be mainly focused on the United States. Europe deserves its own study and will not be dealt with in great detail, but it will crop up occasionally for its important role in the history of film, film exhibition and film culture.
Film, Movie and Cinema

Before an in-depth discussion of film exhibition, it is necessary to consider the terminology used by different groups when addressing different audiences. Film and movie refer to the same thing: motion picture. The two words are interchangeable in our daily conversations, but in an academic paper it is important to note the difference in their social definition. Among English-speaking countries, Europeans tend to use “film” more often while Americans tend to call it “movie”. In the United States, “movie” is more frequently used in the context of Hollywood mainstream production and by the general public, while non-Hollywood filmmakers and film scholars tend to use “film” more often.

“Movie” is a derivative of the term moving picture, and it was used when moving pictures were first invented and when people were amazed at the effect of motion created by moving a series of still photos at a certain speed. As “movie” has always been the popular name for motion pictures, the commercial motion-picture production sector chose to call their products movies for an easier public reception. Owing to this tradition, “movie” has gained an implication of motion-picture industry too.

On the other hand, “film” has a more artistic and scholarly taste to it. Film refers to the chemical base with multiple layers of chemicals that is used to capture and demonstrate images. Films are organic and deteriorate over time, so using and preserving film requires specialized training which distinguishes film professionals from non-professionals. As filmmakers work with the materiality of film everyday, “film” becomes
the term closer to their understanding of what they are dealing with. As film develops as an art form into the contemporary age, it, like other art forms becomes self-conscious. Filmmakers were making experimental films that were about the material nature and characteristics as a medium. These films, for their avant-garde expressions, were not made for mass consumption and mostly stayed in the alternative sector. Scholars who study the history, cinematic language and meaning of European cinema and alternative and independent cinema, tend to use “film” for consistency with the field, but when the research is more relevant to mainstream Hollywood productions and the industry, “movie” is preferred.

Compared to “movie” and “film”, “cinema” is a broader concept, which refers to all relations, systems, infrastructures, histories, ideas…all cultures created for and by the movie industry. It can be used to describe the film culture particular to a region, for example “Asian cinema”, and it can also be used to describe the cultural related to a specific film category, for example “art cinema”.

**Issue of History**

It is important to examine some major issues assumed in this historical approach. For most cultural practice, it is difficult, if possible at all, to define a day or moment for its birth. As complex as the definition of the birth of film curating is, one thing is certain: it came after the birth of film. Even though the history of film curating is closely connected to the history of film, in stead of film history I am looking into the history of
cinema which is a broader concept that connotes not only the artistic and commercial product but also the political, economical and cultural relations around this subject. In examining the birth of cinema, most film historians consider the invention of the magic lantern the crucial technological innovation thus the appropriate starting point of discussion. In most histories of cinema, the historical inquiry starts from the history of invention, then the focus shifts to the development of basic procedures such as editing techniques. Only in the third stage do more discussions focus on film as art and a cultural practice.

It is during the third stage when the concept of cinema stopped being merely a name for the physical space where people go for movies but came into shape as an apparatus. Jean-Luc Godard said, a machine is not or a worker is not important by themselves, what matters is the relationship between the machine and the worker and the relationships between that worker and the other workers who from their own positions have relationships with the machine (Hak Kyung Cha, 1981). If film, the film product, is the machine, all the workers at stake mainly fall into three categories: filmmakers who participate in the pre-production, production and post-production of a film, audience who consume film in any given form, and people who deliver a movie to an audience: distributor and exhibitor. After a film is made in the stage of production, it travels through distribution and exhibition to reach an audience. In this map of the life of a film, the curating practice finds its niche in film exhibition.
Starting with a historic point-of-view, in the second chapter I contextualize film curating within the history of film exhibition. As film exhibition started as a business, the early film exhibition history is mostly for-profit. Non-profit exhibition venues like church and schools are barely mentioned. This for-profit history might look irrelevant to the subject of this thesis: film curating, which mostly exists in the non-profit sector today. As a matter of fact, it is essential to examine this for-profit history. First of all, it was the industrial and business pressure from the for-profit theatre world that drove art-cinema lovers to seek for alternative exhibition venues where movies could be protected from financial pressures. The mainstream created the social condition that made film curating necessary. Second, the mainstream movie exhibition was and still remains in the for-profit manner. Since the alternatives were created by those who found mainstream problematic, to some extent the alternatives are determined by the mainstream. Third, although for-profit and non-profit film exhibition are driven by different objectives, they do share some similarities in practice. Traces and evidence can be found in the early and mainstream history of film exhibition. And last but not least, film curating practice is established within a democratic film culture that wouldn’t have existed without the business of film exhibition.

**Issue of Art**

The second issue that must be discussed here is the perception of art or the perception of film as a form of art. It is the basic assumption of film
curating/programming thus the assumption of this thesis that film is a form of art.

However, including film in the art family does not simply mean to equal film with the
Mona Lisa. There are two parts that complete the argument of film as an art form: a new
perception of film and a new perception of art.

The argument that film is a form of art is set against the perception of film as a
product for mere commercial and entertainment purposes. It has been argued by many
that film is a form of art, the form of art that has most accurately documented and
reflected human society and human emotions in the 20th Century. I am not going to repeat
those arguments. Today it is no longer a tough idea for people to acknowledge the artistic
value of film, but not everyone would learn to appreciate it whereas far more people
would make the efforts to learn to appreciate fine art. For example, the Metropolitan
Museum of Art is a destination for most tourists in New York, while fewer of them
would visit the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), and a very small number would go to a
film screening at MoMA. The mere knowledge that film is being considered art by some
and art-cinema films are being screened in art centers and museums is far from a real
acceptance by the public. For the commercial origin of filmmaking, movie-going and the
ongoing mainstream film exhibition, it would be problematic and unrealistic to expect
film to be treated like fine art. However. Film curators should keep in mind their
responsibilities and never stop endeavoring to educate the public about film art. Beside
the general public, reluctance to embrace film as art and ignorance of film exists among
other art disciplines. Phil Solomon, one of the most recognized avant-garde filmmaker, talked about the reception of film from other arts in an interview when discussing the misconception of Stan Brakhage, who is famous for his evolutionary “painting on film”, always as a filmmaker and not as a painter.

“Thousands upon thousands of individually painted frames, a monumental career in painting. And why didn’t painters accept or engage in what he was doing? Ironically, he knew more about and cared for the work of painters than anyone else I ever knew... Every filmmaker I know has books of poetry, a vast record collection, photo books... But I almost never see other artists from other disciplines really interested in avant-garde film. ‘They want their movies’, as Stan used to say.”
(http://www.cinemad.iblamesociety.com/2006/12/phil-solomon.html)

A movie with soda and popcorn is a comfort zone that few people, even few of those in the arts, would want to step out. The idea of film being art must be strengthened so that film will be better integrated in the art world.

On the other hand, the uniqueness of the medium of film determines its artistic value must be appreciated, understood, interpreted and educated in a fashion different from the conventional concept of art. This uniqueness is well implicated in the following quote of Francis Ford Coppola (Durham & Kellner, 2001):

For me the great hope is now that 8mm video recorders are coming out, people who normally wouldn’t make movies are going to be making them. And that one day a little fat girl in Ohio is going to be the new Mozart and make a beautiful film with her father’s camcorder. For once the so-called professionalism about movies will be destroyed and it will really become an art form.

– Francis Ford Coppola

Coppola pointed out the fundamental difference between film and the conventional
definition of art. Film is a democratic art, whereas “art” belonged to the elites. Film is one of the new media that are “directed primarily toward large audiences which were essentially heterogeneous in composition.” (Jowett, 1976) Being a “mass” media, professionalism and elitism are not vital choices for the future of film or film exhibition. The value of mass media comes from the messes. It must be utilized, well received and understood by the mass. Professionalism and elitism are two attitudes that requires specialized skills and knowledge, thus they exclude the messes. Professionalism and elitism might always exist among some in the production and appreciation of film, but they should not be the achievement filmmaking aims at. This new perception of art that film brings into the art world and the museum community, as a matter of fact, results in a shift in their perception of themselves and their role in the society. This will be discussed in great detail as a major issue in the last chapter.

Methodology

Three methods are applied for the research of this thesis: literature review, exploratory interview and historic contextualization.

As mentioned earlier, the first body of literature centers upon the history of film exhibition. The history of film presentation ever since cinema was invented has been well compiled and organized. “Moviegoing In America: A Sourcebook in the History of Film Exhibition” is a compilation of essays put together in chronological order with them organized into different time periods. “Shared Pleasure: Presentation in the United
States” illustrates the history by three themes: business history, alternative operations, and technological transformation. Literature on specific film exhibition movement is also emerging. “Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema” discusses the historical context and development of the art house cinema movement. Organizational history is available for a few that are significant to the field. Such books include: “Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema”, “Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society”, “Art In Cinema: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society”, and “Canyon Cinema: The Life and Times of an Independent Film Distributor”. Articles on history of film exhibition can be found scattered in journals like Hollywood Quarterly. The second body of literature involves writings on major issues in film presentation. Compared to the historical approach to film exhibition, these writings aim to elaborate on issues essential to film programming. Cultural critics and scholars have written articles on the subject of film exhibition regarding its social relations and influences; other scholars have produced philosophical works on film curating and programming as preserving the significance and vitality of a cultural heritage. Some contemporary thinkers have reflected on the future of film in a digital age, the major issue and challenge facing film curators and programmers. The third part of my reading is on multiple aspects involved in the curatorial practice of film, for example preservation and projection of film and video. Although the technicality involved in a film curator’s job does not directly link to the content of this thesis, it helps
me better understand the scope and structure of a film curator’s knowledge and responsibilities. For the search of literature, Susan Oxtoby from Pacific Film Archive/Berkeley Art Museum and the literature listed in the syllabus for the seminar on film curating that she teaches in University of California at Berkeley have been very helpful.

In addition to literature review, exploratory interviews with film curators and programmers across the country have offered me invaluable information about the field and first-hand opinion from the practitioners who are working on the frontier of film curating. After answering some of my questions, they also responded to my follow-up questions throughout my writing of this thesis via email. They are (last name in alphabetical order):

Filipi, Dave - Associate Curator, Film/Video
   Wexner Center for the Arts (Columbus, OH)
Healy, Jim - Assistant Curator, Motion Picture Department
   George Eastman House (Rochester, NY)
Horrigan, Bill - Chief Curator, Film/Video
   Wexner Center for the Arts (Columbus, OH)
Maggiore, Mike - Programmer and Publicist
   Film Forum (New York, NY)
Otto, Dean - Assistant Curator, Film/Video
   Walker Art Center (Minneapolis, MN)
Oxtoby, Susan - Senior Film Curator
   Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive (Berkeley, CA)
Quandt, James - Senior Programmer
   Ciném初めてque Ontario (Toronto, ON)
Siegell, Josh - Assistant Curator, Department of Film
   Museum of Modern Art (New York, NY)
Stults, Chris - Assistant Curator, Film/Video
   Wexner Center for the Arts (Columbus OH)
This thesis is created by a strong personal interest and curiosity about the profession of film programming. Through research, I have expanded my knowledge and understanding of the field. I learnt to apply my own analytical ability to the information I gathered and formalized my observations of the field into my personal opinions through writing. I feel extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity to talk to so many film curators and programmers, all of whom are working for important institutions in terms of film and video. Both my academic research and personal future plan have been greatly enlightened by the informative and interesting dialogues. I am also hoping this is only a start for me to establish a network with those in the field. As a young field, much is left to be written regarding film programming. It is my honor to contribute to this progress of scholarship in curatorial study in film programming.
CHAPTER 2

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FILM EXHIBITION

When it comes to cinema and film history, two terms are visited frequently: mainstream and alternative. They indicate the content and style of the film, the target audience, and more fundamentally the economic drive behind the film production, distribution and exhibition operation. Examining film exhibition, we also see a mainstream exhibition and an alternative one. In this chapter, I am going to examine the history of both mainstream and alternative operation of film exhibition to paint a big picture of the tradition and the reality in which film curating was born and is being practiced.

Before the mainstream and the alternative came into shape, there were the earliest movie shows. When film and projectors were first invented, neither the financial nor the artistic potential of film was well understood. Soon enough the showmen realized that movie could be a business that generates significant profits, however while the recognition and practice of film as a form of art came long after that. Gomery claims in his Shared Pleasure that at its base the history of motion picture presentation in the United States is an economic history (Gomery, 1992). As movie presentation started and
grew as a business, movies made and shown for financial purposes and the operation around these movies formed the history of mainstream cinema. Even though the subject of this thesis, film curating, mostly exists in the non-for-profit environment today, it is still necessary and important to briefly examine the history of mainstream film presentation for two reasons. First of all, a great part of our understanding of the development of film, knowledge about the formation of the audience and perception of cinema as an apparatus come from this history. Second, one cannot study alternative film without studying the mainstream for that the mainstream defines the alternative.

In the very early practice of film exhibition, we can trace film programming as showmen exerted creative control over their programs by organizing and sequencing the short films in their repertoire. In 1896, Edison Vitascope made its debut in New York. The opening night program was not a casually assembled collection of entertaining views. Instead, the sequence of films was built around a central theme: The Monroe Doctrine. The Monroe Doctrine was a response to a “crisis” in foreign affairs at that time, involving a long-standing border dispute between British Guiana and Venezuela, which had heated up after gold miners rushed into the disputed area. The vitascope’s opening night strongly indicates that the film exhibitor, Raff & Gammon, were consciously appealing to American patriotism as vitascope, the American film projector, was competing with the European kinetoscope at the time. According to Charles Musser in his *Introducing Cinema to the American Public*, the vitascope New York debut program
“displays a highly organized, of oblique, narrative structure…showmen effectively had editorial control over their programs.” (Musser, 1990)

In the 1890s, the exhibitor exerted creative control over a spectrum of elements that are called post-production today. Those showmen were exploring the possibilities of expression through an elaborate construction of characters and narratives and a wide range of sound accompaniment including music, voice and effects. While it is widely considered that this editorial practice later evolved into the profession of film editor, the responsibility of shaping meaning by juxtaposing moving images on a time line has survived to be an aspect of film programming, especially short film programming, today.

