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Institutionalization of the Avant-Garde

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ACCESS AND THE EXPERIMENTAL FILM

KRISTEN ALFARO

New Technologies and Anthology
Film Archives' Institutionalization
of the Avant-Garde



In 2010, Anthology Film Archives (hereinafter Anthology) celebrated its fortieth anniversary and launched a new website, which offers online access to select film stills and experimental films.¹ Anthology, a major center for independent, avant-garde, and experimental moving images, is currently developing a digital archive composed of photographic, video, and paper material from its collection.² Filmmakers Jonas Mekas, Stan Brakhage, Peter Kubelka, Ken Kelman, James Broughton, Jerome Hill, and historian P. Adams Sitney created Anthology in 1970, shifting experimental film exhibition through institutionalization. This polemical transition, from underground to institution, situated Anthology's origins within the rubric of formalist and modernist film criticism and history.³ Today Anthology is an example of open archival access, which reflects a history long predicated on increased access to experimental film. When

Anthology opened in 1970, it declared itself the first film museum dedicated to film art, stating that its aim was to define its study and exhibition through the development of a canon (Essential Cinema) and a theater (Invisible Cinema). The Essential Cinema selection committee included Mekas, Kubelka, Sitney, Broughton, and Kelman (Brakhage was also briefly on the committee), and their choices contributed to Anthology's association to medium specificity and avant-garde film hierarchy. Anthology's origins, though polemical in theory, were practically grounded in the idea of access, as exemplified in Anthology's prehistory and early institutional activities.

Anthology's institutional fermentation begins in the 1960s, when experimental film access was scarce and geographically specific, thriving most prominently in New York and San Francisco, where its viewers relied heavily on word-of-mouth domestic viewings, membership screenings, and alternative public spaces.⁴ Portable film technology defined localized experimental film culture, and its exhibition evolved into complex networks of underground and itinerant microcinemas.⁵ During this period, venues were precarious, and instability characterized the distribution and exhibition of experimental film. This type of infrastructure helped initiate networks between the underground film community and other art forms. As an outgrowth of 1960s Greenwich Village culture, Anthology and its founders were informed by censorship and portable film technology, which forced them to rethink access. This shift offers an interesting parallel to Anthology's present archival hybridity, which, once again, reinforces their commitment to access in a changing cultural landscape.

For the moving image archive, new technologies have consistently shaped and sustained access discourse. Among its most vocal proponents is Rick Prelinger, who has steadily called on archives to place access as the preeminent discourse, revising the current preservation hierarchy. In volume 10, issue 2 (Fall 2010) of *The Moving Image*, Prelinger focuses on the concept of accessibility, arguing that it can redefine the twenty-first-century moving image archive.⁶ Prelinger describes this archival disposition as one of citizenship, where it is an active member of the community working in conjunction with both conservative and progressive institutions and collectors. Prelinger argues that free access is a form of preservation that can expand scholarship and enrich communities.

The archivist-scholar relationship is further articulated in *Cinema Journal's* "In Focus: The Twenty-First Century Archive," where Prelinger, Eric Schaefer, Dan Streible, Karan Sheldon, Lynne Kirste, Mike Mashon, and Margaret Compton describe archival challenges, particularly those of the marginal moving image archive (regional films, orphan films, lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender films).⁷ Experimental film is not featured in this discussion, however, Kirste acknowledges Anthology's preservation

of the Kuchar brothers' 8mm films, and Prelinger alludes to the online experimental film community when discussing file-sharing sites and members-only downloadable archives. Each piece is an appeal to the moving image community to discuss and build the accessible twenty-first-century archive together.

Scholarly work on the accessible archive also frequently returns to a complex and crucial dynamic: that between access and preservation. Caroline Frick reinforces Prelinger's hierarchical shift in *Saving Cinema*, where she traces the cross-cultural development of film preservation through an investigation of national and international archives.⁸ Film preservation is fueled by the notion of heritage conservation, where cultural artifacts propel a nation's history into the future. This idea, Frick contends, is unsuitable for the twenty-first-century archive. As archivists continue to discover nontheatrical films (industrial, educational, training, travel, etc.), value is selectively ascribed to specific films for photochemical preservation, leaving the majority of nontheatrical films unpreserved. Frick reiterates Prelinger's plea by arguing that the future of the twenty-first-century archive lies in equating access with preservation. The twenty-first-century archive shifts away from the object-centered archival and museum disposition into content access, tying archival discourse to media history and portable technology, which provided decentralized and increased content access to moving images. The correlation between contemporary archival discourse and media history is exemplified in the evolution of Anthology Film Archives, whose development begins in the 1960s, when portable technology offered the promise and potential of increased access to experimental film.

