The Internet as DeFacto Archive:
Communities of Interest saving films

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Internet as DeFacto Archive:
Communities of Interest saving films
• Orphan Films
• Communities of Interest
  – Home Movie Day
  – Orphans Film Symposium
  – Sponsored Films
  – Prelinger Collection
  – Auteurs
  – Superstar
  – YouTube
• Conventional Archives & Communities of Interest

Historically, Film Archives primarily
preserved narrative feature films
• Types of “ephemeral” films that were
  neglected:
  – Amateur films, Home movies
  – Industrial films
  – Educational films
  – Anthropological footage
  – Shorts
  – Advertisements
  – Still neglected, but perhaps not so ephemeral: Newsreels,
    Documentaries, avant-garde
• What we call Orphan Films

Even when Archives collected Orphans,
they gave them low priority
• Some people say that Film Archives are like
  Prisons, where some types of films disappear
  forever
• Caroline Martel mentioned that Rick
  Prelinger’s films went to Library of Congress;
  but LC has most of them stored in a cave in
  Pennsylvania; NYU liberated the Mogulls
  Brothers collection

In recent years, communities have come
together to try to save and make Orphan
& Ephemeral films available
• These are modern versions of the Ciné-Clubs of the
  1950s and 1960s
• And, as happened in earlier Ciné-Clubs, many in
  these communities decide to make films themselves
  (but most use more editing skills than camera skills,
  as many are made by re-editing other Orphan films)

Home Movie Day
Home Movie Day

- Began in a few cities August 2003
- Has grown exponentially

HMD-now throughout North America

HMD-now also Worldwide

HMD has made inroads with traditional film preservationists

- "Saving our film heritage should not be limited only to commercially produced films. Home movies do not just capture the important private moments of our family's lives, but they are historical and cultural documents as well. Consider Abraham Zapruder's 8mm film that recorded the assassination of President Kennedy or Nickolas Muray's famously vibrant color footage of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera shot with his 16mm camera. Imagine how different our view of history would be without these precious films. Home Movie Day is a celebration of these films and the people who shot them. I urge anyone with an interest in learning more about how to care for and preserve their own personal memories to join in the festivities being offered in their community..."

- Martin Scorsese

DVD from Home Movie Day

Formed Center for Home Movies

- Office at Library of Congress National Audiovisual Conservation Center
- Non-profit fundraising organization
- http://www.centerforhomemovies.org/
HMD uses Internet for Community Building

• Though no distribution or archiving takes place on the Internet, HMD community building does:
  – Collaboration across US to give birth to the HMD activities
  – Coordinating HMD activities around the world
  – Recruitment of new participants

Web directory of HMD locations

Orphans

Orphans Films

Orphans

Orphans
Orphans

University of South Carolina Film Preservation Symposium
September 23-25, 1999

Orphans of the Storm: Saving Orphan Films in the Digital Age

Orphans Blog

• The 6th Orphan Film Symposium.html - Orphans 2009 Blog (http://blogs.nyu.edu/orphanfilm/)

Sponsored Films

• 300,000 Industrial & institutional films were commissioned by businesses, charities, educational institutions, and advocacy groups
• Interest in these developed through stock footage, Prelinger Films, Ephemeral Films, ...
• Interest grew much wider when 1,000 from Prelinger collection were put onto archives.org
• More intense interest from Orphans Film Symposium
• More scholarly interest-

Field Guide-Scholarly

1. A IS FOR ATOM (1935, sound, 16 min, color, 35mm) Producer: General Electric Co. Distributor: RKO Pictures. Written and directed by Ralph Flanders. "A popular introduction to atomic energy and designed to be, as a Bulletin, 'strangely clear and unscientific.' " (New York Times, 1937) Nature film promoting atomic energy as both a peaceful and a walking force. Sponsored by a corporation involved in the nuclear reactor industry, the film is an animated introduction to atomic energy and designed to be, as a Bulletin, "strangely clear and unscientific." The periodic table, represented in "Element Town," depicts each element in a distinctive shape, suggesting to the user the element's properties and applications. A poster in the use of nuclear energy.

Field Guide

• Used Internet to collaborate on this scholarly study of 452 films
• Over 100 collaborators coordinated their efforts
Prelinger Collection

Prelinger sub-collections

Prelinger Tag Cloud

Prelinger Archive Mash-ups

• 244 films
• “What happens when you make close to 2,000 ephemeral public domain films freely available on the Web? People make art and more films are born!”
• “Here’s a sample of films created with Prelinger Archives footage and uploaded to the Internet Archive. However, Rick Prelinger suspects thousands more are uploaded on other video sites.”

Prelinger Assembled (mash-up)

• prelinger-assembled.mp4 - prelinger_assembled

The Auteurs BETA

• Social Networking site for “quality films (“classic masterpieces”, “wonderful new cinema”, “visionsary” films,...)
• Over 750 films available (from several different collections)
• Films stream via $5 rentals, but some are free
• Forums where viewers engage in online discussions about the films
• Viewers post their preferences (playlists)
• Sharing, networking, commenting, and viewing
• Goal of broadening demand for theatrical distribution
Auteurs Viewings

- 150,000 registered users
- 500,000 visitors month of Oct 2009
- Since founding in Nov 2008, 1.5 million unique visitors, reviewed 15,000 films and made 200,000 forum posts

Partnering with World Cinema Foundation (WCF)

- “The World Cinema Foundation is being created to help developing countries preserve their cinematic treasures. We want to help strengthen and support the work of international archives, and provide a resource for those countries lacking the archival and technical facilities to do the work themselves.”