**Amusement Park**

Amusement park entrepreneurs were one of the earliest to exploit the economic potential of movie. As soon as these entrepreneurs noticed movie’s power to create spectacle, they added it to their variety of acts to attract audiences. Amusement parks were built at the end of trolley lines in major cities as a response to the need for a base for a permanent entertainment attraction in the late nineteenth century. With the popularity and success of movie shows in amusement parks, movie became an important player in the mix of contemporary popular culture. To further exploit the financial meaning of movie, amusement park entrepreneurs converted motion pictures into a permanent attraction by creating simulated railroad trips with movies. For example, the Hale’s Tour Car was created consisting of a railroad coach rigged to sway gently from side to side as
if it were moving, with movies providing the illusion of scenes flying by (Gomery, 1992).

**Traveling Exhibition**

As amusement parks were only open during the summer and were only located in suburban area, a solution was in need for the rural population that made up the majority of the national population in 1900. Exhibitors started traveling. They screened movies in small-town opera houses, county courthouses, under temporary canvas theatres or under the stars. Among the exhibitors, there were also travel lecturers who added motion pictures to their stereopticon exhibitions. Compared to a current practice popular in film curating, accompanying film screenings with conversation with visiting filmmakers or even panel discussion of issues related to the film, lecture was primary to the traveling exhibition while motion pictures were a means of visual illustration. However, instead of simply functioning as an addition to the lecture, the role of motion pictures grew bigger and bigger. E. Burton Holmes, one of the major lecturers of illustrated travel lecture, made films specifically for his own lectures (Gomery, 1992). Travel lectures gradually became elaborate and sophisticated documentary presentations. They were either ethnographic in orientation or organized around political topics such as the Spanish-American War. For its content and presentation, travel lectures became refined entertainment that was enlightening and informative. Soon religious groups were supporting travel lectures by offering the local church as a venue for presentation. Along with the development of travel lectures, there were another two kinds of full-length
programs: fights and passion plays. Each type of program attracted a different audience. While prizefighting gained an impassioned following among those who enjoyed male-oriented amusements; passion plays were popular among religious groups; travel lectures attracted cultural elites. Travel programs were limited in their commercial success, because they only appealed to a small group of audience; for another reason and because they used highly different exhibiting methods. Fights and passion-play programs heavily relied on the narration by an appropriate individual, whereas travel exhibition rarely had lecturers stand in and voice their thoughts over the images.

**Vaudeville Theatre**

Motion pictures hit mainstream mass entertainment when they were presented in vaudeville theatres in major cities. In the late 1890s and before motion pictures, vaudeville exhibition usually consisted of eight variety shows that were not related. There was no structure or any kind of relationship between one act and another. The exhibition included various shows to attract all types of audience. Motion pictures followed the tradition of a series of visual spectacles including the magic lantern presentations. The Lumières’ Cinématographe made its American debut at Keith’s Union Square vaudeville theatre, a mere two months after the Edison Vitascope opened at Koster and Bial’s vaudeville theatre. The Keith’s chain, the major vaudeville power in the eastern United States, dropped its initial Vitascope contract and signed up the Lumieres to service its theatres. A pattern of single acts of movie presentation was established in theatres by the
end of 1896-97 vaudeville season (Gomery, 1992). Since originally the vaudeville exhibition mainly aimed at a middle-class audience, many of the movies made and shown targeted the middle class too.

**Era of Nickelodeon**

After being adopted in vaudeville theatres, motion pictures continued attracting audience through the first decade of the twentieth century. However the presentation of movies was greatly limited by the seasonal limitations of the amusement park, the temporary nature of traveling shows, and the pricey admission of vaudeville. A new means of presentation was needed in response to the growing popularity of motion pictures. Nickelodeons, an innovation started in the 1890s but did not really take off for the first decade for the movie presentation as an entertainment, began to rise and expanded fast. In 1907 Variety told its readers “Three years ago (December of 1904) there was not a nickelodeon, or five-cent theatre devoted to moving picture shows, in America.” By 1910 Variety reported more than one hundred in Chicago alone. The figure for the nation as a whole was estimated at five thousand; some placed the number over ten thousand. (Gomery, 1992) Similar to vaudeville theatres, nickelodeons served urban population, but with its prices so much lower than vaudeville shows, nickelodeons were able to attract more people from the lower class. In addition, instead of being one of a variety of shows, in nickelodeons motion picture has become the core program that provided most of the entertainment, indicating that motion picture probably could support
an independent sector of the emerging American mass entertainment industry. The program usually began with a song accompanied with illustration of color magic lantern slides displaying the images and words of the song. Sometimes the song was a drawing card, but sometimes the audience would rather have solid pictures. Exhibitors could learn about all this from watching the house during the performance and observing the expressions and comments of the patrons on their way out after the performance. Ticket sales were another barometer of public approval. Theatre managers studied their audiences and considered audiences’ tastes a priority when obtaining pictures acceptable to their patrons. During the era of nickelodeon, choice of a program had already become a great factor in determining competitive position of the exhibition theatre.

Even though the nickelodeon craze didn’t last very long (from 1905 to 1909), it greatly expanded the audience for motion pictures, vertically to all classes and horizontally across a vast geographic area. Movie exhibitors were ready to take advantage of this national market. They followed the model of grocery chains and department stores which brought significant success in mass selling. For instance, a former New York City based vaudeville company, Loew’s, was able to take over film exhibition in all five boroughs of America’s largest market, and later it became of the three major theatre chains, among Balaban & Katz in Chicago and Stanley Company of America in Philadelphia.

Although the nickelodeons attracted a large audience, many of them were less
than affluent. Theatre owners wanted a higher class of patrons to make more money. To attract richer folks, theatre managers carefully chose the location for their theatre buildings, provided the patrons a variety of considerate service ranging from free child care to air conditioning. New theatres inherited the show tradition from the nickelodeons, only the live stage shows were much more sophisticated and expensive. When the stage shows had grown from cheap magic lantern shows into elaborate minimusical with spectacular settings and intricate light effects, movie programs were evolving too. Special programs made up of films of some specific nature were put together and advertised accordingly. For example, on “Biograph Night” nothing but biograph reels were used; on “Travel Night” the majority of films are scenic; “School Children” is a special program consisted of films particularly pleasing, and to some extent educational, to children. Different pictures and programs appealed to different audiences. When a picture pleases the audience, it may be the specific picture, or it may be the general genre to which the picture belongs. Though motion pictures were already capable of standing alone as an entertainment, some of its old companies were not abandoned by exhibitors. Lectures were still associated with movie screenings, but at this point the movie was primary to the presentation while lectures functioned as an addition explaining the picture to the patrons.

**Specialized Theatre**

While the five Hollywood companies, Paramount, Loew’s Inc, Warner Bros., Twentieth Century-Fox, and Radio-Keith-Orpheum (RKO), were catering to the taste of
the masses, controlling the movie theatre chains, and dominating the movie industry by vertically integrating movie production, distribution and exhibition during the 1930s and 1940s, some theatres focused on certain special interest instead of aiming at the mass audience. In October 1934, Robert Schirmer opened an all cartoon theatre in New York City to exploit the craze of cartoon created by Disney’s shorts. Cartoon theatre proved that there was an audience for specialized programming and specialized theatre was profitable. Another instance involved the movement for children’s programming. It started in 1910s as theatres felt pressure from women’s groups and began to present uplifting family programs on Saturday mornings when children were out of school. Later because of the Great Depression, theatre operators tried new programs to sustain their business, and they created “Junior Motion Picture Clubs” and notified parents through women’s clubs and schools. In early 1930s, this movement spread across the country. All theatres played the same program: a Mickey Mouse Carton, a serial and a feature for children aged six to sixteen. With the ticket only cost a dime, this movement found its audience base among children and parents.

Another type of specialized theatre that demonstrated audience interest in an alternative movie-going experience were the newsreel theatres. A significant genre in American cinema, newsreels, showed Americans the visual images of many of the most important events of the day. As a matter of fact, newsreel began in late 1910s in France and England in the form of a regular compilation of news footage organized as stories as
in a magazine. Newsreel theatres were small theaters screening programs of newsreels and shorts. For many, newsreel is a distinctively different film product. Compared to the fictional narrative movies from Hollywood, newsreel delivered messages with an immediacy in realistic images, which was particularly appealing to well-educated adults. Newsreel theatres flourished with America’s entry into the WWII. The desire for instant information significantly boosted an interest in newsreel, and newsreel theatre was the only type of specialized theatre that survived the big-five-owned theatres throughout the 1930s and 1940s. In the golden age of the newsreel theatre, the managers follow the other theaters and joined together as chains. Three chains almost assumed all newsreel theatres: Trans-Lux, Newsreel Theatres, Inc., and Telenews. Beside image quality, picture update was important for newsreel theatres. Programs at the Trans-Lux were changed twice a week, and there were daily inserts of major breaking stories, shipped cross town from the headquarters of the newsreel services in Manhattan (Gomery, 1992). Programming at newsreel theatres was not limited to newsreel. Other available materials included popular short subjects, cartoons, and occasional two-reel revivals of a Charlie Chaplin silent short. The shows lasted under an hour and ran continuously from morning to midnight. For a time there was even talk of running newsreels twenty-four hours per day. (Gomery, 1992) With moving pictures as well as sounds, newsreels beat the real sounds of the war on radio, but the era of prosperity of newsreel came to an end with the coming of suburbanization drawing away the critical mass and the introduction of television
bringing the news into the home and thus erased the necessity to go to a theatre. Some newsreel theatres died and many were transformed into art house cinemas.

While cartoon theatre and newsreel theatre were specialized in a certain genre of film, some other theatres were serving a rather special group of audience: ethnic theatre, theatres for African Americans, and upscale theatres for the rich.

It is estimated that in the 1930s there were approximately five hundred theaters in the United States catering to ethnic audiences. (Wilinsky, 2001) Ethnic theatres mainly located in ethnic neighborhoods in urban areas and screened films in native tongues for audiences speaking foreign languages. Ethnic theatres illustrated the potential for foreign-language film exhibition. However, as the United States entered World War II, American patriotism greatly increased the profitability of Hollywood films, and many of the ethnic theatres were turned into mainstream theaters.

Before African Americans gained voting right in 1965, they were generally not welcome in mainstream movie theatres. Earlier in the nickelodeon era, theatres set up either a specific time of the day (usually after they had closed for whites) or segregated balconies or areas separated by a curtain for black Americans. Later black theatres emerged. The situation in the north is better than that in the south. One study found that in the late 1920s, at the height of the popularity of the movies in America, southern cities had fewer motion picture theatres catering to blacks than simple population needs would have indicated. (Gomery, 1992) Not surprisingly, an unequal moviegoing experience
resulted from the racial segregation. Blacks had far fewer theatre choices than the whites.

The black-oriented movie theatre reached its acme during the Second World War as there were very few things to spend money on, the blacks chose to go to the movies, and thus the black market and their spending power were greatly expanded. In 1950 a one-thousand-seat theatre was opened. The prosperity of black theatres was eventually ended by the civil rights movement.

As movie had become popular among all classes, the upper class preferred special theatres that could provide them distinctive movie-going experience. These theatres differentiated themselves from the mainstream not with high-culture films, but higher admission and subscription price, unique space, and theatre service. While the rich wanted an upscale theatre environment for their movie-going experience, they also wanted to see some movies that were different from the mainstream to go along with their movie-going experience. After these “high-class” exhibition sites emerged in 1930s, developed throughout the 1940s, many of them turned into art house cinema.

**Art House Cinema**

Art house cinemas started as, what Wilinsky called Little Cinema, cinemas that were typically smaller and whose income largely relied on regular patrons rather than extensive marketing campaigns, and the film they screened were unconventional productions usually poorly financed and of an artistic nature. As a matter of fact, American businessmen picked up the idea of showing alternative movies in smaller
specialized theatres from French cine clubs. In around 1926, Symon Gould started showing art films at the Cameo Theatre in New York City, and later the little cinema movement reached major cities nationwide (Wilinsky, 2001).

The Little Cinema demise, according to Wilinsky, was due to three reasons. First, pressures of the film business combined with economic pressures from the depression and a decrease of the availability of European films impacted the little cinema movement. Second, audiences of little cinemas decreased as many of the movie buffs refused the idea of sound cinema. Third, the upper class is more interested in being amused in exclusive theatres rather than truly appreciating the intellectual and artistic aspect of art films. The little cinema movement demonstrated that not only was there a market for art cinema, but an entire system of production, distribution and exhibition was needed to support art cinema.

Since 1920s, newsreel theatres, ethnic theatres, upscale theatres, little cinemas that mainly screened unconventional European films, and some non-profit venues such as film societies had been providing an alternative moviegoing experience and distinguished themselves from mainstream exhibition sites. They offered an operational model for art house cinema movement in the context of the studio-dominated U.S. film industry in the postwar era. On the other hand, with the idea of film as a form of art being formed and established, newsreel, foreign films and experimental films were considered categorically art cinema. To survive under a great industrial pressure, theatres that specialized in only
one genre had to expand its interest to a broader concept of art cinema.

While the emergence of art house cinema was based on the rise of consciousness of both the filmmakers and audience to recognize film as a form of art in the pre-war era, after the Second World War, the resurgence of interest in films from foreign countries came from a curiosity of other culture, especially after the United States entered the United Nations. Among all the films from foreign nations with a filmmaking tradition, such as European countries and Japan, one film is widely considered responsible for the fast expansion in audience for foreign films: the Italian film Open City by Roberto Rossellini. The screening of Open City was overwhelmingly successful. Either it was because the American audience’s taste had become more mature and sophisticated, or the audience was simply interested in movies labeled as “exotic”, there was no doubt that a popular demand did arise and continued (Wilinsky, 2001).

Additionally, another film genre that explored the artistic possibility of film and expanded audience’s vision of cinema is documentary, which had been neglected until the widespread use for propaganda purpose during the wartime. With a great number of government sponsored propaganda documentaries broadcast in movie theatres and on television, audience became interested in new film themes and techniques.

In the late 1940s and the entire 1950s, many entrepreneurs in the film industry, though not enthusiastic about art films, embraced the idea of art house cinema, considering it might be the only option they had to keep their business. Art house cinema
was growing fast in the early 1950s. There were an estimated 470 art houses in January 1952 in addition to some 1,500 theatres that were booking foreign films in their schedules (Wilinsky, 2001). In the 1950s and 1960s, art cinema reached its golden age both in production and exhibition. Films like Ingmar Bergman’s Wild Strawberries (1957), Francois Truffaut’s The 400 Blows (1959), Jean-Luc Godard’s Breathless (1960), Federico Fellini’s Nights of Cabiria (1957), Alain Resnais’ Hiroshima mon amour (1959), and Luis Bunuel’s Viridiana (1961), films that have been considered all-time classics, were all made in that period. As art house cinema was established as a “permanent part” of the world of film exhibition, entrepreneurs moved forward to develop national art theatre chains, which later on became major foreign film distributors.