GREENWICH VILLAGE

Anthology's origins need to be situated in the multimedia networks of 1960s Greenwich Village. These networks were often fluid: film coexisted with other performance arts and was sustained by an underground network in which systems of distribution and exhibition were informed by portable technology and New York City politics. In Greenwich Village, artists expressed their ideas through collaborative performances and media plurality, as in the case of Claes Oldenburg's *Gayety*, a performance that consisted of six activities occurring simultaneously, which included a man playing a trombone, a silent poet, a woman kneading dough, and a man collecting bottles and cans into a sack.⁹

Experimental filmmaker Jonas Mekas played a pivotal role in advancing the interests of the experimental film community. From 1958 to 1971, Mekas wrote a regular film column for the *Village Voice*, where he discussed the state of contemporary film

criticism, the politics surrounding underground cinema, and the films and filmmakers of the experimental film community. In addition, Mekas devoted himself to multiple cinema-oriented endeavors, several of which became pillars of experimental film history: *Film Culture* (journal), Film-Makers' Coop (artist-run distribution cooperative), and Film-Makers' Cinematheque and Anthology (both amalgamated in 1974, under Anthology). Concurrent to Mekas's New York-centric activities, experimental filmmaker Bruce Baille began Canyon Cinema in 1960, an organization out of Canyon, California, dedicated to alternative, independent, and experimental film exhibition.¹⁰ In 1966, Canyon Cinema became a distribution organization: it still operates today in this capacity. Both Canyon Cinema and Anthology—the former itinerant, the latter a permanent exhibition venue—established themselves as the opposition to commercial film theaters, offering films omitted from popular programming.

New York alternative film access was supplemented by Amos Vogel's Cinema 16 and Mekas's Film-Makers' Cinematheque.¹¹ Between 1947 and 1963, Cinema 16 was the primary experimental and independent film venue of the New York area. In 1960, Vogel's refusal to screen Stan Brakhage's *Anticipation of the Night* added to the mounting criticism of Vogel's programming. In the same year, Jonas Mekas, his brother Adolfas Mekas, and Brakhage were among the filmmakers that created their own collective, the New American Cinema Group (1960), and later the distribution center, the Film-Makers' Coop (1962). Though distinct, Anthology's development and materialization coincided with experimental film groups in San Francisco and New York. Anthology was not created independently of its alternative exhibition counterparts or predecessors. However, the particularities of its emergence in 1970, not to mention its sustenance and progression in the twenty-first century, merit close analysis, particularly with regard to issues of access.

During this time, experimental films frequently traveled between exhibition venues and the storage spaces of the filmmakers' own homes and Mekas's loft apartment (which also served as the offices for *Film Culture* and the Film-Makers' Coop), thus institutionalizing a particular kind of physical mobility within the experimental film infrastructure¹² (see Figure 1). Using his *Village Voice* column, Mekas applied the rhetoric of war and freedom to discussions of experimental, independent, and art cinema; its culture; and its challenges. Mekas tried to mobilize film audiences to protest against the Establishment: cinema, he argued, was forced underground and calling for its liberation.

The literal embodiment of this metaphorical imprisonment came in 1964, when Mekas (programmer), experimental filmmaker Ken Jacobs (theater manager), and artist Florence Karpf (ticket seller) were arrested for screening Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* (1963) at the New Bowery Theater, which housed the Film-Makers' Cinematheque two

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nights a week.¹³ In preparation for the upcoming influx of World's Fair tourists, New York City officials outlawed clubs, coffeehouses, and porn theaters, and sexual

deviancy laws permitted the persecution of film exhibitors and the collection of projectors and box office receipts.¹⁴ Following the arrests, Mekas published "Underground Manifesto on Censorship" in the *Village Voice*, where he accused the legal system of imprisoning the experimental film while its community desired social promiscuity.¹⁵ Local and international press covered the censorship battle over *Flaming Creatures*, as Mekas, Jacobs, and Karpf's case went to court.¹⁶ Under the New York County Criminal Court, Mekas, Jacobs, and Karpf were found guilty of exhibiting an obscene film. An appeal was filed, and the New York Supreme Court exonerated the accused, ruling that Mekas, Jacobs, and Karpf were screening *Flaming Creatures* as a work of art and therefore were not violating obscenity laws. While awaiting the court's decision, Mekas founded the short-lived Anti-censorship Fund in the hope of changing film licensing laws, while the Film-Makers' Coop became a private screening venue and center for protest mobilization in 1964.

Still, for Mekas, this was not enough. He looked to portable film technology for the answer. Writing in the *Village Voice*, Mekas claimed that the 8mm film offered a

Figure 1. Jonas Mekas at the Film-Makers' Coop office, circa 1963. Courtesy of Anthology Film Archives, all rights reserved.

solution to the censorship problem, as it promised inexpensive copies, cheap distribution, and affordable display devices in the form of portable projectors.¹⁷ Mekas and Stan Brakhage were most excited by 8mm's potential for democratizing exhibition. In 1964, while living in Boulder, Colorado, Brakhage purchased 8mm equipment out of necessity (he couldn't find any 16mm editing equipment in Boulder) and soon realized that the 8mm format would return him to the living rooms of his friends through inexpensive copies.¹⁸ Mekas, meanwhile, was utilizing his column in the *Village Voice* to employ the rhetoric of freedom to 8mm: experimental film would be liberated through domestication. The inexpensive format could make the experimental film more accessible, enabling it to elude censorship while transforming film art into viable cultural objects stored and displayed in the home. Likening the 8mm avant-garde film to poetry and paper, music and vinyl, Mekas claimed that the 8mm film would change the consumption of experimental film through the act of domestic collecting and viewing. Reaching beyond the theater and alternative, perpetually itinerant exhibition spaces, the experimental film could, in 8mm form, enter into the home, in the same way as literature and music had. Thus Mekas aspired to reduce the Film-Makers' Coop film collection to 8mm for the purpose of distributing and selling. However, owing to a lack of financial support and the preoccupations of other projects, the 8mm domestic dream was never realized.¹⁹

