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Access to Moving Image Collections

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Assignment #1: Comparing Reference Tools

Both Alice Guy Blaché and Mary Ellen Bute had unparalleled talent as filmmakers in their respective genre, time period, and location. Blaché spent her career directing the earliest silent features, while Bute utilized sound with unrivaled animated visuals as an early experimental filmmaker. The list of their accomplishments and influence on the art of filmmaking would undoubtedly warrant sightings in a number of indices, only their presence has controversially always been close to nonexistent.

I foresaw difficulties in researching these two individuals, mainly based on the fact that they have been marginalized as female filmmakers, and in the case of Bute, an avant-garde female filmmaker. For this reason I set out with alternative key words hoping to impart more results. When Blaché did not retrieve any findings, I broadened my search with Gaumont and The Solax Company, which generated better results more often. For Bute, I simply extended searches to experimental film.

Print Resources

Many of the print sources used for this examination provide entrance into a small scope of the filmmaking world. For example, *Motion picture performers: a bibliography of magazine and periodical articles* focuses solely on performers and “biographical, career-oriented, analytical or critical” articles (M. Schuster vi). *A guide to critical*

reviews, part IV: the screenplay simply contains an alphabetized collection of screenplays. Also, the guide is specific to “critical reviews of feature length motion pictures released from October, 1927 through 1963” (J.M Salem v). Lastly, *The film index: a bibliography* is broken into three separate volumes, each with its own subject matter (The Film as Art, The Film as Industry, and The Film in Society). With a concise aim to cover certain aspects of film, some of these periodicals immediately advertise a lack of information in the way of Blaché and Bute, simply because the two do not fall under the distinct categories provided by the sources.

In the case of my two research subjects, *Retrospective Index to Film Periodicals*, *The new film index: a bibliography of magazine articles in English*, and *The Film Index: A Bibliography Vol. 1 (The Film as Art)* contained varying degrees of information. The latter source had a particularly broad and extensive scope, explaining in the introduction that it “quite properly aims at being comprehensive rather than selective” (Wilson viii). Still, Bute was not found in the experimental section.

While a fair number of the authors publicize their periodicals as aimed at “librarians and laypeople alike” (P. Hanson and S. Hanson ix), each index has differing techniques for organizing the data. Despite a certain standardized arrangement throughout each resource (mainly the Index found in the back), one could still utilize alternating routes to find the information needed. For example, *Retrospective Index to Film Periodicals* has taken data from 14 film journals, and has presented all of it under three sections: Individual films, Subjects (including descriptors for film studies and people of interest), and Book review citations. I think the ability to search via descriptors like Aesthetics and Auteur Theory (Batty vii) provides the user with intersecting themes

and individuals, consequently giving the researcher a more concrete foundation with which their subject fits.

I did find *The film index: a bibliography Vol. 2* to be somewhat more difficult to navigate, as there was no overarching index to lead me directly to my subjects. Instead, I had to file through the eight different subject headings, and use my judgment on where Blaché and Bute could be found. While this technique led me to information about the Solax Company, there weren't any listings for either Blaché or Bute.

In terms of functionality, I had spent a considerable amount of time on many of the print indices, most of which delivered low or insufficient results. Time is a commodity, and print resources aren't always necessarily going to cater to the time constraints of a researcher or research librarian. The indices made for specific areas of film (screenplays, performers, industry, etc.) could easily provide useful results for a researcher in those fields, but would not suffice for other audiences. Typically, the sources containing all-inclusive indices in the back allowed for quick referencing, and the obtaining of results (although, this process is not conducive to extending the scope of research to alternative individuals, subjects, or films).

Internet Sources

It is stated that the *FIAF international index to film periodicals* database contains over a third of a million records, along with the full text of 45 journals. Additionally, there are 20,000 subject terms. *Film index international* has data from 1900 to the present, 120,000 films, 735,000 film personalities, not to mention full cast and crew records, synopses, and production details. Finally, the *Film & television literature index* contains full text for 120 journals and 100 books, as well as *Variety* film reviews from

1914 to present, and 36,300 images. Immediately I can acknowledge the wide scope of data referenced in these sources, as well as their superiority over the print sources, simply because of size. Comparatively, the print sources seem to be poor attempts at comprehensiveness, which have grown out of date sitting in library stacks without any hope of new editions.

With an option for conducting Boolean searching (through EBSCO Host), *Film and Television Literature Index* provides an advanced form of searching, which print sources aren't capable of. Multiple keywords can be searched congruently or separately from each other, giving the researcher multiple points of entry to the periodicals. With this database a simple search for 'Alice Guy Blaché' brings up 31 results. With these results I can continue a more aggressive and focused search by adding more subjects (such as Gaumont or The Solax Company), bringing me to more direct aspects of her career. While Mary Ellen Bute only found 4 results, it is still an improvement from the print sources.

Both *FIAF international index to film periodicals* and *Film index international* have less advanced interfaces, but they still allow for quick searches and considerable results. *Film Index International* did not have any results for Alice Guy Blaché, but it took a significantly shorter amount of time to obtain that knowledge, compared to flipping through a print index. Here, the database does the page turning and referencing for the researcher. This same index listed five films by Bute, four of which were not mentioned in a single print source.

Providing such a wide scope of film history and filmmaking, all three of these Internet sources can attract a large audience of film enthusiasts, film critics, film

theorists, and researchers alike. In terms of the Boolean search available, the process of inquiring about a subject is very different than if print sources were to be used. While Boolean logic may not seem as simple as looking in the back of a print source for an index, it is a necessary mechanism when searching these large deposits of information.

Conclusion

As mentioned before, time is important when researching or helping a researcher. Searching online indices is far faster and comprehensive than print. I spent more time than was necessary on print sources, only to find that there was no information for either of my subjects in most of the periodicals.

The benefits of Internet sources are clear, only it is worth questioning if they still aren't as comprehensive as they should be. While the number of print periodicals is not necessarily growing, there are a significant amount of them on shelves, and holding information that is probably not in these databases. This is an important consideration to have in mind while conducting research. It is easy to trust a resource that touts the extensiveness of its holdings, but also still ill advised to rely entirely on those contents when important information could still only be written in print.

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