The art house cinemas were considerably different from its mainstream competitors. Not only did they screen different films from a different distribution system, they ran differently. Their higher admission price matched them to art theatres on Broadway. Instead of the mainstream-standard double-feature screening, they only presented one feature film at a time. Art house cinemas created an environment where film was treated as a serious art. Ushers were polite, no talking was permitted during the screening and instead of popcorn, they sold tea and light sandwiches.

The art house movement came to an end in the 1970s when home video entered the household. With home video, people no longer need to go to the movie theatre for classic foreign films, so the repertory houses which used to be the midnight movie
attraction were closing. Followed by the art house theatre chains going bankrupt. By
1980, the universe of theatres in the United States that regularly ran foreign films was
down to less than one hundred. The core market had shrunk to major cities like New
York City, Boston, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Non-profit World

While the art film theatres were dying, art cinema found its new exhibition venues
in the non-profit sector, which had already emerged in the beginning of the 20th century.

Film Society Movement

The film society idea was first formed and institutionalized in Europe. In 1921, Le
Club des Amis du Septieme Art (CASA), as the first cine club, was established in Paris.
By the mid-1920s, the idea and infrastructure of film culture was growing mature as an
identifiable network of film critics, journals, cine clubs, screenings, lectures and
specialized cinemas had been well established. While the film society movement had
already become rather healthy in Paris, Berlin, Amsterdam, Brussels, and London, in the
mid-1920s, it only began to emerge in the United States. In 1925, the first documented
cine club in the United States was established in New York, but about a decade after that
the film society movement began to take a firm hold.

Compared to the little cinemas discussed earlier, these film societies were non-
profit and less entrepreneurial. They were usually composed of members who were
cinephiles and were run on a membership subscription basis. The private-membership-
club status not only secured film societies a financial income, but more importantly, it allowed them to circumvent censorship. When subject to censorship, film societies had to submit a copy of the film and a copy of the script to the Censorship Office. Applying the same standards to these film societies as they did to Hollywood films, censorship created enormous obstacles for the screening at film societies. For instance, for a French animation film that had a nonsense language soundtrack, a stenotypist had to be hired to take down “baba, booboo” as the script; and a documentary of cats including some birth sequences was entirely considered “obscene”. (McDonald, 2002) In addition to the control over content, going through the Censorship Office also delayed the screening and slowed down the circulation of films as the Office would hold the films for at least a week. With the status of membership clubs, film societies and their members were able to achieve their mutual purpose of film exhibition in a private setting that was made impossible in commercial or little theaters by the disinterested commercial organizations and censors.

*Film Archive*

When film was considered a form of art, it became susceptible to the idea and behavior of collection. There are three major reasons behind film collection, and they are also the ideas that initiated the formation of film libraries and archives. First, a desire to revisit older movies, especially the classic ones, was rising among some audience. Second, as a response to the concept of film art, scholars and professionals needed to
study older movies as an important historical reference and resource. Third, compared to paintings, sculptures and other artistic products, film has a relatively short life. The organic nature of this medium determines that, even when taken good care of, a film only has a life of several decades. Haidee Wasson clearly stated “a crucial material fact of 1930s film culture” in his *Museum Movies*: While the industrial organization, images, ideas, and public spaces collectively referred to as the institution of cinema had secured a place in national cultures and international governance, films themselves did not fare so well. Despite the profound influence cinema exercised on conceptions of time, space, knowledge, industry, nation, and leisure, only a year after their initial release most films could not be seen. (Wasson, 2005) Most films were recycled for their material components or simply dumped into the ocean after their first theatrical run. Film libraries and archives were created as an institutional solution to, first and foremost, preserve the films and all film culture materials in jeopardy of being forever lost in the public view.

Even though it took some time for the public to learn to take films seriously rather than as mere entertainment, some institutions and individuals understood the artistic and historical value of movies and started collecting them and all the historic documents around them rather early. However, the early collections were seriously scattered in libraries, museums and art expositions throughout the United States. The second task of film libraries and archives, therefore, is to compile and organize scattered resources. The concentration and compilation of resources create the possibility of better utilization of
these resources. For those whose work and research are based on the existing film culture, such as film scholars and curators, film archives offer them a more concentrated and systematically organized resource. With the unprecedented breadth and depth of film collection in film archives, scholars and curators are enabled to explore the infinite creative possibilities in their research and programming. On the other hand, as non-profit art institutions that operate on merit-based grants from federal, state and local government and funding from foundations, and individual and corporate donations, film archives must prove to the funders the value of their organization and service. On this note, a bigger and better organized collection, various service and creative programming strengthen the ability of film archives to compete in the non-profit world.

The first proposal of preserving film and creating a film archive came in 1898, when a Polish photographer Boleslow Matuszewski wrote “Une nouvelle source de l’histoire” and “Le photographie animée, ce qu’elle est, ce qu’elle doit être” and sent them to French institutions. Unfortunately the idea was too aggressive at the time. (Hagener, 2007, Pp113) By the early 1920s, another call was made by Louis Delluc for a “library or repertory of significant films…not only to preserve but to promulgate the idea of cinema art and to educate cinema audiences in order to support further innovations and the cinema’s eventual achievements” (Hagener, 2007).

As the movement of archiving was going forward, one technological innovation brought to it a dramatic change: the sound film. The coming of sound devalued the silent
films, and this devaluation triggered the enthusiasm of archiving silent films in some young cinephiles that grew up in the alternative film culture of cine-clubs. Among the first generation of archivists who had bathed in the film society culture, some of them became key figures that initiated and accomplished some of the milestones in the history of the institutionalization of film archive and alternative film exhibition.

In Europe, the British Film Institute created its film archive in 1934, the National Film Archive (now the National Film and Television Archive). In Paris, Henri Langlois tasked Cercle du Cinéma, the ciné-club he cofounded with Georges Franju, with the idea of combining film exhibition with film archive, and in 1936, with all the films Henri Langlois collected and stored throughout the ciné-club years, they founded the Cinémathèque Française. Inspired by the Cinémathèque Française and supported by Henri Langlois, the Cinémathèque de Belgique was founded in Brussels in 1938 by André Thirifays, Henri Storck and Pierre Vermeylen, who shared a common enthusiasm in cinema and participated in the film club movement. Followed by Národní Filmový Archiv, the Film Archive in Prague, established in 1943; the Fondazione Cineteca Italiana in Milan in 1947; Tainiothiki tis Ellados, the Greek Film Archive, established in Athens in 1950; and the Deutsche Kinemathek - Museum für Film und Fernsehen in Berlin in 1963. These film archives shared the common aim of safeguarding the cinematographic repertory and reducing the risks of films disappearing that may have an artistic, scientific, historical or social value.
In the United States, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, announced the formation of the Film Library in 1935. In 1932, Alfred Barr, the Museum's founding director, stressed the importance of introducing "the only great art form peculiar to the twentieth century" to "the American public which should appreciate good films and support them." (The Celeste Bartos Film Preservation Center, http://www.moma.org/collection/depts/film/bartos/collection_history.html) Film curator, Iris Barry, was sent to Hollywood to lobby for the donation of film prints. Soon Warner Bros., Paramount, Twentieth Century–Fox, Samuel Goldwyn, Harold Lloyd, Walt Disney, and many other producers responded. Later in 1936 Barry also traveled to Europe and the Soviet Union to collect international films and establish bond with important international filmmakers. The first attempt of assembling the collection for the Film Library was so successful that the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences recognized MoMA in 1937 “for its significant work in collecting films…and for the first time making available to the public the means of studying the historical and aesthetic development of the motion picture as one of the major arts.”

At the avant-garde frontier, Anthology Film Archives was founded in 1970 as “the first film museum exclusively devoted to the film as an art.” (Anthology Film Archives, http://www.anthologyfilmarchives.org/history/manifesto/) Some filmmakers and film scholars, specialized in avant-garde cinema, including James Broughton, Ken Kelman, Peter Kubelka, Jonas Mekas and P. Adams Sitney, formed a Film Selection
committee and established a definitive collection of film: the Essential Cinema Repertory. The Essential Cinema Repertory defines film art with the avant-garde understanding of what constitutes the essence of cinema.

The fact that the film archival movement was underway in many countries and was happening at the same time period among some countries, first legitimized the emergent practice and encouraged followers. Second, the movement enabled the film archives and institutions to share their institutional experience and resources as many of the non-commercial productions received very little publicity and couldn’t afford multiple copying. Third, it urged those countries where no film institutions had been formed and those informed intellectuals who were aware of the growth and importance of film art to establish their own presence in this international scene of emerging cultural institutions.

*Film Exhibition*

In the United States, the institutionalization of film exhibition was not an easy process, especially in museums where curating is mostly practiced. Museum was perceived as a comparatively elite and sacral space while movies were considered mass entertainment thus dramatically different from what was being exhibited in the museum. As the leading institution that initiated museum movie exhibition and film curating, the exploratory experience of the Museum of Modern Art exemplifies the institutionalization of film exhibition in the United States.
In 1935, the Film Library had already secured an official status within the Museum and gained an operating budget. Nevertheless, there was still a debate mounting about the pairing of museum, the palace of elite culture, and movies - a popular amusement. Although film art had been granted a physical space within a large institution, it hadn’t been fully embraced ideologically. As one of the biggest museums of modern art in the world, MoMA’s mass museology required MoMA to build its Film Library on, first of all a broad concept and a wide range of film, which was achieved by a constant film collecting for their film archive, and second a strong institutional and network support. This implies a constituency of parties that includes trustees, philanthropists, art patrons, government, producers, filmmakers, critics, educators and the general public. Among all the different communities to whom MoMA needed to legitimate its film project, three of them were particularly important: the museum trustees, the American film industry, and the Rockefeller Foundation. The museum trustees remained suspicious to accommodating film in the museum; the film industry was holding the copy and exhibition rights of their vast resources very tight; and John Marshall, the head of the Humanities Division of the Rockefeller Foundation, was only interested in the educational power of film through certain programs but not the idea and practice of film being archived and exhibited as an art form. Based upon the assumption that the understanding of film as a unique aspect of American culture should be essential for all culturally informed citizens, the value of film art was articulated in various ways.
according to their different interest. To the museum trustees, certain filmmakers were identified as artists to appeal to the idea of creative genius, and film was more closely associated with new media as an expressive form rather than being weakly defined as one of the traditional cultural forms. To the film industry film exhibition in museum was argued as an effective way to increase public’s appreciation of American films. To John Marshall and Rockefeller Foundation, it was demonstrated that civic reform could be realized through film programming at MoMA. There remain great lessons for today’s curators, arts administrators and institutions to learn from MoMA’s early practice of carefully balancing and appealing to the strikingly different interests among its constituents. The enormous effort MoMA made to make its Film Library project possible embodied a vision of “the institutionalization of film as art was simultaneously the institutionalization of film as American history and as education,” which is still valuable today. (Wasson, 2005)

After the films were collected, an institutional space was secured, an abundant funding was on the way, and the important stakeholders were convinced, one party of interest still remained inharmonious in the scene of film exhibition in museum: the audience. MoMA needed to handle another delicate balance in terms of both the composition of audience of movies and its museological position. On one hand, the socio-economic background of main-street movie-goers was different from museum-goers. On the other, owing to its mass museology, MoMA was always attempting to
appeal to a mass instead of the elite few, so MoMA needed to strike a balance between the mass appeal and the respectability that the middle-class expected from museums. Attending a movie at MoMA during the early screening years could be a peculiar experience for many as movies were, for the first time, accompanied by docent lectures, dates of origin, or didactic placards. No behavioral norm of watching movies in museum was ever established before. Audiences weren’t sure how they should behave when watching movies in an art museum. Instead they brought their movie watching habits into the museum. They talked, they laughed, and they arrived at films late and left early. There was very little order that could help to maintain an environment for attentive viewing engagement. Film curator Iris Barry decided it was time for intervention and education. She reserved a permanent seat for herself in the auditorium with a phone besides her connecting to the projectionist so that she could pause the screening if the audience was not well behaving themselves. Sometimes when a short intervention was not working, Barry had to threaten to cancel the screening. While the movie-watching behavior and experience were being institutionalized into museum, the status of cinema was being transformed, from ephemeral entertainment to enduring cultural monument. (Wasson, 2002)

Following the lead of MoMA, institutions that include modern and contemporary art as part of their programs started preserving and/or screening curated film exhibitions.
CHAPTER 3

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF FILM CURATING

The film industry infrastructure consists of three components: production, distribution and exhibition. Film curating practice mainly occurs in the third part: exhibition. It has been demonstrated in the first chapter that film curating was created as a response to the need of understanding those films categorized as art cinema. Subject to great industrial pressure in the commercial sector, art cinema started looking for alternative exhibition channels and gradually moved into non-profit venues, and film curating is consequently mainly practiced in non-profit alternative venues such as museums. To examine the institutionalization of film curating practice therefore is to examine the institutionalization of non-profit film exhibition.

On the business side, the film industry was going through some standardization and stabilization. During the 1920s and 1930s, films were deemed legally as “business pure and simple” and were not protected by the First Amendment until 1951; hence the film industry was subject to censorship and criticism from social groups such as religious groups. To protect itself, the film industry undertook some organization and
rationalization on itself. Various associations were founded in the industry’s interests. The Society of Motion Picture Engineers (SMPE) was formed in 1916, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) was formed in 1922, and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) was formed in 1926. These associations worked in different capacities to advocate for the industry’s interests and further the status of cinema. In 1923, the SMPE donated artifacts to museums such as the Smithsonian for their collection and display. In 1927, the MPPDA adopted the first version of the industry’s self-regulating Production Code.