In 1965, magazine editor Phyllis Johnson furthered this idea in *Aspen* magazine (1965–71) and incorporated film objects and ephemera into the multimedia “magazine in a box.”²⁰ According to Johnson, the typical bound paper format was limiting; *Aspen* sought to change the magazine by creating a multimedia, sensory experience and offering its subscribers LPs, paper, and film. The Fall/Winter 1967 “Minimalism” issue included one 8mm film reel containing Hans Richter's *Rhythm 21* (1921), excerpts of Laszlo Maholo-Nagy's *Lightplay: Black-White-Grey* (1932), Robert Morris and Stan VanDerBeek's *Site* (1964), and Robert Rauschenberg *Linoleum* (1967). Issue 2, “The White Box, 1966,” presented excerpts from an industry versus art film debate at the Aspen Film Conference, while issue 3, “The Pop Art Issue, December 1966,” included an Underground Movie Flip Book featuring Andy Warhol's *Kiss* (1964) and Jack Smith's *Buzzards over Baghdad* (1952). Last, mock newspaper *The Plastic Exploding Inevitable*, edited by Warhol and Gerard Malanga, contained Mekas's *Village Voice* review of *Chelsea Girls* (1966). Through *Aspen*, the 8mm film was distributed alongside LPs and paper in a fashion evocative of Mekas's vision in 1964. Objects like the newspaper and the flipbook made the experimental film “accessible” at the conceptual level.²¹

While *Aspen* was publishing issues in the mid-1960s and early 1970s, the development of public experimental film exhibition prevailed over private viewings.

Reproducible 8mm copies of the Film-Makers' Coop collection were never manufactured; instead, Mekas created the Film-Makers' Cinematheque in November 1964. Inherently itinerant, the Film-Makers' Cinematheque moved through eighteen different venues between 1961 and 1969. Its temporary homes included the Maidman Theater, the City Hall Cinema, the Methodist Church on West Fourth Street, and the Gallery of Modern Art.²² Simultaneously, film societies and film curricula increased in universities throughout America. Miles from New York and San Francisco, however, universities and colleges in small-town America did not have regular access to experimental cinema. Film educators began contacting Mekas and film historian P. Adams Sitney to aid in programming experimental film screenings. This university demand, along with itinerant screenings and portable technology, generated the development of a single, permanent home for the experimental film.

425 LAFAYETTE STREET

In 1967, Mekas shifted his focus to the growth of the Film-Makers' Cinematheque and the creation of Anthology Film Archives. At this time, Brakhage, Kubelka, and Sitney were apprehensive of the open policy of the Film-Makers' Cinematheque and criticized the democratic system of programming for its lack of rigor.²³ Simultaneously, Mekas and Hill, a major financial supporter of avant-garde filmmakers, Film Culture, and Anthology (from 1960 until his death in 1972), conceptualized an avant-garde film academy, and Mekas, aware of their criticism, approached Brakhage, Kubelka, and Sitney to form an alternative and complementary exhibition space to the Film-Makers' Cinematheque.²⁴ Its founders desired a central place where film could be valued as art and audiences could learn about and view its history. In the inaugural literature of 1970, Sitney describes Anthology as the first museum dedicated to film art, declaring their aim to define its scope with a canon (Essential Cinema) and the terms of its experience with a theater (Invisible Cinema).²⁵ Anthology navigated through proper legal channels to establish itself as an institution of film art, opposing the previous decade, where Mekas organized underground film screenings and was arrested for violating obscenity laws. In 1970, the new exhibition venue operated under Film Art Fund, Inc., which also represented Film Culture and the Film-Makers' Cinematheque. To maintain its status as a nonprivate operating foundation, one-third of the Film Art Fund's financial support was required to come from public contributions, leading Anthology Film Archives to file taxes; accept donations; and apply for private, state, and federal grants.²⁶ Though Anthology sought public funding, it was Hill's financial backing that enabled Mekas to purchase the ground

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floor of 80 Wooster Street in 1967 for the Film-Makers' Cinematheque, and in 1968, again with Hill's financial support, the Film Art Fund rented space in the Public Theater on 425 Lafayette Street.²⁷ To differentiate between

the two spaces, the Film-Makers' Cinematheque was also referred to as Cinematheque 1, and Anthology was titled Cinematheque 2. These alternate titles would remain for a number of years.²⁸ The Film-Makers' Cinematheque would continue programming new experimental works, while Anthology would have a rigorous selection process, focusing on the Essential Cinema canon and the history of film art.

Designed by Kubelka and housed in 425 Lafayette Street, the controversial Invisible Cinema (1970–73) functioned as Anthology's ideal theater for screening film art. The Essential Cinema canon was presented in cycles, each lasting six weeks. Seating approximately ninety people, Anthology set out to mold the posture of art cinema viewers by encasing them in a "shell-like structure," where they were immune to external sound, temperature, and peripheral vision²⁹ (see Figures 2 and 3). For every screening,

Figure 2. Invisible Cinema seats, Anthology Film Archives, 425 Lafayette Street, 1970. Courtesy of Anthology Film Archives, all rights reserved.

a house manager sat in the audience and was responsible for ensuring ideal projection and implementing the appropriate film theater etiquette of silence and respectful behavior. With immediate access to automatic focus, sound control, and a telephone connecting to the projection booth, the house manager could adjust the film during the screenings. Approximately fourteen thousand theater visitors were recorded during the first eleven months of its opening.³⁰ In 1970, the cost of admission to Invisible Cinema was one dollar; within two years, Anthology raised the price to two dollars and, as a result, began losing patrons and therefore returned to the original ticket price in February 1972.³¹ In a letter to Alan A. Masur, president of the Film Art Fund and Anthology's legal counsel, Mekas advocated for Anthology's patrons and justified his decision:

