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Metadata for Moving Image Collections

Assignment #1

Metadata for Searching Moving Image Collections Comparison:
Film Archives Online and UCLA Film and Television Archive

For this assignment I chose to compare and contrast the metadata schemas and search functionality of the UCLA Film and Television Archive's online catalog and Film Archives Online, the latter of which is an aid for finding moving image materials in European collections. To see the differences and similarities between the two websites more clearly, I performed four searches on each site using the same terms. I did a person search for "Buster Keaton", a title search for "Sherlock Jr.", a genre search for "silent comedy" and a keyword search for "projectionist". As my searches did revolve around an American movie and actor, there were overall fewer results to be found in the Film Archives Online catalog, which was to be expected since it is meant for searching the collections of European archives. Even with that being the case, my searches were still able to find results as there are a few copies of these films in European Archives, and there was enough information present to compare the results with the much more numerous ones attained through UCLA's Film and Television Archive's catalog.

Both UCLA's Film and Television Archive and the Film Archives Online catalog allow the user to search in multiple ways. In UCLA's online catalog, there is a "Recommended Searches" tab and an "Advanced" tab. On the "Recommended Searches" tab, the user can quickly filter their search in a variety of ways, including by title, credits,

topic or genre, keywords, inventory number, release date, and collection name, among others. The page also very helpfully includes an extensive list of recommendations on how to use each of these different search functions in the most optimum ways, such as letting the use know not to include any punctuation marks when performing title searches. This became helpful information when I attempted to search for “ Sherlock Jr.” and it yielded no results until I removed the period from the title. The “Advanced” search page offers similar filters and search terms as the “Recommended Searches”, but allows the user to search for up to three terms in one search (such as searching by both a person and a keyword at the time), as well as adding search fields for language, location, and year. The Advanced Search page also includes search tips, but it is a much less comprehensive list than the list on the “Recommended Searches” page.

The search options on Film Archives Online’s catalog are a bit different from those of UCLA’s site. Film Archives Online has both a very basic search bar as well as a page for performing advanced searches. Advanced searching allows the user to perform searches for title, person, person depicted, production, content, keyword, and place, up to three search terms at a time. While that is similar to UCLA’s catalog, Film Archives Online differs in that the user can also search by technical specifications, such as what film format, film base, whether it is sound or silent, black and white or in color. However, searching by technical specifications does not work very well on the site and I received error messages whenever I tried to incorporate them into my searches, even when I combined them with terms that should have yielded results, such as for adding the technical specification of “black and white” to my search of “silent comedy.” In this

sense, Film Archives Online's catalog is a more buggy and thus a bit less user-friendly than UCLA Film and Television Archive's catalog.

Even though searching by moving image-related technical specifications proved to be dysfunctional, the fact that Film Archives Online, included those as search terms, coupled with the fact that it is a European website, led me to believe that they were using a CEN metadata schema. When I looked for any documentation on their website about their metadata standards, I found confirmation on their "About" page under "Goals and Objectives", where they list one of their qualitative objectives as, "To define and implement a common, standardised set of core descriptive elements, based on existing International standards, and based on the results of the relevant CEN standardisation group." Meanwhile, UCLA Film and Television Archive's catalog did not include any moving-image related search fields, and instead appeared to be using a more general purpose standard. Looking at an item's page led me to believe that UCLA is using a MARC schema, as the page includes the option to view the item in "MARC staff view," though that was the only kind of documentation I found regarding their metadata standards.

Attempting to browse collections proved to be difficult on both websites. UCLA Film and Television Archive offers minimal browsing, but on an entirely different part of the website from where the catalog is located. In order to browse, the user would have to go to the main page of the UCLA Film and Television Archive's website, click on the "Collections" tab and then on "Explore". Even then, the user can only really browse on a collection-level, and not an item-level. Meanwhile, it seemed to be that Film Archives

Online did not support browsing at all. Even when I looked up member institutions on the website, such as the British Film Institute, there was no way to scroll through their holdings at either a collection-level or an item-level.

In terms of actual search results, both websites display the results in alphabetical order by default. The only other way to sort the search results in UCLA's catalog is by release date, either from earliest to latest or vice versa. Film Archives Online offers sorting by date as well, but refers to it as "Year of Production" rather than "Release Date", and it also allows the user to sort by country of origin. Based on the searches I performed, neither site offered a way to sort the results by relevance. This was less of an issue for me on Film Archive Online, as my searches only yielded a handful of results. It would have been a nice feature to have, however, on UCLA's catalog as my searches resulted in a much larger number of results. A case in point of this was when searching for "Buster Keaton", of the 174 results found, the top search result in alphabetical order is for a film called *30 Years of Laughs*, which appears to be a collection of clips from a variety of silent comedies, some of which star Buster Keaton, but many others that feature other comedians of the era. While this might be of interest to a researcher, it may not be as relevant to their search as one of Keaton's own feature films, or something like a documentary that solely focuses on him. For that reason, I think that sorting by relevance would be a helpful addition to the site.

Even so, on both sites I was mostly able to find what I was looking for. This did, however, require I bit more manipulation of search terms on Film Archive Online's site than it did on UCLA's site, at least in this instance. On UCLA's site, my title, person,

genre, and keyword searches all yielded mostly expected results. It was fairly straightforward. Things were a little bit more complicated in this regard in Film Archive Online's catalog. My title search for "Sherlock Jr." and my person search for "Buster Keaton", returned accurate results. The other two searches were a bit more challenging. Unlike UCLA's site, one cannot search by genre on Film Archive Online. This being the case, at first I tried searching for "silent comedy" as a keyword, but that yielded no results. Then tried searching for "silent comedy" using the content field, but that only yielded one result, which was a compilation of silent comedy shorts. Though searching for "projectionist" as a key word on UCLA's site returned several results, including *Sherlock Jr.*, it returned zero results on Film Archive Online. It was only when I searched for "projectionist" using the content field that I received eight results, one of which was *Sherlock Jr.* In this way, Film Archive Online's search engine was a bit more tricky to navigate and involved a more trial and error than searching on UCLA's site did.