In the non-profit world, by the mid-1930s, films were presented as more of a moral and intellectual experience in institutions such as libraries, churches, and national organizations like the YMCA. These organizations utilized films as a tool for advancing their beliefs and perspectives. The public programs were usually free, and in these programs films were valued for their educational capacity instead of commercial value. In Museum Movies, Wasson considers the early institutionalization of film exhibition a paralleled history of film history: Such developments complement a common narrative in film studies that characterizes film history as shaped by an impetus toward standardization and regulation of cinema as an institution. This includes the adoption of classical Hollywood narrative and style, as well as modes or production, distribution, and exhibition (Wasson, 2005). A tendency toward organization and institutionalization in both film form and exhibition venue was clear.
Institutionalization refers to the attempts and processes to shape itself through organizational formation and field structuration. Instead of individual identity, institutionalization is the process that organizations and programs distinguish themselves from their surroundings and related organizations with boundaries and specializations with a collective definition of the field. When examining the current stage of institutionalization of film curating, I am using the following indicators:

- Collective definition of the field
- Professional association and connection
- Emergence of a center-periphery structure

In the diagram, indicators are placed in circle around the subject being investigated in this chapter: institutionalization. All the indicators are represented by double-headed arrows. The indicators are pointing at institutionalization at one end and at the other end it shows the areas where evidence of the indicators can be found. This is to show that the progress of institutionalization takes place in the fashion of constant interaction between the status of institutionalization and evidence. They strengthen each other, and the progress is mutual.
Figure 3.1 Indicators for Institutionalization
Collective Definition of the Field

Collective Definition of the Field refers to a common identity shared by institutions and individual practitioners that is distinct from their surrounding – whether of museums, of vaudeville theatres, or mainstream movie theatres. This identity is created by a professional culture which is a manifestation of similar institutional missions, education background, professional experience, and professional objectives and destinies.

Non-profit organizations manifest their self-imposed long-term objectives in their mission statement. Mission is the soul of an non-profit institution, and mission statement demonstrates the understanding of a field that the institution identifies itself with and the values weighed in when decisions and choices made on the way to a desired future. Therefore mission statement provides us with a parameter for examining whether the institutional identity of various organizations in one field is to some degree unified to a collective understanding which can be evidenced by the overlapping language in their mission statement. Second, the difference in mission statement manifests the different aspects each institution focuses on and different approach institution adopts, which reflects the individuality and distinct personality of different institutions. In addition to the collective definition of the field identified in mission statement, this part of the mission statement demonstrates the institutional diversity in the field, which is an important indicator of the progression of institutionalization. Through presentation and comparison of mission statement of several major institutions that represent different
regions and aesthetics, I am examining the collective definition and institutional individuality of non-profit film exhibition directed and conducted by film curators.

**Film Library, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, NY**

The purpose of the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art is to trace, catalog, assemble, preserve, exhibit and circulate to museums and colleges single films or programs of all types of film in exactly the same manner in which the museum traces, catalogs, exhibits and circulates paintings, sculpture, models and photographs or architectural buildings, or reproductions of works of art, so that the film may be studied and enjoyed as any other one of the arts is studied and enjoyed (“An Outline of a Project for Founding the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art”, Iris Barry)

**Anthology Film Archives, New York, NY**

The cinemathques of the world generally collect and show the multiple manifestations of film: as document, history, industry, mass communication. . . . Anthology Film Archives is the first film museum exclusively devoted to the film as an art. What are the essentials of the film experience? Which films embody the heights of the art of cinema? The creation of Anthology Film Archives has been an ambitious attempt to provide answers to these questions; the first of which is physical — to construct a theater in which films can be seen under the best conditions; and second critical – to define the art of film in terms of selected works which indicate its essences and parameters. (http://www.anthologyfilmarchives.org/history/manifesto/)

**George Eastman House, Rochester, NY**

George Eastman House, an independent nonprofit museum, is an educational institution that tells the story of photography and motion pictures—media that have changed and continue to change our perception of the world. We:

Collect and preserve objects that are of significance to photography, motion pictures, and the life of George Eastman.

Build information resources to provide the means for both scholarly research and recreational inquiry.
Keep and care for images, literature, and technology to tell the story of photography and the motion picture in history and in culture.

Care for George Eastman’s house, gardens, and archives, maintaining them for public enjoyment and as a memorial to his contribution to our lives and our times.
(http://www.eastmanhouse.org/inc/the_museum/mission.php)

Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley, CA

The mission of the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive is to inspire the imagination and ignite critical dialogue through art and film. The UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive is the visual arts center of the University of California, Berkeley. Through art and film programs, collections and research resources, we aspire to be locally connected and globally relevant, engaging audiences from the campus, community, and beyond.
(http://www.bampfa.berkeley.edu/about/mission)

American Film Institute, Los Angeles, CA

The American Film Institute is a national institute providing leadership in screen education and the recognition and celebration of excellence in the art of film, television and digital media.

The American Film Institute was founded in 1967 as a national arts organization to train filmmakers and preserve America’s vanishing film heritage. The National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities recommended creating AFI as a nonprofit “to enrich and nurture the art of film in America.”
(http://www.afi.com/about/)
(http://www.afi.com/about/history.aspx)

Gene Siskel Film Center, Chicago, IL

Since its foundation in 1961, San Francisco Cinematheque has become one of the most knowledgeable and respected showcases of experimental film, digital media, and performative cinema in the world. Our intention is to make these works a part of the larger cultural landscape through three main areas of activity: exhibition, publication, and education.
(http://www.sfcinematheque.org/about.php)

Cinémathèque Français, Paris
The purpose of the Cinémathèque Française is to establish, in the interests of film art and film history, a museum and archives which shall have the widest possible utilization…As a library, the Cinémathèque Française collects and preserves documents relating to films, and purchases or receives, on loan or as gifts, positive and negative prints of films…As a museum, it assumes responsibility for exhibiting film documents and for exhibiting and distributing films which have artistic or pedagogic value. As a research center, the Cinémathèque undertakes historical research programs and provides for the publication of the results…It is, by its constitution and bylaws, a private enterprise developed by its membership. (“The Cinémathèque Française”, Henry Langlois)

In addition to an institutional definition of the field, individual practitioners also develop a collective definition of the field. Some may argue that the collective definition of a profession is more of an indicator of professionalization rather than institutionalization, but I am including it in the discussion of institutionalization for the following two reasons. First, film curating is mainly practiced by people under two titles: curator and programmer. The differentiation of the two titles, to a large degree, owes to the institutions to which they are attached. Second, it is important to discuss the difference and similarities early in this thesis so that the discussion later on is based on a clarified understanding of the field of film curating.

When glancing through the websites of various non-profit film exhibition organizations, one would notice that some curators are entitled as chief curator and assistant curator while others are addressed as senior programmer and programmer. A discussion of these two titles is also included in the first session of the seminar of curatorial practice in film at Berkeley University. Clearly, this is a subject to be clarified.
The title of curator was created in the museum setting. It refers to a specialist in a certain field who is responsible for the overall well-being and scope of the museum collection related to the field, including acquisition and disposal, preservation and access, interpretation and exhibition, and research and publication. Despite the doubts and disagreement from conservatives, cinema gained its legitimate position in the museum world after MoMA formed Film Library in the 1935, and film curators, whose job include programming, became a member of the museum community. However, the practice of film programming widely exists outside museum. Film professionals, who share similar training background and professional experience with film curators, are creating film series exhibitions in other non-profit exhibition venues including cinémathèques, film festivals, film schools, etc. Usually they are called programmers. So to a large degree, to be titled curator or programmer depends on whether it is in a museum or not.

There is another distinction within the museum world. There are museums as collecting institutions and non-collecting institutions. In other words, some museums maintain a permanent collection of their own and some don’t. Due to the high cost of storing film and, there dare I say, a reluctance to fully embrace the idea of film being part of the art world hence to spend money on creating and maintaining a film collection, only a few museums own a film archive. Without a film archive, film curators do not have any collection-related responsibility any more, which leaves them with jobs of organizing
exhibitions, interpreting materials, conducting research and publication and representing the institution. Even though they still bear the title of curator, their responsibilities are not substantially more than or different from those of programmers. In this case, the title curator is only an institutional choice. During the exploratory interviews, when an interviewee was asked why the title is senior programmer instead of curator since it is a museum, I got a very interesting answer: it’s more modest. While some of the film curators feel it is more modest to call themselves programmers instead of curators because their job does not involve any archiving or preservation, there is no debate over whether a fine-art curator in a non-collecting museum should be called curator. This is another instance that shows the distance between film, a discipline rooted in mass culture, and fine art, history and status of which have been positioned on the top of ivory museum tower.

In spite of the difference of their institutional environment, curators and programmers consider themselves as one group as they share a similar educational background, the same programming responsibility for their institutions, the same educational responsibility to the public, and most of all an enthusiasm for cinema and a willingness to devote their life and career to cinema. Based on these shared characteristics, they have formed a collective definition of the profession. Understanding the definition and composition of the field, the investigation of this thesis is based on a broad concept of film curator, which includes those who act in collecting institutions,
non-collecting institutions, and many many more outside the museum world but bear the same responsibilities.

**Professional Association and Connection**

The organization of professional association is another important indicator. It is an institutional effort created on an established collective definition of the field. Professional associations ally and organize the individual institutions and/or practitioners to advance the professional culture among its members and to create a professional image to the public. The following discussion will examine the current situation of this aspect of institutionalization.

First of all, there is no professional association established specifically for film curators. As discussed earlier in the history of film exhibition, film curating is an emerging practice that has been in existence since 1930s. Second, there is only a relatively small numbers of film curators in position right now. According to the statistics from Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, there were approximately 10,000 curators in employment in 2006, and the projected employment of curator in 2016 is 13,000. (Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-2009 Edition) Only a very small portion of these curators specialize in film. Due to the nature of and the limited funding supporting this profession, the number of film curator is not expected to grow dramatically. This statistics is based on the definition of curator as those who work in museum settings. For programmers who work outside museums, there is no professional
association either. In a word, the status of professional association for film curating and programming professionals is non-existence.

One organization that film curators and programmers can join is the Association of Art Museum Curators (AAMC). However, as far as I learnt from the exploratory interviews with film curators nationwide, only the ones at MoMA are members of AAMC. While other curators are aware of the existence of AAMC, they do not even know some of their colleagues in the field are member of AAMC. Considering it defines its target members as traditionally-defined curators from art museums, AAMC is unlikely to become the organization to unify film programming professionals or the platform where they can communicate and advance their profession.

Another organization which more curators and programs are involved is the National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture (NAMAC). NAMAC was founded in 1980 by a group of media arts centers to strengthen their social and cultural impact by unification. NAMAC accepts both individuals and institutions as members. The goal of NAMAC is to support and advocate for independent film, video, audio and online-multimedia arts. Its members comprises a wide range of organizations and individuals, who provide services in multiple areas including education, production, exhibition, distribution, collection-building, preservation, criticism and general advocacy. It runs a Leadership Institute that provides workshops to promote the participant’s leadership skills. It offers individual members funding for professional development and
offers institutions grant for capacity building. It creates a platform for building network and channeling ideas through newsletters, conferences and publications. It helps its members start and advance their career with toolkit on evaluation, fundraising and strategic planning. NAMAC provides rather overall service, and many media-art institutions and professionals are members of NAMAC for the good information and service it provides, but it is not a professional organization for film curators and programmers. It doesn’t provide information and service that are targeted on the issues and problems of film curating and programming.

In the world of film and film archives there is the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF), founded in 1938. FIAF has more than seventy members today. It holds annual congresses. While programming related issues do come up during the meetings, its main focus is the issue of film preservation. Moreover, it is the institution, film archive that is a member, not the individual curator.

The most formal meeting of film curators and programmers is the Annual International programmers’ Gathering hosted by Cinémathèque Ontario on the day before the opening of Toronto International Film Festival. In 2007, 75 programmers from 59 organizations representing 8 countries in North America, Europe and Asia, and 5 representatives from 4 major art-cinema film distributors attended the annual gathering. At the meeting, programmers communicate their first-hand experience and discuss issues in the field. The distributor representatives talk their policy and situation at the end of the
meeting. Distributors do not participate in the earlier discussion so that programmers can have a conversation among themselves about issues and possible solutions when dealing with distributors. However, year after year the discussions have always been focused on the same issues, for example how to unify film curators and programmers to get a lower rental fees from distributors and difficulties faced by American film curators when renting films from Europe, but no solution for any of the big problems has ever been reached, so this gathering is becoming less and less formal, and more and more of a cocktail reception. One product of the meeting is the formation of an online Yahoo Group as a daily-networking platform for programmers to exchange ideas and keep up with the latest update in the field. Since programmers tend to travel to film festivals, it is not surprising that much of the networking that takes place occurs very informally at the major international film festivals like Cannes, Toronto, Rotterdam, Berlin or the specialized festivals that feature a lot of new film restorations, Bologna and Pordenone to name two.

In general, the professional connection of film curators and programmers has not been formally institutionalized yet. Networking is happening on an individual and occasional level. Currently film curators and programmers do not have the urgent need or the financial and labor power to realize the idea of professional association to establish an institutionalized professional connection and to maintain and advance the political standing and professional authority of film curating. On top of this, the direction and
advancement of film curating is, to a large degree, determined by its institutional environment and support from the film industry. At present the role of museum is in transition, and the film world is also facing the uncertainty brought by digitalization. Having an unpredictable future and not knowing what non-profit film exhibition is going to be like, the film curator and programmer community is in no position to stabilize and standardize their practice.

**Emergence of A Center-periphery Structure**

This indicator refers to the emergence of several key players that have a prominent and leading position in the field, hold up as model to the others, and receive more attention from the community and general public.

**Archiving**

Institutions that first became the key players in the field were the major film archives or institutions with a film archive. They became significant for the following three reasons. First of all, with the film collection they have at their immediate disposal, these organizations have more freedom and convenience in programming. The immediate access to a collection of film and historical documents enables a broader and deeper research on film as well. Second, these institutions soon gained a reputation among all the non-collecting institutions simply because they need to loan films from those that have a film archive. Third, only collecting institutions with a permanent collection can be considered for some awards. In the museum community, owning a permanent collection
is much more popular in fine art than in film. Thus some awards established for museums are permanent-collection based, for example, the “Outstanding Catalogue Based on a Permanent Collection” from the Association of Art Museum Curators. Therefore, only film exhibitions curated by film-collecting institutions qualify for the competition for such awards and get the chance of publicity. Institutions with a major film archives include:

- Museum of Modern Art (New York, NY)
- Anthology Film Archives (New York, NY)
- George Eastman House (Rochester, NY)
- Harvard Film Archive (Cambridge, MA)
- Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division Library of Congress (Washington D.C.)
- Pacific Film Archive (Berkeley, CA)
- UCLA Film & Television Archive (Los Angeles, CA)
- Academy Film Archive – Center for Motion Picture Study (Los Angeles, CA)
- American Film Institute Collection (Los Angeles, CA)
- Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research (Madison, WI)

Public Grants

Public grant can be used as an important indicator of how much an organization and the programs it provides are valued by the professionals and the community. It indicates the public attention that an organization receives and how much the community is willing to reward the organization for what it has to offer. It not only demonstrate the reputation an organization has gained from its history but also shows the confidence the
community has in its future potential. Reviewing the history of grants, who have been receiving the grant and how much each of them received, will reveal the key players who’s made the biggest contribution and received the most recognition.