The raising of the ticket price is not the way to gain the public support, money—or otherwise. We have lost a good part of our most faithful audience; we have created a very bad feeling among a good number of our supporters: they are beginning to look at us as another shark, capitalist, etc. etc. “art” organization; and we have abandoned one of the principles which we set for ourselves at the very beginning, during our first meetings: to keep our entrance ticket price minimum so that not to keep away from the true film lover, the film student, who very often cannot afford higher prices.³²

Access equaled a democratized view of avant-garde film exhibition, opposing the hierarchical implications of a canon. Mekas, though invested in cultural capital, decried monetary gains at the behest of Anthology's board, retaining the spirit of the former decade within Anthology's more formal, institutional framework.

Invisible Cinema projected the Essential Cinema canon in repeated cycles, which would, in theory, allow viewers to experience a canonized history of film art in a

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Figure 3. Andy Warhol at Invisible Cinema, Anthology Film Archives, 425 Lafayette Street, 1970. Courtesy of Anthology Film Archives, all rights reserved.

single institution. A self-appointed Film Selection Committee comprising Mekas, Sitney, Kubelka, Kelman, and Broughton formulated the canon and based their final decisions on an intuitive passion, including only five female filmmakers: Maya Deren, Marie Menken, Helen Levitt, Janice Loeb, and Leni Riefenstahl. Brakhage belonged to the original Film Selection Committee but chose to leave because he disagreed with the method of selection. In 1978, Constance Penley and Janet Bergstrom pointed out the institutional bias of the avant-garde film canon, citing the close relationship between Anthology, New York University (NYU), the Whitney Museum of American Art, and MoMA.³³ Penley and Bergstrom argue that the interrelations between such institutions cloud film art programming, locating it within the parameters of the Essential Cinema canon, which itself lacked a critical definition and distinction between the film avant-garde and film art.³⁴ The Whitney and MoMA collected and programmed experimental films belonging to the Essential Cinema canon, and Sitney was an instrumental member of the NYU Cinema Studies Department, which held classes at Anthology's Film Study Center. Anthology circulated the Essential Cinema program pamphlet to universities, guiding avant-garde film education.³⁵

Anthology's less polemical endeavors could be found in the Film Study Center and library, which contributed to Anthology's pedagogical objectives by offering visitors the equipment and space for individual and small-group exhibitions. Film study at Anthology included close analysis, the examination of paper ephemera, semiprivate screenings, and a conference room for discussion, similar to the curriculum of the NYU Cinema Studies Department, where Sitney and Annette Michelson taught and worked between the NYU and Anthology collections. In 1972, the Cinema Studies Department at NYU held a weekly New American Cinema seminar in the conference room of Anthology's library (used for screenings and discussion). Acquisitions grew significantly in Anthology's first two years of operation; filmmakers contributed their own films and private collections, while posthumous donations included finished and unfinished films. As of November 8, 1971, 145 films had been cataloged and organized for the film study room and were valued at twenty-four thousand dollars.³⁶ In 1972, Frederick R. Adler donated four thousand antique film posters to the library, valued at fifty thousand dollars.³⁷

With the acceleration in acquisitions came the issue of film preservation. In a May 1971 letter to Alan A. Masur, Anthology's legal counsel, Mekas explained that increases in film acquisition motivated Anthology to begin preservation. He wrote:

All these private collections and depositories will remain with Anthology, and they must be properly organized, cataloged, in a good number of cases new

prints made, originals protected, etc., etc. And made available to film students in one form or another. This means plenty of work, and also expenses. But, as it's becoming clear as we now conduct our work on a practical-day-to-day basis and deal with film-makers and film students—it's becoming clear that one of our functions will be the protection and guarding of the films—finished and unfinished films—of the avant-garde film-makers when they die.³⁸

In *Nitrate Won't Wait*, Anthony Slide claims that Anthology began preservation in 1974, four years after its opening.³⁹ However, correspondence between Mekas and Masur indicates that Anthology acknowledged the need for preservation in 1971, and by 1972, the "Program Report" demonstrated that Anthology had initiated this process.⁴⁰ Slide also writes that a list of Anthology's holdings could be found in P. Adams Sitney's *The Essential Cinema: Essays on Films in the Collection of Anthology Film Archives*.⁴¹ However, Sitney's book lists only the Essential Cinema films and is therefore incomplete. Anthology did not, for example, own every film in the canon, and this list did not include the cataloged and noncataloged films for use in the Film Study Center.⁴²

The pedagogical objectives found in Invisible Cinema, Essential Cinema, and the Film Study Center were appropriate for the academic climate of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1973, Calvin Tomkins wrote of the experimental, avant-garde American cinema, "In every case, the major audience for their film is found in colleges and universities, hundreds of which now offer credit courses in film history or technique, and fifty-one of which offer degrees in film."⁴³ This period was ripe for an institution like Anthology, as Michael Zryd's work on the academy and the avant-garde demonstrates. Zryd argues that the relationship between higher education and the experimental film is one of sustenance and reciprocity; one aided in the development of the other. The university ensured filmmakers employment, the payment of a stipend or lecture, and consistent rentals for Film-Makers' Coop and Canyon Cinema.⁴⁴ The majority of rentals from the Film-Makers' Coop were generated from universities across America, and the continued growth of Anthology depended on its coexistence with other institutions such as NYU.