  - Martin Scorsese, Chairman

Co-Operative Agreement announced at Cannes 2009

- Scorsese, WCF’s Kent Jones, Auteurs’ Efe Cakarel, B-Side distributor Chris Hyams, & Criterion
- Films restored by WCF would play at Cannes Classics sidebar, and simultaneous stream at The Auteurs
- Then distributed to Universities via B-Side
- Then Special Edition DVD releases by Criterion
2009 Cannes-1st try

- 4 WCF films posted on The Auteurs (day of press conference)
- Within 2 days, 1,000 viewings (each view >10 minutes)
- Appears that there's a resulting audience for theatrical release
- "These films are meant to be watched on the big screen... if there's more awareness, there are more theatrical opportunities"


1,000 views of 4 Cannes Classics Films (The Housemaid, Touki Bouki, Dry Summer and Transes) Within 2 Days

1 View = More Than 10 Minutes

Communities acting to save analog film

- Todd Haynes Superstar
- Can't legally be shown (Carpenters, Mattel)

Superstar
“Inherent Vice”-Lucas Hilderbrand

• Quality of sound and image is really poor; mostly saved on video only
• But the poor quality gives it a special (bootleg) image, and some argue that this quality is very important
• Lucas Hilderbrand points out that the poor quality reproduction adds to the Subjectivity of Karen Carpenter, and that the image wastes away like she did
• “Analog reproduction of the text, rather than destroying the original’s aura, actually reconstructs it.”
• The video reproduction artifacts set it in a particular technological and social time period (home video)

“Purists” on reformatting

• “Purists” say that film should only be shown on the original type of media that it was created (35mm should be 35mm; nothing should ever be shown on digital projectors)
• But that doesn’t happen in reality
  – Nitrate is shown on safety film
  – 8mm is reformatted onto 16mm

“Purists” on film screening environment

• Of course we all want to replicate the original way in which films were screened
• But not always. We don’t try to replicate:
  • uncomfortable benches
  • noisy projectors
• And many “purists” release high quality DVDs or re-mastered films with a music track fixed onto a film that was originally silent (fixing a single music performance, when originally each performance was different)
“Accidental Archives”

• Many of our most valuable archival collections only became archival by accident
  – Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI) started out as distribution for Bill Viola and other artists (also Paper Tiger)
  – Russian consulates had some of the best remaining prints of revolutionary era cinema
  – NYPL Donnell Library & NYU A/V circulating collections are now the only remaining copies of works now out-of-print
  – Footage collections become only copies of material later recognized as valuable (Prelinger)

These may all be Archives, but they’re not real preservation

Is YouTube an Archive?

Youtomb

• monitoring 435,900 YouTube videos
• 23,712 videos taken down for alleged copyright violation
• 109,428 videos taken down for other reasons
• http://youtomb.mit.edu/

Copyright is a Serious Issue

We can’t see the one-time stream of restored Metropolis at this very moment
Conventional Archives

- Are embedded in institutions that have some degree of stability (buildings, storage, employees, a source of ongoing funding,...)
- The Public recognizes that their mission is to preserve
- Never have enough resources to fulfill their mission, and so constantly have to set priorities that leave many objects not cared-for
- Often their prioritization favors feature films over more marginal works (Orphans)
- Concern over Conservation often inhibits Access; don’t want to act like prison guards

Communities of Interest

- Collectors and hobbyists showed interest in educational, industrial, amateur, and home movies decades before film archives did. They are responsible for saving tens of thousands of works that would have disappeared.
- Are good at generating interest and excitement over niche types of works.
- Are great at finding new ways of providing access to these works (streaming and download, engaging the public in social networks and online discussions, ...)
- Engage the public to become active creators instead of merely passive viewers. (appropriate for a DIY era)

But Access is not the same as Preservation

- Preservation requires long-term sustainability (not only of the films, but also of the custodians--organizational stability)
- Access is an important component of Preservation, and a community of support really helps make preservation work

Communities are great for generating interest

- But we can’t rely upon them, particularly for long-term preservation
  - They often don’t have the shared ethics to stand up to bullying from © holders (though, as activists, they do engage in Civil Disobedience—Eyes on the Prize)
  - There is no continuous long-term funding, and often they must rely upon a single personal benefactor
  - Communities can disappear over time
  - Because they are so very interested in Access, sometimes their short-term goals imperil long-term preservation

Conventional Archives need to listen to Communities of Interest

- and to partner with and collaborate with them
- and to encourage their energy (think of Langlois and the Ciné-Clubs of his time)
- and to learn something from them about Access, as well as about building social networks dedicated towards particular collections
- and should recognize that much of their future should be tied to viewers who curate and even re-mix from their collections

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