I am going to review the NEA grant history from 2005 to 2008 for Media Arts under the category Access to Artistic Excellence I. As a federal funding agency, NEA offers grant to organizations nationwide. Without any geographic preference, it reveals the national star organizations. As the grant categories setting changed since 2005, to make a fair comparison, I am only reviewing the grant history of the same category after 2005. All the exhibition-related grants are listed under Artistic Excellence I, while Artistic Excellence II is focused on other programs and efforts organizations carried out, such as educational programs and capacity building.

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</table>

Table 3.1 Access to Artistic Excellence I, Media Arts

The following list includes organizations that received grants above average for their film exhibition programming:
Anthology Film Archives (New York, NY)
Art Institute of Chicago (on behalf of Video Data Bank) (Chicago, IL)
Art Institute of Chicago (on behalf of Gene Siskel Film Center) (Chicago, IL)
Austin Film Society (Austin, TX)
Bay Area Video Coalition (San Francisco, CA)
Chicago International Film Festival – Cinema Chicago (Chicago, IL)
   Cinema Seattle (Seattle, WA)
   Cleveland International Film Festival (Cleveland, OH)
   Denver Film Society (Denver, CO)
   Facets Multi-Media, Inc. (Chicago, IL)
   Film Society of Lincoln Center, Inc. (New York, NY)
   Film Forum (New York, NY)
   George Eastman House (Rochester, NY)
   Museum of Modern Art (New York, NY)
   National Film Preserve – Telluride Film Festival (Portsmouth, NH)
   Northwest Film Center - Portland Art Museum (Portland, OR)
   San Francisco Film Society (San Francisco, CA)
   San Francisco Jewish Film Festival (San Francisco, CA)
   Thomas A. Edison Media Arts Consortium (Black Maria Film and Video Festival)
      (Jersey City, NJ)
   Washington, DC International Film Festival (Washington, DC)
   Women Make Movies, Inc. (New York, NY)

Four organizations received a grant more than $50,000 from 2005 to 2008 consecutively:

   Art Institute of Chicago (on behalf of Video Data Bank and Gene Siskel Film Center), (Chicago, IL)
   Bay Area Video Coalition, Inc. (San Francisco, CA)
   Facets Multi-Media, Inc. (Chicago, IL)
   Film Forum (New York, NY)

Another two organizations have received a grant more than $50,000:

   Film Society of Lincoln Center, Inc (New York, NY) (2008)
   George Eastman House (Rochester, NY) (2008)

The top grantees, organizations that have received a single grant more than
$50,000 from NEA, are doubtlessly key players in the field, and unsurprisingly these organizations are in New York, San Francisco and Chicago. The organizations that have received grants above the average amount are major players in the field too. Some of them might not have any national influence, but they are key film exhibition institutions in their region and community. These organizations are geographically diverse and they have a wide range of focus.

**Film Festival**

Film festival is another popular form of non-profit film exhibition. It is a form of institutionalization, but it is different from museums, cinematheques, art institutes, etc. Rather, it is an event that runs on a regular time basis. Film festivals are usually organized and presented by an actual organization. For some, the film festival is the major event of the organization and it is so famous that few people are aware of the existence of the hosting institution. For example, Sundance Film Festival has gained incredible reputation in recent years. It has grown into one of the biggest and the most recognized film festival for independent cinema, but few people are aware of Sundance Institute, the non-profit organization behind the film festival, and other programs offered by the institute. In other cases, there are many middle-size or small film festivals hosted by art and film organizations, colleges and universities.

There are two major purposes embedded in film festivals: showcase and education. The major film festivals were often created as a showcase for new works of
film and video. This kind of film festival is a window for film art, and it is often accompanied by competition. For it is open for public submission, all filmmakers, professional and amateur, have the chance to compete by simply submitting their works. Therefore it has become an important channel for emerging filmmakers to gain a position in the film world. At the same time, for the big amount of entries they receive, these film festivals provide filmmakers a chance to test their works and talents. Also, they provide a platform for filmmakers and audience to learn about the frontier of filmmaking. Although education is usually not an explicit objective of such film festivals, it is undoubtedly a good education about film art for filmmakers and audience. The description of New York Film Festival presented by Film Society of Lincoln Center gives a good example of such film festivals:

The New York Film Festival continues its proud tradition of showing the newest and most important cinematic works by directors from around the world. The 17-day Festival is an unparalleled showcase of inspiring and provocative cinema by emerging talents and first-rank international artists whose films are often recognized as contemporary classics. A special section of the Festival is the Views from the Avant-Garde which premieres non-narrative, experimental film and video.

The Festival is highly competitive with an average of 28 feature films and 12 short films selected each year. There are no categories and no prizes awarded. Selections are made by a five person committee.

All filmmakers, regardless of experience, are invited to submit work to the New York Film Festival. There is no entry fee. There are no competition categories – all lengths and all genres are considered. (http://www.filmlinc.com/nyff/about.html)
The other group of film festivals are aimed at an educational purpose. The motive of these film festivals is not film exhibition itself, rather films are used as an accessible and interesting educational tool to bring education for a certain audience or to raise discussions on certain issues. The subject matter of these film festivals is not film but the cultural and social ideas presented through films. Films exhibited in such film festivals are not necessarily the newest of their kind but usually the most representative of the focal issues of the targeted discussion. For example, the Columbus International Children’s Film Festival is presented by the Wexner Center for the Arts every year. Selected films range from newest animation to classic Charlie Chaplin. With being entertaining considered as a factor for better reception of children, education is the ultimate purpose. This education is reflected by the diverse culture represented in the selected films. It is evident that Wexner Center attempts to deliver the education of cultural diversity to the next generation. Film festivals with educational purposes are also presented by colleges and universities as an alternative forum for discussion on social and cultural issues.

Film festivals mainly fall into two categories: general and thematic film festivals. General film festivals are usually named after a city and hosted by a major institution. Films of all genres and themes can compete for the opportunity of exhibition. Entries are usually categorized by genres for competition. Thematic film festivals usually serve a certain group of filmmakers or audience. Such film festivals mainly focus on the
following four themes: children’s film festival, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and trans-gender) community, independent filmmaking and experimental/avant-garde filmmaking. The audience and filmmakers of these film festivals belong to the minority. Their presence tend to be ignored by general film festivals, so specialized thematic film festivals are created to These film festivals are established specifically to serve their needs and culture.

It is hard for film festivals to stand alone, because they are seasonal events that cannot support a permanent staff of its own. For this reason, film festivals are usually attached to an organization. The people who work on the film festivals work on other programming of the organization during the rest time of the year. The organization of film festivals also involves a great number of volunteers and seasonal staff. The permanent staff who participate in the organizing process of film festivals are usually the staff of the hosting institution. Because of the fluidity of personnel, there is no professional association for film festival professionals.
CHAPTER 4

PROFESSIONALIZATION OF FILM CURATING

A curator’s job is a complex one. Curators administer museums. They direct the acquisition, storage, and exhibition of collections, including negotiating and authorizing the purchase, sale, exchange, or loan of collections. They are also responsible for evaluating and categorizing collections. Curators oversee and help conduct the institution’s research projects and related educational programs. Today, an increasing part of their duties involves fundraising and marketing, which may include the writing and reviewing of grant proposals, journal articles, and publicity materials, as well as attendance at meetings, conventions, and civic events. Therefore neither is the professionalization an easy process, nor can it be achieved by single effort. This chapter is going to investigate the multiple aspects that both drives and indicates progression.

Before getting in to the discussion, it is important to clarify the definition of certain terms (Freidson, 1994).

**Professionalization** – The process by which occupations can shift their position along the Occupational Continuum through the use of
various resources, attributes and methods.

This definition takes us to Occupational Continuum.

**Occupational Continuum** – Continuum with unskilled labor as one pole and profession as the other. Occupations are arranged along this continuum based on various attributes and may move in either direction because of various processes and actions undertaken by the occupation as a field or the individual practitioners.

Simply put, when a field is moving along the continuum from the end of unskilled labor to that of profession, it is getting professionalized; and as an individual is moving along this direction, s/he is becoming professional. In this chapter, we are going to examine the professionalization of the field and the path an individual takes to become a professional film curator as the individual and collective forces are driving the field forward together.

In analyzing the degree of professionalization of film curating, I am using the following indicators:

- specialized knowledge and skills
- lifelong learning expectation
- formal institutions for transmitting knowledge
- systematic evaluation and standards

These indicators refer to the knowledge and skills necessary to perform the duties of the occupation. They are often considered the key indicators and the primary lens through which the question of professionalization is approached, because specialized knowledge and skills distinguish a profession from an unskilled labor.
These indicators all point to the internal force and development of a profession. Professionalization of any occupation is the product of both internal and external development. Some of the external forces have been discussed as part of the institutionalization in chapter 3. Other external indicators measure the progress of professionalization such as a profession’s political standing in the community. But in this investigation I choose to only focus on indicators for internal control. This decision is based on the observation that internal-control indicators are more representative of the particularity of film curating and programming. As film curator is a sub-category of curators, and film curators function within the same institutional framework as curators in other fields, the external-control measurements indicate the level of professionalization of curator as a profession in general instead of film curator in particular. However, it is important to note that the professionalization of curator in general provides a contextual reading and reference for that of film curator. To fully understand the professional status of film curator, internal and external attributes should be combined and studied together, but due to the limitations of this research, they won’t be included.

To further discuss the indicators in details, I will investigate the current practice of film curating to search for evidence for each indicator and to examine the development and level of maturity of the evidence. A diagram outlining the indicators and evidence is given.
Professionalization

- Professionalized Knowledge and Skills
- Lifelong Learning Expectation
- Formal Institution for Transmitting Knowledge
- Systematic Evaluation and Standards

Knowledge in Film Professional Skills
Creative Programming Technology Advancement
Film Production/Studies Professional Development
Implicit Standards in Awards

Figure 4.1 Indicators for Professionalization
Before getting into a detailed discussion on film curator, I am presenting the definition and roles and responsibilities of curator by Curators Committee of American Association of Museums. (A Code of Ethics for Curators, 04/11/08 draft, http://www.curcom.org/docs/08COE_draft_web.htm). Since film curator is a member of the curator team, their role and responsibilities can be identified with those of curator in general. Thus, it can be considered a parameter of the roles and responsibilities of film curator, and an examination of responsibilities is an investigation of the specialized knowledge and skills required for film curator too.

**Definition:** A curator is highly knowledgeable, experienced, or educated in a discipline relevant to the museum's purpose or mission. Curatorial roles and responsibilities vary widely within the museum community, even within a museum.

**Roles and Responsibilities:**

- Remain current in the intellectual developments within their field(s), conduct original research and develop new scholarship, and contribute to the advancement of the body of knowledge within their field(s) of study and the museum profession as a whole.

- Make recommendations for acquiring and deaccessioning objects and collections.

- Assume responsibility for the overall care and development of the collection that includes objects, specimens, historic structures, and/or intellectual property.

- Formulate institutional policies and procedures for the care of collections that are based on the highest-accepted professional standards.

- Perform research to identify and document the history of materials in the collection.

- Interpret the objects, materials, and specimens belonging or lent to the museum.
• Develop and organize exhibitions.

• Contribute to programs and other interpretive materials of various types.

• Publish monographs and other materials.

• Represent their institution in the media, at public gatherings, and at professional conferences and seminars.

**Specialized Knowledge and Skills**

To understand the specialized knowledge and skills needed for a profession, it is best to observe the practitioners in the field. It is more so in the case of a young profession like film curating, for which little literature exists. Examining the training background and professional experience of people who are currently working at curatorial positions in film will provide us an empirical understanding of this profession. Thanks to the complexity of the curator’s job, people holding a curatorial position today have taken different roads to where they are today, but overlapping and pattern also appear in their career paths.

The four film curators whose experience will be discussed here all work for major institutions that are part of the center-periphery structure of this field. They all have stepped into a rather mature stage of their career, so their past experience will offer abundant information. An observation of their career paths not only will provide this academic research important reference from practice in the field, but it is also expected to set up examples for those who might be interested in becoming a film curator.
**Susan Oxtoby**

Current position: Senior Film Curator, Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive, (Berkeley, CA)

Susan Oxtoby has a B.A. of double major in English and Cinema Studies from University of Toronto. For her interest in film, she studied in Ryerson University in Toronto and got a Bachelor of Applied Arts in Media Studies: Film Option, where she gained more knowledge and skills in film production.

Her first job was Research Assistant to the Head Film Librarian in York University on an annotated bibliography of Canadian Experimental Film. Later she participated in the production of a narrative film, The Duration of Life and Other Tales from the Grimms, as a part-time Assistant Editor. During the same period, she also gained experience in production, publicity and book editing from her apprenticeship with R. Bruce Elder, a Toronto-based experimental filmmaker. Her early working experience also includes: one year as a full-time Administrative Assistant to the Secretary-General of the 33rd International Congress of Asian and North African Studies and one year in a contract position with Art Gallery of Ontario’s Film Department working on cataloguing and archiving. Susan gained her experience and network with film distribution from her three years at the Canadian Filmmakers’ Distribution Centre (Toronto). Starting as Special Projects Coordinator, she coordinated screenings of CFMDC films at centers across Canada and abroad. In 1992 she became the Experimental Film Officer who is responsible for the rental and sale of the films in the Experimental section.

In 1993, she started her career as an Assistant Programmer with Cinémathèque Ontario. Because there were only two people working in the department, Susan and James Quandt (Director of Programming), she started taking responsibility in all curating/programming related aspects: researching series, selecting films, sourcing prints, coordinating guest lectures and panel discussions, writing program notes, coordinating print traffic, editing and contributing writing Cinémathèque Ontario’s Program Guide, and overseeing production management of the Program Guide. After 4 years as an assistant programmer, Susan became the Director of Programming at Cinémathèque Ontario in 1997 and served in the position for 8 years. This position involves the overall artistic direction of Cinémathèque Ontario’s annual program, which include 400 events per year with an average annual attendance of over 50,000 patrons. As the Director of Programming, Susan was responsible for the management of a department with a budget of $800,000. She also lead activities in Communications, marketing, Public Affairs, Development, Print Traffic, and Box Office departments. In 2005, Susan moved to California from Toronto to join the staff of the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive as the Senior Film Curator.
Mike Maggiore

Current Position: Programmer and Publicist, Film Forum (New York, NY)

Mike graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1989 with an English major. Different from many who entered programming in later career, Mike started investing in this interest in film since his sophomore year in college. While he was attending college, he also worked with the student film programming board at the Wisconsin Union – the Film Committee of the Wisconsin Union Directorate. He ran one of the film series in his junior year, and in his senior year he became the chair of the Film Committee that ran several different weekly film series in the student unions and presented special events and other programs on a regular basis. As early as when he was in college, he was already gaining programming experience.