When Anthology came into existence in 1970, it declared itself a didactic institution devoted to the study and exhibition of film art. Film art would be experienced in the form of lectures, conferences, private film study, programming, and the physical experience of the theater. Anthology's relationship to universities and museums was vital for grant applications and the board's support, and from the onset, Anthology established important financial relationships with these institutions. The 1972 fiscal year

program report declared profit from university class projections at NYU, Cooper Union, Yale University, and the Philadelphia College of the Arts. In the same year, Anthology attended the first National Conference on Teaching Resources of Film and Media and loaned Bruce Baille's notebooks to the State University of New York, Buffalo, the conference's sponsor. The library also participated in a still photograph exchange program with the BFI, and American avant-garde preservation projects were initiated between Anthology, MoMA, the American Film Institute, and the Pacific Film Archives. Anthology simultaneously cooperated with the U.S. Department of State. As the first major center for American avant-garde, Anthology garnered attention from foreign film scholars and filmmakers. As a result, Anthology's employees made themselves available for personal interviews, discussions, consultations, and special film programs that were coordinated by the Department of State.⁴⁵

Anthology's activities demonstrate how it framed a specific idea about cinema through multiple viewing formations and networks. Recorded histories situate Anthology within a strict formalist and modernist position, concentrating on public rhetoric, canon, and viewing formations developed by the institution's founders. Legal documents, however, show how Anthology's goals and activities focused on public access to the experimental film and, in fact, were largely inclusive of films outside the Essential Cinema canon. Letters between Mekas and Masur demonstrate the financial limitations that prohibited the growth of Essential Cinema and the maintenance of Invisible Cinema, while simultaneously allowing the Film Study Center and library to evolve and to aid Anthology in receiving grants. Anthology was less a dictatorship and more of a pedagogical community center for the experimental film; the primary goal remained access, and through access, Anthology developed goals of preservation and pedagogy. For Anthology, access to avant-garde film history included access to journals, periodicals, paper materials, audio, still photographs, and paper ephemera. This expanded notion of cinema recalls *Aspen's* position as the first multimedia magazine in circulation, while also remaining a steadfast element of Anthology's mission today, evident in the development of their web archive (<http://www.anthologyfilmarchives.org/>).

On July 13, 2010, Anthology launched its new website. In three phases, Anthology will become a hybrid analog and digital archive. Currently the website provides a small selection of promotional videos and experimental film clips. Seven of the eight videos are streamed through Vimeo, while Harry Smith's *No. 11 Mirror Animations (1956–57)* can be accessed through YouTube. The eight videos provide a sample (Maya Deren, Paul Sharits, and Smith) of established avant-garde filmmakers, while introducing the relatively unknown experimental filmmaker Lowell Bodger.⁴⁶ After his death in

2009, Anthology acquired all of Bodger's films and paper materials; however, canonical dominance (Anthology's top ten most requested files include eight filmmakers from Essential Cinema) hinders the potential for researchers to explore historically peripheral experimental filmmakers.⁴⁷ As with all archives, curatorial decisions must be made, minimizing public access to Anthology's vast collection, and it is the archive's goal to balance curatorial decisions between physical and online space. The first stage of the web archive enables the viewer to enter into the canonical avant-garde while potentially being introduced to a new filmmaker. Online curatorial decisions also work in tandem with the programming of Anthology's physical theater, as exemplified in the September 16, 2009, screening of Bodger's films *Wave Symmetries* (1971), *Favorable Conditions* (1973), and *A Recent Animation* (1974).

Anthology's web archive will, over time, showcase lesser known experimental filmmakers and also orphan films: home movies, unfinished student films, and behind-the-scenes porn footage will be made available to a larger public. By promoting orphan films, Anthology believes that this type of cinema will grow a bigger audience and that new scholarship will arise. Such films are less likely to be photochemically preserved, and it is Anthology's belief that access will provide its sustenance. Archivist Andrew Lampert discusses access as a route to preservation:

There's a lot of films in the collection which, frankly probably won't ever get preserved through a traditional photo-chemical process, especially as that becomes more expensive, time intensive, sometimes fruitless. . . . And to do what will be digital preservation is still in flux, but to give access in the mean time [sic] to some of these things, I think will generate an interest that could lead to full on preservation down the line. Nobody wants a film preserved that they've never heard of or they've never seen.⁴⁸

In conjunction with access, Anthology prioritizes context. By incorporating digital access to paper materials, journals, audio, and photographic stills, Anthology is creating an online film study center parallel to the one originally established in 1970. As the website evolves into a larger archive, Anthology will ask permission from filmmakers and estates, where possible and if necessary. Otherwise, it will post material and remove it if requested by the verified copyright holder. Although the perpetual modifications of copyright rules situate many of the films within the public domain, Anthology continues to seek permission from the filmmakers.⁴⁹

The final stage of the web archive will contain a dossier on a preservation

project funded by the Andy Warhol Foundation. Anthology received a multiyear grant to preserve over sixty experimental films made between 1975 and 1990. To contextualize the preservation and exhibition of the films, Anthology will provide a complete dossier of the Warhol project, including clips and films of the preserved filmmakers, criticism, interviews, and audio. The paper material will be available to download, offering free access to rare materials, including the journal *Film Culture* and the top ten most requested filmmaker files at Anthology. In addition, a selection of Anthology's audio files will be downloadable.⁵⁰ By offering both moving images and paper materials, the archive will provide an expanded, multimedia film education experience similar to Anthology's early goals of the 1970s. With increased online access, Anthology's collection becomes decentralized and gives researchers access to rare materials, which were previously restricted to those able to visit New York City. Online access breaks the physical and geographical barriers of the Film Study Center, while maintaining the goal of increased content access.

ACCESS AND THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Archivists and enthusiasts have fought for the inclusion of moving images in the history of national cultures, and as such, celluloid must be rescued, restored, cataloged, and preserved. Heritage rhetoric emerged after World War II, when nations felt threatened by culture eradication, marking a shift in moving image preservation history. The artifact became a concrete object of film history, and archivists, in turn, became producers of cultural heritage.⁵¹ A similar rhetorical shift in moving image archival discourse is found in the work of Frick and Prelinger, where the notion of access is paramount to the twenty-first-century archive.

Access is a perpetual negotiation between the value of the original artifact and that of its decentralization and distribution as a reproducible object. Though many filmmakers, such as Peter Kubelka, are committed to celluloid, copies have long been revered within the experimental film community as these provide increased access to noncommercial moving images.⁵² Before constructing the institutional and pedagogical aims of Anthology's Film Study Center, Mekas believed that the 8mm format would profoundly change the accessibility and consumption of the experimental film: copies, not institutions, would overcome censorship and public viewing obstacles. Today, through new technologies, the web archive offers a fragment of Mekas's 8mm dream. The experimental film can now be transferred onto video, downloaded, and stored on a hard

drive or USB key. It can be economically burned onto a DVD and circulated to a larger public. Mekas, with the same resilient energy he embodied in the 1960s, consistently promotes digital technology and free access in the twenty-first century:

[YouTube and UbuWeb] are all very, very, very important outlets for all videotaped material. It becomes very open and democratic. . . . Much of it will disappear, but some of it, people will protect and it will remain. They will make copies and they will see that it does not disappear, because video materials—DVDs, CDs—are fragile and their lives are limited. Film can survive under good conditions, one hundred and more years. Even under bad conditions it can survive fifty years. Video, the current technology, whatever it is on YouTube and video, will be gone. What will survive will be only those pieces which reviewers will like so much that they will want to see them again and again and share with friends, and therefore they will keep making fresh copies.⁵³

For more than fifty years, Mekas has argued for free access to the experimental film, which he has implemented into Anthology's exhibition policies. Home access of the experimental film is not restricted to the web and video; for Mekas and Anthology, the concept began with a particular set of social dynamics in Greenwich Village. In a small and dense community, political forces, the vibrancy of art movements, and portable moving image technologies permeated experimental film exhibition. Ideas about art and its accessibility were synchronous with new developments in film technology, creating prototypes for the accessible archive and the institutionalized avant-garde film. Often marginalized, the experimental film functioned within a cultural economy composed of specialized and ostensibly hermetic forms of exhibition, and when Anthology opened in 1970, it demonstrated that increased access could raise the cultural value of the experimental film object. This particular centralization collides with the infrastructure of the previous decade, where verbal and postal networks decentralized the art object, miniaturizing and manipulating its scale to transgress conventional gallery access. Experimental film followed suit, placing access as its primary goal, and though peripheral exhibition networks metastasized, the basic need to see and experience the film avant-garde persisted, causing a tension between shifting ideas about art objecthood and the necessity for a public space to engage with such art. Contemporary online art access, manifest in the proliferation of independent and institutionalized web archives, is an evolution of the embodied pull between the decentralization of art and the art

institution. It compresses and expands exhibition spaces, and in the film community, preservation, exhibition, and pedagogy are repositioned through the malleability of material and spatial entities. Once again, portability is transforming access to the film art object, enabling it to travel to multiple sites with relative ease, thus changing the way we view cinema through a modification of how and where it is experienced.

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NOTES

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1. I will be utilizing the term *experimental* when discussing Anthology Film Archives' (hereinafter Anthology) prehistory and present ventures. The term *avant-garde* will be used in the discussion of Anthology's foundational years (1970–73) as this was the preferred term during its early institutional rhetoric. Mike Zryd chronicles the linguistic history of *experimental* and *avant-garde*, stating that *experimental* was favored in the 1950s and 1960s, whereas *avant-garde* was employed in the late 1960s and 1970s by influential writers such as Jonas Mekas, Annette Michelson, and P. Adams Sitney. Today the terms are often used interchangeably, with infrequent discipline. Zryd, "Experimental Film and the Development of Film Study in America," in *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, 183–216 (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008).

2. In the last five years, Anthology increased online access to their collection by partnering with UbuWeb and adding film stills to its website. Anthology holds no records of both launch dates and, as of October 2011, could not

confirm a completion date for the digital archive. Wendy Dorsett, e-mail correspondence with the author, October 6, 2011, and Andrew Lampert, e-mail correspondence with the author, October 4, 2011.

3. David E. James, Paul Arthur, Jan-Christopher Horak, Lauren Rabinovitz, Michael Zryd, Peter Decherney, and James Kreul have located the avant-garde film and Anthology within broader discourses of pedagogy, nationalist and regional discourse, and institutional history.

4. In "Experimental Screens in the 1960s and 70s: The Site of Community," *Cinema Journal* 51, no. 2 (2012): 162–67, Tess Takahashi explores the network of experimental screens, arguing that the screen is a vital critical entry into experimental film history. Citing New York and San Francisco as significant locations for the development of experimental film screens, Takahashi provides an overview of experimental film exhibition before and during Anthology's existence. San Francisco's exhibition spaces have been recently documented by Steve Anker, Kathy Geritz, and Steve Seid, eds., *Radical Light: Alternative Film and Video in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945–2000* (Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley Art Museum, and Pacific Film Archive, 2010).