In summer 1989, Mike began working as an intern with the Film/Video Department at Walker Art Center (Minneapolis, MN). In early 1990 the internship turned into a full-time position in the department. In 1993, Mike worked as Publicist at the American Museum of the Moving Image (Astoria, NY), where the writing and communication skills he gained from his English major in college became handy. One year later, in fall of 1994, he joined Film Forum with a starting position as Publicity and Programming Associate, and eventually he was promoted to Programmer and Publicist, which is his current title. His professional skills as a publicist is essential to his current job at Film Forum, because Film Forum is the only non-profit film exhibition organization that survives on its own income. 75% of its budget comes from its own box office, which means Film Forum lives on its own instead of relying on public and private grants. Public relations become particularly important to an organization that depends on the public.

Jim Healy

Current position: Assistant Curator, George Eastman House (Rochester, NY)

Jim Healy was an English major in Loyota University (Chicago, IL). As a young cinema enthusiast, he started writing freelance on films during the college years.

The first job Jim got after college was totally irrelevant to film. It was a position with the Characteristic and Fitness Investigation for National Conference of Bar Examination, and he worked there for three years. When asked why, he said at that time he couldn’t find an ideal job and this job offered him a decent salary to live in Chicago. But Jim never stopped writing freelance on film during these years. His writing kept him in the network of film professionals and organizations. Among all the freelance writings he was doing, a major one was writing program notes for Chicago International Film Festival. An upheaval at the film festival happened. Everybody except the Director of the
As Jim was writing program notes for them, the director took him in and Jim got the opportunity to participate in the programming for the film festival. He took charge of the programming of short film and documentary and soon he was ready to work on programming on a daily basis. The programming experience at Chicago International Film Festival prepared Jim for a position as a programmer, but the film festival is only a two-week event every year, and it was all planning in the rest of the year, so Jim was looking for a job as a programmer. In 2001, Jim applied for an opening at the Museum of Moving Image (MoMI). Although Jim did not get the job at MoMI, his qualifications caught the attention of the person who was hiring at MoMI. As the person hired by MoMI previous worked at George Eastman House, and since he left there was an opening. Jim was recommended by MoMI to the curator at George Eastman House for the position. On September 4, 2001, Jim started working at George Eastman House as a Film Programmer and now he is the Assistant Curator.

**Josh Siegel**

Current position: Assistant Curator, Department of Film, Museum of Modern Art (New York, NY)

Josh graduated from Columbia University in American Studies with a double major in English and history. He incorporated film history in his undergraduate thesis. With a passion for film, Josh started working on film projects after college. He worked on several documentaries, including PBS’ American Masters, in the capacity of associate producer and researcher. Working on these positions, he exercised and advanced his skills in writing and research. More importantly, he familiarized himself with the film circle and established his own network with filmmakers, film producers and distributors, etc.

Josh started his curatorial career with several internships at several New York museums including a 3-month curatorial internship with the Department of Ancient near Eastern Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1993, he arrived at the Museum of Modern Art as a Research Assistant in the Department of Film and Video. Three years later he became the Curatorial Assistant and the Associate Curator in the Department of Film today.

Observing the career paths of these film curators and programmers, I categorize the specialized knowledge and skills into two aspects. The first aspect focuses on the knowledge and skills directly related to film, the cinematic language and history of the
artistic product and/or the actual materiality and production of film, which is usually
gained through a formal school education in cinema studies or film production. The other
aspect relates to the professional knowledge and skills gained in practice.

The first aspect entails the following set of knowledge:

- cinema history
- textual reading of films – film analysis
- film archiving and preservation
- technical knowledge of different media formats
- writing and research

The second aspect entails the following set of professional knowledge and abilities

- collection/library management (video/print/digital material)
- curatorial/museum studies
- publication/editorial
- administration/management
- network building
- copyright issues
- marketing/public relations
- fundraising/development

A major duty of film curator is to develop and organize exhibitions, namely to choose,
interpret and present films. To be able to make judgments and choices of films,
knowledge of film history, understanding of cinematic language and capability of film
analysis is essential. While most film curators come from a theoretical background in
cinema/film studies, they also find knowledge and experience about the material
characteristics of actual film and various media formats necessary in their daily duties
and communication with filmmakers and film industry. Some of them gained the
knowledge and hands-on experience through taking classes and participating in student
film societies while they were in school, the others learnt from reading or working with film in practice. Not all film curators have the knowledge and skill in film archiving and preservation. It depends on whether the institution they work for is a collecting institution.

It is worth noting that while the body of knowledge in film is the core of the profession of film curator, professional skills ensure the power of knowledge to be properly and fully exerted. Film curators must not only understand the subject matter of his job but also the institutional environment he works in and the objectives and implication of his practice.

**Formal Institutions for Transmitting Knowledge**

Formal institutions for learning professional knowledge are another important indicator for two reasons. First of all, it implies that the knowledge needed to perform the work is complex enough that any lay person is not capable of it. Second, it enables the field to be more protective of its body of knowledge, creating a mechanism to better control access (Denzin & Mettlin, 1968).

Film curators mostly come from a background of cinema studies (or a more literature background such as English) with a few from film production/filmmaking.

The education of film production came before that of film studies. The professional training for film production was brought into being by two changes. On the frontier of higher education, American colleges and universities shifted their mission
from gentlemen-training sites to institutions tasked to address the utility of academy. At the same time, the film industry was also going through systemization and standardization, which made academic rationalization of the industry possible and necessary. In 1915, Columbia University started teaching screenwriting courses. Along with courses of screening writing and technical skills, curriculum that fostered interpretive and analytical skill was developing. Followed was the emerging publication of basic film texts and non-degree programs of film studies. Soon listing film studies as a formal element of university curriculum was put on the agenda. Throughout the late 1920s and 1930s, both the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America actively corresponded with universities such as Columbia, Harvard, Stanford, and the University of Southern California (USC) about setting up film courses. Other schools worked in tandem with groups operating outside of the industry in order to generate resources – material and intellectual. (Wasson, 2002 Pp54) During the same time period, with the ciné-club movement spreading throughout Europe and North America, more and more people, especially young people, began to invest great interest in studying cinema. Meanwhile, the institutionalization of film archiving and exhibition was on its way. Knowledge about cinema kept accumulating and being systemized as films and related documents were being gathered, archived and organized for public consumption. In 1936, the Museum of Modern Art Film Library began circulating films to colleges, and in 1937 Film Library created the
first college credit course in film at Columbia University, a course that included lectures by filmmakers such as Alfred Hitchcock and Luis Buñuel.

However, it is important to note that even though the scholarship of cinema studies have established its position in the world of academia, and departments and programs of cinema studies can be found in almost every college and university, film curator/programmer is neither the career goal that this education is aimed at nor a popular career choice of the graduates.

While programs of film studies mostly exist in colleges and universities, education of film production and preservation found new home in non-profit art organizations, art institutes and film schools. Schools dedicated to filmmaking techniques, such as New York Film Academy, are founded usually as private schools and independent institutions. Training in film preservation and archiving can be found in American Film Institute in addition to some university programs. Responding to a growing demand in education, a great number of media-focused non-profit art organizations that have education program as an integral part of their programming have emerged. They offer both the opportunities of learning and the access to equipment.

These learning institutions, whether within academia or not, only offer their students some of the specialized knowledge and/or skills necessary to working as film curator, but none of them provides training targeted on this profession, so rarely is internship or any kind of career development training or opportunities offered.
On the other hand, curatorial practice is being theorized into an independent discipline, and programs and institutions dedicated to curatorial studies are emerging. The Institute of Fine Arts of New York University offers a doctoral-level program in Curatorial Studies jointly with The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Only applicants who have completed a master’s degree in art history are considered The Center for Curatorial Studies and Art in Contemporary Culture in Bard College, New York, was founded in 1990, and in 1994 it initiated its graduate program in curatorial studies. On the West Coast, California College of the Arts established the first graduate program in Curatorial Practice. Courses on curatorial practice can be found under the discipline of museum studies in some universities. These courses tend to be more theoretical, while the programs offered by art institute are designed more as an advanced professional development for artists and art historians and scholars who are interested to develop a career in museum, thus they focus more on the practical and administrative skills needed for a curatorial position. In addition, many museums offer internship and fellowship programs in curatorial departments, which are good opportunities for starters to gain some first-hand experience.

The professional education of film curating only emerged in recent years, and there are very few places that are developing and offering a formal education. University of California, Berkeley, in collaboration with Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, started a 15-week seminar on film curating in fall 2006. It is offered every two
to three years to graduate film students. Susan Oxtoby, the senior film curator at Pacific Film Archive, leads the course. Another one is a film curating course in the master’s program of arts administration at the Art Institute of Chicago. These are the only two courses that focus on film curating that I am aware of. For most of those who want to explore a career in film curating, practice is the only way to receive the education on professional knowledge and skills. As an emerging practice, education in film curating is still limited to a very small scale, and the growth of education greatly depends on career opportunities in the field.

**Systematic Evaluation and Standards**

This indicator suggests that there should be established theories for criticism and evaluation of the work being performed by the occupation. Work should be judged objectively and those within the occupation should be aware of the criteria (Social Science Encyclopedia, 1956)

There is no explicit evaluation system or professional standards for curatorial practice in film. For every screening of a single film or a film series, a curator’s job can be divided into three phases. The first step is to conceive an idea – what is the theme of this film series and what films am I going to include in the screening? A lot of research is devoted to this phase. The second step is to plan and prepare for the screening. Film curator and programmer needs to contact the distributors for a screener or a print of the films he is interested in and to arrange the screenings in coordination with other staff and
departments, such as marketing, in the organization he works for. The third is the actual screening event. It is hard to set up standards for the practice in the first two stages as there is little technicality involved, and the way that the idea is conceived and the screening is planned greatly varies according to the personal style of the curator and the mission and organizational structure of the institution. The third phase, film screening, is the product of curatorial practice. Different from commercial movie theatre, curated film screenings cannot be solely judged by box office; different from art works, a film screening is an intangible experience, so no physicality that can be standardized; different from exhibition of paintings, because screening event is a motion in time, no two-dimensional print documentation can be made as a quick reference for later evaluation.

In the absence of a professional association, not only is no professional evaluation or standard established for film exhibition, but also no regular specialized award is set up as a formal recognition for excellent practice in the field. Film exhibition and curators have received some awards from professional associations in related field. In the United States, the National Society of Film Critics, a body that gives out annual awards mostly to films, has an award category “special citation”, which acknowledges special contribution in film exhibition, film preservation, film distribution, DVD release, life achievement, etc. In 2006, the Museum of the Moving Image was awarded under this category for presenting the first complete U.S. retrospective of French filmmaker Jacques Rivette. In 1999, James Quandt, the Senior Programmer of Ontario Cinémathèque,
received this award for his extraordinary work orchestrating a North American touring series of the films of Robert Bresson that was timed with an anthology on Robert Bresson. In 1970, this award went to Donald Richie (curator of film at MoMA from 1969-1972) and the Film Department of the Museum of Modern Art for the three-month retrospective of Japanese films. In the same year, Daniel Talbot of the New Yorker Theatre was honored the same award for the contribution he has made to cinema by showing films that otherwise might not have been available to the public. Sometimes senior curators receive recognition from governments or universities for promoting its own culture, but this is rather rare, and as the honor for extraordinary life achievements it is generally received late in one’s career.

Since more and more visual art artists are exploring the medium of film and video, film and video have been increasingly appeared in gallery exhibition as part of the show or part of an installation, and some awards were given to film and/video related exhibitions. For example, in 2007 Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive received three nominations from the Association of Art Museum Curators (AAMC) under the category of Outstanding Catalogue Based on a Permanent Collection, Outstanding Exhibition Catalogue and Excellent Exhibition or Installation in Pacific Time Zone for two exhibitions: “A Measure of Time” and “A Rose Has No Teeth: Bruce Nauman in the 1960's”, both of which contained film/video installation. Another instance involves one of the awards by International Association of Art Critics, United States.
section (AICAUSA): Best Exhibition of Time Based Art, which refers to exhibition with installation of video, film, sound or performance.

It is important to distinguish the awards granted by museum curators and art critics mentioned above from the awards granted to curated film exhibitions and film curators. First, film/video installations are usually placed, often besides other works, in an exhibition gallery, which is a rather different space from film theatre. Second, the kind and amount of attention and commitment that a film screening receives from its audience is different from what a video installation receives. Not many people would sit in front of a video installation for 120 minutes, which is the regular length of a film. Third, as artistic products, a single film that is screened in a theatre usually has a much higher concentration of cinematic techniques while, in the case of many contemporary artists, video is used as a tool for documenting their conceptual works that are carried out over time. Therefore, it would be problematic to consider these awards as standards of excellent practice in film exhibition. As none of these awards sets up a category particularly for film and video, the chance of being nominated and awarded is rather random. There is no consistency, which is also a problem with the awards from associations of film critics. In addition, the award juries are composed of critics and curators with a background in fine art. They have limited knowledge in cinema, and their judgment of artworks can be biased by a fine art perspective.

Despite the amateurish judgment from the art world, the inconsistency with the
film critics associations, and the fact none of these awards’ evaluation standard is being articulated, we can still find some clue of the implicit values and standards of what constitutes an excellent program from these awards. Most awarded film series are successful retrospectives. What is being valued here is the breadth and depth of an institution’s programming and the quality and scope of programming as well. As one of the curator’s major roles is educational, the quality of the interpretative materials, in print and online, and the complexity of programming which involves visiting guests, panel discussion and such are also significant components of an outstanding film exhibition.

The awards targeted on film exhibition and film curating are usually granted by professional associations of film critics, and the inclusion of film exhibition, preservation and distribution has been emerging in the category of “special citation” or “special honor” only since late 1990s. A formal professional award focused on film exhibition programming will be highly beneficial to this profession. It will advance the standard practice of programming, strengthen its professional authority and elevate its standing in the museum community. However, due to the size of this profession and the uncertainties that non-profit film exhibition faces from both museum world and film industry, a professional award is not on the agenda yet.

**Lifelong Learning Expectation**

Among all the areas where evidence of continued progress needs to be and is being made, technology is undoubtedly the force that has posed most challenges for the
film curator, so it makes the best example of why and how film curator is expected to learn. Film, as a medium, has evolved from 35mm to 16mm to 8mm and to super 8mm, at the same time there was also the invention of video, the new editing techniques that came with digitalization, and computer-generated images and effects. As a highly technology-based field, a great part of the history of cinema is driven by technology development, so is the history of film exhibition and curating. The introduction of 16mm, as an inexpensive amateur alternative to the conventional 35mm format, enabled non-theatrical and non-commercial programming. The coming of video made home movie possible and popular, thus asked film curator for new approach in programming and marketing. New editing techniques are changing people’s established concept of time and space, thus interpretation with an educational purpose is constantly needed to create effective communication between audience and the film. It is the film curator’s task to closely follow the new updates of technology and understand new technology’s implication in both application and aesthetics.

Thus there is an impetus for progress and constant learning, of what new films have recently been made, what new ideas are incorporated and expressed in the films, what new technology and creative cinematic language have been invented, what implications they have in the world of cinema, and what new programming is needed to re-contextualize the old films. As a mediator and broker of film art, film curator’s job is not only to passively receiving new information but also to distribute the knowledge as
their response, colored by their professional position and institutional value, to any new move in the film world.

The professionalization of film curating is still at an emerging stage. While the pattern of career path has emerged among practitioners, a sense of intention and objective hasn’t being formed in the education process. A professional education is still to be formed and put on the agenda of colleges and universities as an independent subject. Attention and awareness need to be raised in the professional study of curatorial practice. A professional association of film curators is to be formed to strengthen the bond among individual curators and the collective authority of the field. The professionalization of film curating will also need to adjust itself to the transition of its environmental surroundings as the mission, responsibilities and skills required for curators shift in museums.
CHAPTER 5

DIGITIZATION, CULTURAL BROKER AND EDUCATION

After one chapter reviewing the history of film exhibition, two chapters examining the current situation of institutionalization and professionalization of film curating, it is time for some open discussion about the future of the curatorial and programming practice of film. As the ending of this thesis, I am dedicating this chapter to some unresolved issues and challenges that film curating faces. The two major issues I am addressing are audience and digitalization. These two issues lie at the heart of film programming practice. To a large degree, how and how well they are handled determines the future of film exhibition. Who are the audience for film curating? What’s the relationship between curator and audience? What are the effects of digitalization? What have digitalization changed? Why and how will digitalization change film exhibition and conservation? However, mere discussions on single issues are not sufficient. What’s more important is to understand the implications they have for film programmers and for the field of film curating. Pivotal to the future of film curating, managing these two issues require further reflection upon the role and responsibilities of film curators, and the
potential influence that film curating could have on the transition of the role of museum.

Digitization

Digitization refers to the conversion of content from the original media to digital form. It has been a revolution in the cinema world ever since video was invented in 1950s. Heated discussions and debates have arisen around this topic, particularly in recent years. Digitization has become the central issue for unprecedented changes it has brought to the field. Two major digital form in cinema are video and DVD. Video digitizes images that used to be recorded by chemicals on a film base, DVD, as the more advanced digital media which literally translates into a digital video disc, compresses images and sounds on a thin disc in digital form. Video and DVD have posed great changes and challenges to film culture, cinematic aesthetics, film production, collection and preservation, and exhibition. As the collection, preservation and exhibition of digital media came years after it started changing production, issues in these areas remain unresolved and challenging for practitioners in the field. While the focus of this thesis is on film exhibition, it is important to understand the overall impact of digitization on the film industry. As the intermediary that functions between film industry and audience, film exhibition is influenced by the changes in production, preservation and distribution to various degrees and it must evolve with the others so that it is able to keep accommodating the changes, translating for the audience, and responding to a new film culture. The logic implied here is a logic according to time, reflected from the history.
Film production and distribution made exhibition possible, and a culture of cinephilia created the need for exhibition. Exhibition is at the end of this chain. Therefore, I will start my discussion with a glance at the impact digitization exerts on other parts of cinema and then move on to how specifically that connects to exhibition.

Impact on Aesthetics

That digital media changes the aesthetics in cinema is not news. Digital media enabled non-linear editing which created countless possibilities for filmmakers to play with time and space; the different image quality of video has become a characteristic favored by many filmmakers, but little can these be compared to computer generated images, which as Lev Manovich refers to what “redefines the very identity of cinema.” The possibility made by physical reality of conventional film is extremely limited compared to everything that can be simulated in a computer. The biggest difference in cinematic aesthetics is no longer that between fiction and documentary, American and European, or mainstream and avant-garde, but whether a film is live action. In the movies of digital age, human actors become just one of the default options, and as they are named “organics”, cinema is becoming an index. (Manovich)

Impact on Production

Digital media’s impact on production was the first ripple of digitization movement. Invention of video camera and video tape makes filmmaking much cheaper and more accessible. Video camera enables amateur filmmakers and film enthusiasts to
participate in film production as independent voices. Another instance of production changed by digitization involves editing not being in the phase of post-production any more. In traditional film production, filmmakers try to shoot all the scenes that they might include in the final version. Similar to the production of animation, digital movies combine the making and editing together, or the editing comes earlier in the storyboarding phase before the actual film-making.

*Impact on Exhibition*

A greater challenge is brought about by the proliferation of video. In addition to the growing number of devoted members in the filmmaker team, more and more artists from other disciplines are engaging video in their art-making. Compared to the complexity of specialized knowledge and skills needed to operate the simplest film camera, to learn how to use a video camera only requires the reading of an instruction manual. This easy-to-use characteristic echoes with the versatility of moving image. Painters take it as another form of visual expression, sculptors take it as a new tool to explore space, and musicians find the rhythm of editing to their great interests. With video flourishing in the art-making outside filmmaking, challenges and questions about exhibition are rising. Currently one major issue is the institutionalization, or more specifically the departmentalization, of the non-filmmaking video production. When included, video is usually part of an installation or a work series that is made up of multi-media. The whole work is usually exhibited in the gallery space. However, curators and
staff who traditionally work in the exhibition department have little knowledge in working with the technology or interpreting the artistry of the work. Film and video curators have the knowledge and skills, but exhibition of these works is usually not within their jurisdiction.

Currently most institutions are adopting the solution of a collaboration between exhibition curators and film curators. Whether this collaboration is smooth and successful, to some extent, depends on whether the film curator’s opinion is valued. It could cause conflicts if the exhibition curators hold elitist superior attitude towards the participation of film curators.

The history of the Department of Film at MoMA is a good example of the attempts that institutions make to adjust to this need from the field. It started as Film Library in the 1930s. In the 1960s, Film Library was changed into the Department of Film and Video. Then it was renamed into the Department of Film and Media. Recently, Video and Media became a separate department and there is also the Department of Film. The duty of the Department of Video and Media is to be in charge of the gallery exhibitions of video and multi-media works. MoMA’s action of separating Video and Media caused quite some controversies in the museum world. Some believe it is a proper answer to the increasingly complex usage of multi-media in art-making and it is the trend of the future, whereas others think it is wrong to divide film from video as they are all about the using and interpreting the moving image.
Impact on Cinephilia

Cinephilia is a derivative of cinephile which originally referred to cinema enthusiasts during the French New Wave movement. Today cinephiles refer to those who are passionate about films. They are avid film-goers, and they have a thorough knowledge of film history and trivia. They are what Americans call “film buff”. It was also cinephiles who started the film society movement and became the first audience of film exhibitions at film archives in the early years. They are both a consumer of and contributor to film culture. They are the target audience of museum movies and film festivals. Their perception of cinema and movie-going habits have a great influence on whether alternative film exhibition, museum movies and such, will still have an audience.

After the challenge of cable TV, there was a time of digital media: videotape and DVD. Compared to the little control one viewer has over cable TV – on, off and switch the channel – digital media gives viewer complete control over the viewing experience. One can fast-forward to skip the bad parts or rewind to reply the good parts; one can slow-motion the picture or pause it for some good pizza; one can saturate the color or brighten the corners that are supposed to be dark. Digital media has found its niche in the demand for convenience in the consumer culture.

Other than being convenient for the general audience, digital media excel at a few other things for cinephiles that made it popular. First of all, it is easy to carry and copy, which enables cinephiles to share their resource and thus enables a conversation among
like-minded viewers. Conversely DVD has been devised with strict copy protection and regional coding designed specifically to prevent sharing and intercontinental sharing. Facing the high price of a legal DVD copy of the film, cinephiles prefer to invest their time and energy to find or create software programs to break these codes or to obtain bootleg versions of obscure films. In recent years, the Internet download has opened up more channels to illicit versions of films. While the legal infrastructure on laws and regulations concerning the Internet is still under construction, it is easy for cinephiles to bypass the copyright protection system. Despite the opposition to illegal downloading and copying from policy makers and the film industry, from a film-culture point of view, it is hard to ignore the positive influence it has contributed. Many films and filmmakers would have remained unknown if it were not for the sharing through illegal copy and downloads. Furthermore, the unauthorized copies create a word of mouth which turns into a potential market for formal presentation. Another positive contribution involves the “special edition” of films on DVD and the inclusion of supplement materials coming with. One can watch a film featuring filmmakers or scholars discussing the creation or the aesthetics of the film in great detail. Rare footage that is relevant to the film, interviews with filmmakers and commentary from film scholars are attached as supplements on another disc that lively stand as contribution to film history. For the excellent work it has done in compiling supplemental materials, Criterion Collection has become extremely popular among intellectuals and cinephiles.
On one hand, digital media, in legal or illegal form, is boosting the growth of film culture; on the other, cinephiles’ behavior, habits and mentality cultivated in the film culture of the digital age might also reduce the market for film exhibition. Stronger than ever does today’s audience have a sense of security in terms the chance of watching a film. They do not have to “catch” a movie any more because it will eventually come out on DVD or become available for online download. For cinephiles who are enthusiastic about old movies, DVDs are released for their collection, so they no longer feel the urge of catching a film screening in a retrospective program or film festival either. “Movie-going” is becoming less significant as movie-watching can take place whenever and wherever there is a television and a DVD player. Movie theatres are losing their unique function of film screening. On this note, watching movies in the theatre is becoming a nostalgic behavior.

Impact on Film Exhibition

As the medium that carries movies is being digitized, it poses a significant question to film exhibition: if the copy screening at movie theatre is just a DVD copy that we can purchase or rent at Blockbuster, why do we still go to the movie theatre?

Digitization is another case where film curators and programmers reach a unanimous answer when asked what the biggest issue in curated film exhibition is today. It is widely held that digitization is challenging, if not endangering, film exhibition. Digitization has become a powerful trend in all art disciplines for its aesthetic. The
impact it has on film industry is even stronger for the following reason: it dramatically lowers the cost and enhances the convenience of reproduction, shipping and handling. While it is the film purist’s belief that only motion pictures on film are films, film industry and many filmmakers find the low cost and convenience of reproducing and transporting digital media irresistible.

As digital media is replacing conventional film, it is shaking the core of the materiality, an important aspect of film culture. For the different image qualities they present and the different levels of accessibility they provide, 35mm, 16mm, 8mm and video have possessed their distinct positions in film culture. Film prints deteriorate, so the archiving and restoration of film become an indispensable support for film exhibition. It is celebrated when a new print of a significant old film comes out. When a new print of Alain Resnais’ “Last Year at Marienbad” was released at Film Forum in New York City early this year, New York Times did a story on the event. To quote the article: The chief difference between “Marienbad” in 1962 and “Marienbad” in 2008 may be how many people are willing to tolerate that distress and walk into the theatre in the first place. (Times, 01-13-2008) “Last Year at Marienbad” is one of those difficult European films that test audience’ ability to “read” film, and obviously there are more people willing to take the challenge than there were in 1963, because it is no longer simply a film screening, it has become a cultural event surrounding the new print. In other words, film culture is not only a culture established on artistic creation and appreciation, but it has a
material culture that has been considered essential and celebrated throughout the history of cinema.

If this material culture is completely deserted one day; if all the distributors decide that movies should be distributed only in digital formats because it is cheaper and easier and all a theatrical film screening needs is a DVD player, it would be the biggest crisis in film exhibition history. Yet there remains an optimistic view that film can never be totally replaced by digital media as long as there are non-digital movies shot on actual film, because the original film negative must be well preserved so that whenever there is any issue comes up about the digital version, people can always have an original copy to refer to.

Digital media is a double-edged sword. Some believe that it is the future of cinema and some believe it is killing it. Digitization is a complex issue. It cannot and should not be simply defined as beneficial or detrimental. It is a phenomenon and a movement. Literature on digitization has already emerged. While scholars are trying to decipher digitization in theory, questions remained for practitioners in the field. We need more debate and more people, including scholars and practitioners, to participate in the debate on many issues. In a digital age, what is the relationship between film and art? What is the relationship between film and video presented in the theatre and those in the gallery? Does digital media only change the format of presentation or is it changing more than that? How do we maintain the appeal of movie-going experience? How do we create new
appeal for movie-going experience?

**Curator as Culture Broker**

In his book “Reflection of a Culture Broker: A View From the Smithsonian”, Richard Kurin brings the concept of brokering into the discussion of roles and responsibilities of culture scholars and educators. According to Kurin, communicating understandings about cultural subjects is important as it bears political and economic consequences, and public cultural representation is at core of this communication. He claims that the responsibility of scholars and educators is to help people in their cultural representations of themselves to each other. Kurin uses “brokerage” as a metaphor for examining that scholarly and curatorial practice in which practitioners have the ability and power to manipulate symbolic constructs, develop cultural representations, and present them to mass audiences. To further explain what culture brokering means, Kurin categorizes cultural brokering as a form of strategic brokering, a concept created by Robert Reich. Reich describes the role of strategic broker as “creating settings in which problem-solvers and problem-identifiers can work together without undue interference. The strategic broker is a facilitator and a coach – finding the people in both camps who can learn most from one another.” In Kurin’s understanding, “the role of the strategic broker is to marshal the resources necessary to do the job and to keep everyone’s eyes on the general goals while encouraging creativity. Strategic brokers are symbolic analysts – they manipulate symbols, they simplify reality into abstract images, which are
rearranged, juggled, experimented with, communicated to others, and then transformed back into reality.” Drawing from the role of strategic broker, Kurin continues with the role of culture brokers. “Culture brokers study, understand, and represent someone’s culture (even sometimes their own) to nonspecialized others through various means and media. ‘Brokering’ also captures the idea that these representations are to some degree, negotiated, dialogical, and driven by a variety of interests on behalf of the involved parties.”