5. On portable technologies and cinema objects, see Haidee Wasson, "Electric Homes! Automatic Movies! Efficient Entertainment! 16mm and Cinema's Domestication in the 1920s," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 1–21; Charles Acland, "Curtains, Carts, and the Mobile Screen," *Screen* 50, no. 1 (2009): 148–66; and Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). For an account of postwar New York experimental and independent film networks, see James Kreul, "New York, New Cinema: The Independent Film Community and the Underground Crossover, 1950–1970," PhD diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2004. Los Angeles has also long been a thriving place for avant-garde cinema. David James argues that Los Angeles, not New York, was the main center of avant-garde cinema. James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

6. Rick Prelinger, "Points of Origin: Discovering Ourselves through Access," *The Moving Image* 9, no. 2 (2010): 164–75.

7. "In Focus: The Twenty-First Century Archive" featured the following pieces: Eric Schaefer, Rick Prelinger, Karan Sheldon, Dan Streible, Margaret A. Compton, Lynne Kirste, Mike Mashon, *Cinema Journal* 46, no. 3 (2007): 109–42.

8. Caroline Frick, *Saving Cinema: The Politics of Preservation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

9. Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 133.

10. See Scott MacDonald, *Canyon Cinema: The Life and Times of an Independent Film Distributor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

11. For a history of Cinema 16, see Scott Macdonald, *Cinema 16: Documents towards a History of the Film Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).

12. When the Film-Makers' Coop began in 1962, Mekas's loft apartment on

425 Park Avenue South became the co-op's office, where it remained until 1967, when it moved to 175 Lexington Avenue. Today the coop is located at 475 Park Avenue South.

13. Michele Pierson, David E. James, and Paul Arthur, eds., *Optic Antics: The Cinema of Ken Jacobs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8.

14. Paul Arthur, "Routines of Emancipation: Alternative Cinema in the Ideology and Politics of the Sixties," in *To Free the Cinema: Jonas Mekas and the New York Underground*, ed. David E. James (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 28.

15. Jonas Mekas, *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema 1959–71* (New York: Collier Books, 1972), 127–28.

16. By 1965, media coverage of the censorship battle dissolved. In the January 7, 1965, edition of the *Village Voice*, Mekas writes of censorship as a passing fad, stating that underground film became a fashion of the establishment. *Ibid.*, 174–75.

17. In 1965, *Business Screen* reported that approximately five million 8mm projectors were circulating in the United States (population 194.3 million). Anthony Slide, *Before Video: A History of Non-theatrical Film* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 114–15.

18. For \$30 (\$214 in 2011 dollars), Brakhage purchased a complete suite of 8mm equipment at an auction. Mekas, *Movie Journal*, 138.

19. Mekas wrote about the Film-Makers' Coop's desire to reduce all 16mm films to 8mm in the *Village Voice* on April 23, 1964. *Ibid.*, 135. According to Mekas, the Filmmakers's Co-op reduced Andy Warhol's *13 Most Beautiful Women* to 8mm. Jonas Mekas, e-mail correspondence with the author, March 9, 2011.

20. Phyllis Johnson, "A Letter from Phyllis Johnson," <http://www.ubu.com/aspen/aspen1/letter.html>.

21. On the networks of 1960s multimedia art texts (assemblings, flyers, newspapers, magazines), see Craig J. Saper, "Fluxus: Instructions for an Intimate Bureaucracy," in *Networked Art*, 113–28 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). For networks of the European avant-garde, see Malte Hagener, *Moving Forward, Looking Back: The European Avant-Garde and the Invention of Film Culture 1919–1939* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007).

22. Arthur, "Routines of Emancipation," 24.

23. Brian Frye, "Interview with Jonas Mekas," *Senses of Cinema*, June 2001, http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/17/mekas_interview.html.

24. The Avon Foundation (posthumously the Jerome Hill Foundation) donated a total of 1.7 million dollars to Film Culture and Anthology between the years 1964 and 1975. "Jerome (Hill) Foundation Grants to Anthology Reach \$1,700,000," *Variety*, October 22, 1975..

25. Today, Anthology functions as an archive, exhibition theater, and library of the experimental, independent, and avant-garde moving image, shedding the terms *film art*, *museum*, and *academy*.

26. Film Art Fund Inc. was incorporated in 1966 as the legal name under which donations could be made from Hill and other funders to Film Culture and, later, Anthology Film Archives. In 1972, the year Anthology formed a

board of directors, it applied for grants from the National Endowment of Arts, New York State Council, American Film Institute, Rockefeller Foundation, Noble Foundation, and forty smaller foundations. In this year, Anthology also received several donations and sponsorships from individuals for specific projects. Anthology was rejected by the Noble Foundation but received grants from the National Endowment of Arts, New York State Council, and Rockefeller Center. "Program Report for the Period Commencing May 1, 1972"; "Minutes of the First Board of Directors Meeting, October 30, 1972, February 17, 1973, March 26, 1973"; Jonas Mekas, letter to Alan A. Masur, March 16, 1972, Jonas Mekas Personal Archives, which Mekas keeps in his personal studio (hereinafter JMPA).