While addressing the merits of using the “brokerage” metaphor, Kurin stresses that culture brokering is complex and multidimensional, because the value systems and meanings involved are diverse. First of all, the self-interests of the parties involved in cultural presentation are often diffuse and open-ended. Second, genres of cultural exchange are more complex than simple monetary transactions. Third, there are more actors involved in the deal and they have countervailing notions and ideas of the “deal”. Owing to these conditions, the outcomes of cultural brokering are less predictable, depending on varied styles, standards and circumstances.

Kurin characterizes the tasks of culture brokers as sequential, progressive and goal-oriented. They manipulate bureaucratic culture to secure appropriate and varied resources; they intimately involve themselves in brokering other organizations and agencies that mediate their relationship to the people being represented; they secure the necessary support for their activities so that the people and cultures being presented and
the audiences will have a suitable setting for the interchange; they manage the audience, and most importantly culture brokerage involves an informal learning relationship with the represented. These tasks reflect the twofold roles of being a culture broker. On the one hand, they represent their institutions, so their practice reflects the missions, objectives and procedures embedded in the institution. On the other hand, they represent themselves and their practice naturally reflects their own bodies of empirical findings, methodologies, theoretical orientations, and standards for constructing knowledge and its argumentation. These two roles are embedded throughout the practices of accomplishing their multi-faceted tasks.

Film exhibition is an important component of public cultural representation, and film curator is the broker managing the cultural exchange that happens at film screenings. From the brokerage point-of-view, the film curator’s job is to bridge the cultural difference between film/filmmaker and audience. In accomplishing this job, the film curator need to undertake all the tasks defined by Kurin. Film curators need to balance their relationship with the interests of other departments within the institution and their relationship with distributors; they offer support for fund-raising and marketing; and they must maintain an updated knowledge of the field including cinematic artistry, film industry and audience. Among all these tasks, I am going to address the relationship with audience in more detail as I believe it is an important issue that deserves more attention.
Audience

When asked the question of what the most important factor is in the curatorial and programming practice of film, film curators almost unanimously answered: audience. Audience is the purpose of film exhibition. They are what film exhibition is created and what programming is done for. We can find the traces that evidence this importance of audience in the history of film exhibition, both commercial and alternative. In the commercial sector of film exhibition, audience is the market that brings in the box office that defines whether a movie is a success or a failure, hence audience undoubtedly weighs the most. Ever since for-profit film exhibition was invented, film exhibitors have been studying the tastes of audiences so that they could cater to it. Admission prices were lowered at the nickelodeons to attract more people from the working class, conversely prices were raised at upscale theatres and art-house cinemas to maintain their patrons from middle-class and upper-middle-class who preferred certain exclusivity to their leisure activity. Theatres obtained movies that they thought their audience would enjoy, and they created the theatre ambience and provided services needed by their audience. Commercial theatres live and die with box office failure and success. The relationship between them and the audience is a simple market relationship: demand and supply.

Once profit is not the only factor driving film exhibition, exhibitors place their own preference into the programs, and the institution also demonstrate its mission and agenda through the programming, the relationship between exhibitor and audience is no
longer as simple. The reason that the film programmers and curators today are no longer regarded simply as exhibitors is that they call upon specialized skills and knowledge about cinema and programming involved in their daily duties. Even though the subjectivity of programmers becomes a major factor in the film-selection process and the educational agenda of non-profit exhibition makes film not merely an objectified product, the reception and response from the audience remain of great importance. At one of the earliest and most prestigious avant-garde film societies, Cinema 16, Amos Vogel did questionnaires to understand the composition of his audience. Amos Vogel also had his assistant Jack Goelman evaluate the audience reaction. In an interview with Scott MacDonald, Jack Goelman recalled how he was documenting and reporting his observation of the audience at each film screening:

“We tried to understand the audience as much as possible. I’d see these films over and over again with the different audiences, and I’d take notes on a little pad. I would write down how many people left, how much applause there was during the film and after the films. I would make a note if there was nervousness – coughing, talking – or if people seemed bored. I’d come into the office the day after the screening and immediately take out my notes on the audience, write up a report, and give it to Amos, and we’d talk about it.” (MacDonald, 2002)

While being not-for-profit, Cinema 16 paid extreme attention to their audience because Cinema 16 was dependent 100 percent on membership fees. Today, with funding from private foundations and grants from governments, few organizations or programmers would under-take such actions to document their audience reaction so systematically and in such great detail. With less financial concerns, institutions today have the fortune of
more artistic freedom, arguably, but on the other hand they are no longer cornered learn about their audience as Cinema 16 was.

While audience has always been a major subject of study for the film exhibitor, the knowledge about audience has been mostly empirical. Most programmers and curators keep close observation of their box office and audience. They heavily rely on their experience when it comes to the question of which film would have a better reception, but little study has been done to survey or theorize the demographic composition of the audience, educational and professional background of the audience, attendance patterns, and the ways in which certain kinds of motion pictures affect movie-going in curated film exhibitions.

A very small numbers of articles on the study of motion picture audience are scattered in periodicals such as Film Quarterly, Hollywood Quarterly, under the category of study of media, communication, culture consumption and such. Most of these studies focus on the audience of mainstream film exhibition, so it would be difficult for film curators and programmers in the non-profit sector to associate their practice with the research. On the other hand, there is research studying the composition of audience of “high culture” art forms. However, as discussed earlier in the first chapter, film brings in a new concept of art that is quite different from the conventional idea of “high culture”. Sticking to the audience of “high art” is likely to result in ineffectiveness and great limitation in profiling and expanding audience of curated film exhibition.
One center piece of documented research is a study conducted by College of Liberal Arts of Rochester Institute of Technology, presented as a paper titled “Portrait of an Art Film Audience” at the Eastern Communication Association Annual Convention in 1983. As the paper abstract states “a survey containing open- and close-ended questions was sent to 329 persons on the mailing list of the International Museum of Photography at the George Eastman House”. The survey reached the following conclusions about art film audiences:

1. They are highly educated, enthusiastic movie-goers;

2. They are more likely than other film audience samples to report movie-going as their favorite leisure activity;

3. They are frequent movie-goers;

4. They perceive their art film theatre as offering a unique alternative to commercial cinemas;

5. A majority planned their last attendance at the art theatre at least one week in advance;

6. While the typical attendance unit was the couple, 30% attended alone the last time they went;

7. They are interested in learning about the films they see;

8. Unlike the majority of U.S. movie-goers, they express only a modest preference for American films over foreign movies.

This study reveals some of the common characteristics shared by curated film exhibition goers. Even though some of the conclusions are still believed to be true, there is a lot new to learn about today’s audience who are twenty years younger. As an institution-based survey, the survey result is more representative of the composition and attendance pattern?
of the art film audience in the New York region.

Questionnaire is the most common tool that can effectively provide programmers with information about their audience. It is easy to conduct, relatively low-cost, and it collects straightforward first-hand information that is easy to comprehend. For all of these measures, exhibitors have been using it from a very early time till today. Amos Vogel’s questionnaires told him that among Cinema 16’s audience, “there were a lot of artists and intellectuals, and would-be intellectuals and artists. The gamut ranged from the movers and shakers on the cultural scene to schoolteachers and secretaries, people who wanted to widen their horizons.” (MacDonald, 2002) I learnt from my exploratory interviews that some of them have conducted audience questionnaires. Not surprisingly, Film Forum is the organization keenest on audience survey as approximately 70% of its budget comes from the box office. The questionnaire was also used for future marketing purpose to understand which marketing channels have been more effective in bringing in audience to Film Forum. However, most of the questionnaires at Film Forum and other institutions have been on-going surveys conducted in the fashion of “thank you for filling the card on the table”. Survey questions could be out-dated and too general to collect any information valuable to observe any specific film series or screening, and no systematic evaluation of the statistics is conducted after they are collect. No report or document is filed as reference for future programmers who inherit the program.

A term that was used most frequently to describe audience during my exploratory
interview is diverse. It is good news that there are a variety of programs appealing to a
diverse audience. On the other hand, generally describing them as diverse reveals the lack
of a profound knowledge of audience and the absence of a desire to know audience
better. Film curator, as the film culture broker, is a translator. Translation between two
languages requires the master of both. In other words, translation serves two ends. As the
other end of the service of translating films, audience is far less concerned. I strongly
urge both scholars and practitioners in the field to start working on surveys and scholarly
works on audience. Who are the audience of curated film exhibition? Who are not our
audience? Who are our audience now but we are losing them? Who have the potential to
become our audience? What factors are influencing their decision on whether or not to go
to a film screening? What does one film or a series of film do to its viewers? What does
audience expect from film curators beside film screening?

**Education**

In recent years, the rise of museum studies and curatorial studies has made
explicit some of the points that have been known implicitly about museum. First,
museums are enormously important and wide-ranging, resource-rich centers for lifelong
education in public life. Second, most museums have a long way to go before they fulfill
their educational potential. As Talboys argues, museums act as one form of the collective
social memory of a people. Through museums we learn about the past of our own society
and, because of their ability to present an overall or large-scale interpretation, come to an
understanding about the past which helps to guide our present and future thoughts and actions. Through museums we learn about material culture and the non-material culture that gave rise to it, as well as the context in which both cultures are embedded…museums are quintessentially educational. (Talboys, 2000)

It is recognized by many that education is a valuable addition because it will bring in more funding and enhance the vitality of the institution. However, museums still find it hard to commit the resources and make education a priority. It has also been widely acknowledged that education is an important component of the museum’s organizational mission, and in many museums education has been institutionalized as a separate department to organize and deliver educational activities and service in coordination with other departments. However, not all institutions can afford a full-time permanent education staff on professional salaries with a sufficient budget and autonomy to do justice to their work. Under such circumstances, education is a responsibility that should be undertaken by all museum staff. Even if an institution has an established education component to it, the resource of a museum should be developed to accommodate educational uses holistically and comprehensively. As the key staff that has the direct control over the resource of a museum, the curator is beyond all doubt a key player in museum education. If the education is to be realized, people must have access to museums. Collections can be preserved well when being inaccessible, but they would have lost all meaning of their being. Interpretation makes these materials accessible and
educative, thus giving them life. As the interpreter, curator is the one that can and should make this education a reality.

Compared to dead historical and archaeological artifacts, movies are by common sense easier to understand. Motion pictures with sound are by nature more interesting and attention-catching. This helps and prevents film curators from achieving the goal of education. On the one hand, movies are not as culturally intimidating as a fossil can be. On the other hand, movie has established the role of entertainment in public perception, and most people think they know what movies are. This perception and mentality prevent them from having an open mind and humble attitude towards movie as they have for history, art history or natural history.

The combination of motion picture and education is not a new invention. They’ve been paired together ever since people discovered the incredible influence of movies early in the history of film exhibition, from traveling lectures to schools and churches, where movies were used as an educational tool for the subject discussed in the movies. The subject of education by curatorial practice in film includes two aspects: film art as the subject and the subject discussed in the film. For example, the Museum of the Moving Image offers workshops for youth on digital filmmaking and animation. A variety of programs designed for teachers include: utilizing the museum as a teaching resource, film and television in the classroom, teaching history through documentary film, and video games and learning. They also set up online program that teach social
studies through film watching: Silent Comedy and the Immigrant Experience; Prejudice and the Jury System, The Struggle for Equality during the Civil Rights Movements, and Exploring the Documentary Form. At Chicago International Children’s Film Festival, kids take up the role of critics and judge in the Young Chicago Critics program and Children’s jury, where they learn to read films critically.

Today the education embedded in the film curating and programming aims to educate audience about film art. The most common tool used is program notes. Program note is the major channel how the education is being disseminated. It is available through calendars, handouts at the screening and the Internet. With program notes, it is hard to reach a bigger audience than those who have already taken an interest in the activity. Other activities include visiting filmmakers programs and panel discussions, but they take place less frequently and mostly in bigger institutions. Curators sometimes participate in the programs created by the education department. Their responsibilities in such programs usually include selecting films and writing program notes. In sum, film curators are delivering their educational service through a very limited number of channels. Education through film curating needs broadening, deepening and diversifying on learning subjects and audience.

Museum is in a time of transition, shifting their mission from collection and presentation to public service organization. There is a great deal of consensus in the museum world for a new form of cultural curation…though there are certainly
differences in mission, resources, and circumstances, a paradigmatic shift in the nature of the museum… was evident. (Kurin, 1997) According to Kurin, instead of being rigid, opaque, museums should have a flexible, transparent attitude that generates understandings; instead of being an attic and the end of learning, museums should be a forum that provides means. Museums could be developed into promise-driven instead of mission-driven; they can earn money instead of relying on government grants; they should create partnerships instead of standing alone. In this transition from collection-oriented to user-oriented, curator might experience a change from being authoritative, demeaning and conformational to being helpful, informational and making meanings. Instead of having an artistic excellence focused monologue, curators should be having multilogue that concern all voices.

Education is the key to the institutional transition of museum. While the professionalization of education in museum should be advanced by establishing education department run by education specialists, curators must be aware that being educator is an essential role among their multiple tasks and they must set out to take a proactive role in this transition. For film curators, the first step is to learn more about their audience. A good understanding of audience is the foundation of sharing knowledge and creating a meaning experience. Film curator can also consider having the material culture of film in the education to add another layer to the current education of film culture.
These major issues that film curating faces reflect an under-development in the institutionalization of film curating and professionalization of film curator. Film curating needs a stronger and newer field structure to accommodate the changes digitization poses on exhibition. The shortage of knowledge about the audience resulted from the absence of an essential piece of education through formal education or working experience. The addition of education to their job responsibilities or the shift of mission from conserving to serving will require the institutions and curators to act on audience studies. Having the public service as the goal of their job, curators will be able to navigate themselves through the mist of digitization, instead of staying confused in the uncertainties brought by digitization or waiting for a verdict from the film industry.

Film curators must realize that, although the institutional environment is bringing some uncertainties to the future of film curating, they can take a positive and proactive role in stabilizing and developing film exhibition and transitioning of museum. They have the experience with curating a mass medium, and they have the experience and knowledge of working with updating technology. They are better prepared for this transition.
The purpose of this thesis is to frame the curatorial practice of film. Film curation is an emerging practice that is facing multiple challenges from film industry and museum community. As a graduate student who shares a passion for cinema, I cannot imagine my life without museum movies, and I believe I am not alone. I want to see the field of film curating growing bigger and stronger, and I can only hope that my thesis can draw more attention to some of the major issues of this profession that is still young and small.
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