27. Roslyn Bernstein and Shael Shapiro, *Illegal Living: 80 Wooster Street and the Evolution of SoHo* (Vilnius, Lithuania: Jono Meko Fondas, 2010), 78. After Jerome Hill's death, Anthology could no longer afford the rent at 425 Lafayette Street. In 1974, Anthology merged with the Film-Makers' Cinematheque and moved to 80 Wooster Street. Today, Anthology is located at 32 2nd Avenue.

28. Sitney describes the evolution and history of Anthology in the *Filmmakers Newsletter*, referring to Anthology as Cinematheque 2 during its conceptual years. *Filmmakers Newsletter*, February 1971, 18.

29. Peter Kubelka in "Invisible Cinema" Interview with Peter Kubelka, *Design Quarterly* 93 (1974): 32, and Sky Sitney, "The Search for the Invisible Cinema," in *Perspectives on Jerome Hill and Anthology Film Archives*, ed. Robert Haller, 31–41 (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 2005).

30. Alan A. Masur, letter to Carl Schwartz, November 5, 1971, JMPA.

31. The average ticket price for a commercial theater in 1970 was \$1.552; in 1971, \$1.645; and in 1972, \$1.695. David A. Cook, "Average Ticket Price in the U.S. Each Year, 1970–1980," in *History of the American Cinema*, vol. 9, ed. Charles Harpole (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2000), 491.

32. Jonas Mekas, letter to Allan A. Masur, February 24, 1972, JMPA.

33. On December 15, 1970 (fifteen days after Anthology's first screening), the Whitney Museum of American Art inaugurated a "New American Film-makers Series." Each program lasted one week and contained twenty-three individual screenings. Robert J. Landry, "Mekas' Insiders, Whitney Weeks," *Variety*, November 18, 1970, 7. In 1967, NYU began to offer an MA in cinema studies, and in the following year, the university began a PhD program.

34. See Constance Penley and Janet Bergstrom, "The Avant-Garde Histories and Theories," *Screen* 19, no. 3 (1978): 113–27. P. Adams Sitney responds in "Letters from the Film Work Group, P. Adams Sitney, Janet Bergstrom, and Constance Penley," *Screen* 20, nos. 3–4 (1979): 149–56.

35. No record was kept of this distribution. Jonas Mekas, e-mail correspondence with the author, March 9, 2011.

36. Equivalent to \$134,249 in 2011 dollars. Jonas Mekas, letter to Alan A. Masur, November 8, 1971, JMPA.

37. Equivalent to \$279,685 in 2011 dollars. "Program Report of Anthology Film Archives for the Period Commencing May 1, 1972," JMPA.

38. Jonas Mekas, letter to Alan A. Masur, May 12, 1971, JMPA.

39. Anthony Slide, *Nitrate Won't Wait* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1992), 90.

40. "Program Report of Anthology Film Archives for the Period Commencing May 1, 1972," JMPA.
41. P. Adams Sitney, *The Essential Cinema: Essays on Films in the Collection of Anthology Film Archives* (New York: New York University Press, 1975).
42. Correspondence between Jonas Mekas and Alan A. Masur, 1971–73, Anthology Film Archives Legal History, JMPA.
43. Calvin Tomkins, "Profiles: All Pockets Open, Jonas Mekas," *The New Yorker*, January 6, 1973, 32.
44. Michael Zryd, "The Academy and the Avant-Garde: A Relationship of Dependence and Resistance," *Cinema Journal* 45, no. 2 (2006): 17–42.
45. "Program Report for the Period Commencing May 1, 1972," JMPA, 7, 10, 14.
46. Five video transfer clips are available on the Anthology website: *NYC-Downtown*, Lowell Bodger, date unknown; *Wintercourse*, Paul Sharits, 1962; *Morton Street*, Maya Deren, date unknown; *No. 11 Mirror Animations* (1956–1957), Harry Smith, 1956–57; *Coney Island*, summer 1969, from the Bob Parent Collection. Three promotional films are also included: *Persistence of Vision*, Tom Brenner, date unknown; *Anthology Film Archives Promotional Video*, 1999; and *Anthology Film Archives Television Spot*, Gotham TV, Episode 9, 2000. This list is based on October 2011 access of Anthology's website.
47. Brakhage, Hollis Frampton, Andy Warhol, Joseph Cornell, Harry Smith, Paul Sharits, Robert Breer, and Marie Menken were included in the Essential Cinema list and remain among the top ten most requested files. Carolee Schneemann and Yvonne Rainer round up the list. Library Appointment Binder, Anthology Film Archives.
48. Andrew Lampert, personal interview with the author, New York, August 20, 2010. Lampert worked as Anthology's archivist from 2003 to 2011, when he transitioned into the role of curator.
49. Andrew Lampert, e-mail correspondence with the author, April 2, 2011.
50. As of August 2010, 220 audiotapes have been digitized.
51. Frick, *Saving Cinema*, 5.
52. At a lecture in 2005, Peter Kubelka unspooled a 35mm print of his own film, passed it around the audience, and encouraged the examination of each frame, promoting celluloid and demonstrating film objecthood. Travis Bird, "An Empty Frame Is a Piece of Art: Reflections and Projections on Archiving and Restoration," in *Le Giornate del Cinema Muto 2005: The Collegium Papers* 7, ed. Luca Giuliani and David Robinson (Gemona, Italy: Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, 2006), <http://www.filmintelligence.org/collegium-2006.htm>.
53. Jonas Mekas, personal interview with the author, New York, August 20, 2010.