

GUERRILLA CINEMATHEQUE COMES OF AGE THE PACIFIC FILM ARCHIVE

Lee Amazonas

This whole thing is put together with spit, chewing gum, good intentions, cooperation from the film community and overhead paid by the Museum. I'm not over-budget or under-budget because I haven't got a budget.

—Pacific Film Archive founder Sheldon Renan
in a February 1971 interview

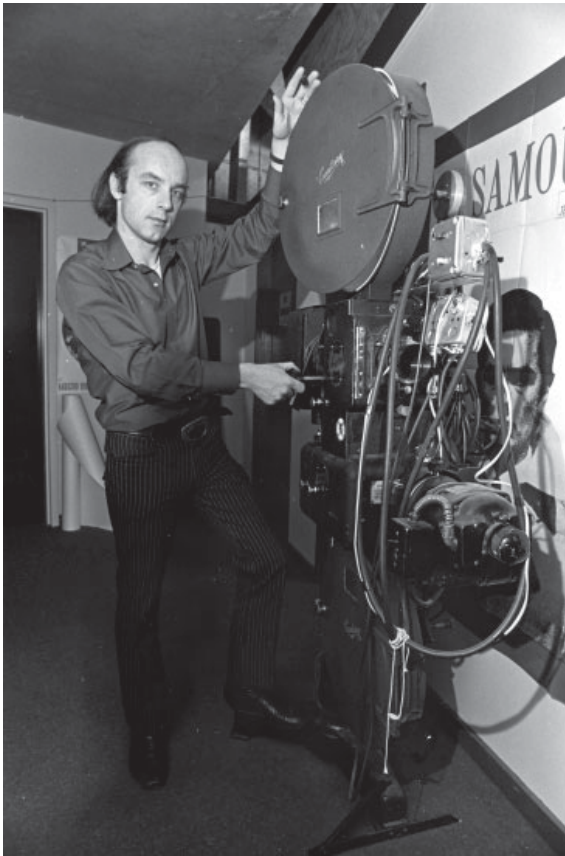
FOR AN INSTITUTION WITH SUCH A JERRY-BUILT INCEPTION, the Pacific Film Archive (PFA) has not done too badly for itself as it progresses through its fourth decade of existence. The numbers tell a small part of the story: a permanent collection of over 10,000 films and videos (stored in temperature- and humidity-controlled vaults); a study center whose holdings include more than 7,600 books on film history, theory, criticism, and reference, 150 international film periodical titles, over 95,000 clipping files, 36,000 film stills, and 7,500 posters; and an exhibition program of approximately 500 film presentations each year serving an audience of over 50,000 viewers from the Berkeley campus and around the Bay Area.

Beyond statistics, it is the magnificent array of programs the Pacific Film Archive offers that provides a broader understanding of this vital institution. Many audience members and professionals throughout the film archive community would agree that the exhibition program at PFA is among the most richly varied and comprehensive shown anywhere, presenting avant-garde and experimental film, classic Hollywood, international cinema (from Iran to Finland to China to Brazil), video art, silent film, ethnographic film, and more. Aside from the many programs curated at PFA, many of these are collaborations with other institutions or selections from film festivals or traveling programs.

An active member of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF), the Pacific Film Archive is recognized throughout the world of cinematheques and film institutes for its commitment to film preservation and collection development. Filmmakers, scholars, and enthusiasts nationwide have the PFA library information line on speed dial. The library and year-round film programs are also UC Berkeley's surprisingly low-profile gem, a resource for students, faculty, and staff (although they are not always aware of it) to use whenever the need or desire strikes.



Sheldon Renan in his office at the Pacific Film Archive. Photograph by Dennis Galloway. Date unknown. BAM/PFA.



Tom Luddy at the Pacific Film Archive. Date unknown. BAM/PFA.

While the Pacific Film Archive is the product of many personalities and forces, the principal founder was Sheldon Renan. The author of a book on underground film, Renan arrived in Berkeley from New York City in 1966 seemingly for the express purpose of establishing a film archive. By the end of the year he was exhibiting films on campus, the proceeds intended for the still unnamed institution. At the same time, lecturer, critic, and force of nature Albert Johnson (who would be involved with many major film festivals and organizations over the next three decades) programmed films for the campus's Committee for Arts and Lectures. He was assisted by Berkeley student Tom Luddy, who also operated the F. W. Murnau Film Society out of the University YWCA, wrote film notes for one repertory theater (the Cinema Guild), and was program director for another (the Telegraph Repertory Theater). The three men eventually combined their programming efforts.¹

Meanwhile, the San Francisco Bay Area was already infected with

cinophilia. One of the first repertory film theaters in the country, the Cinema Guild (also known for being an early setting for Pauline Kael to develop her incisive writing style) began operation in Berkeley in 1950 (in living rooms and basements before getting a theater in 1952). The San Francisco International Film Festival launched its inaugural program in 1958; *Film Quarterly* was given new life by the University of California Press and editor Ernest Callenbach that same year. (Both the festival and the journal continue to flourish.) The year 1961 was busy for Bay Area cineastes: the Cinema Guild's second Berkeley venue opened, the seminal avant-garde film distributor Canyon Cinema came into being in an independent film-maker's backyard, and the San Francisco Cinematheque began operation (as Canyon Cinematheque).

At the same time, college courses and programs in film studies grew, nationally and locally. San Francisco State College, now University, was seventh out of the 100 largest universities in number of film courses taught in 1963 and 1964 (UCLA was second).² The San Francisco Art Institute, which began offering cinema courses in 1947, established a film department in 1968. That same year, the *New York Times* reported that 60,000 students were enrolled in film courses nationwide, double the 1967 number.³ Berkeley's own Film Studies Program did not begin until 1976, but faculty in a variety of language and literature departments (William Nestrick in English, Bertrand Augst in French, among others) developed courses in the previous decade to meet the growing academic interest in cinema. Nationwide, film societies had proliferated: from about 200 in 1950 to 4000 in 1964, most of them associated with colleges and universities.⁴



Professors William Nestrick and Bertrand Augst at Tom Luddy's farewell party, January 21, 1980. Photograph by Maureen Gosling. *BAM/PFA*.

program in the late 1940s. He was turned down, as he was at the Oakland Museum. The newly appointed director of the University Art Museum⁵ at Berkeley, Peter Selz, however, accepted Renan's idea. Selz's recent employment at MoMA in New York likely acquainted him with both the possibilities and the challenges of such an arrangement.

The world of film archives is a diverse and occasionally contentious one in terms of philosophy, priorities, and structure. While the Film Department at MoMA was a ready model for the many former New Yorkers involved in this effort, PFA's formative years were most influenced by the ardent and mercurial founder and secretary-general of the Cinémathèque Française, Henri Langlois. Exceedingly generous with people he liked and trusted, Langlois had been instrumental in helping a number of European archives get off the ground since the 1930s.⁶ Renan and Langlois met in 1968; very soon, Selz and Langlois signed a document in the form of a contract, but with language that suggested nothing more binding than a shared set of goals.⁷

Langlois came to Berkeley several times, assisting Renan and the fledgling archive with advice, the loan of films from the Cinémathèque's fabled collection, and introductions to filmmakers and funding sources. The greatest impact of Langlois and the Cinémathèque was not material, but of spirit: the creation of a place where cinema patrons, artists, students, and critics could watch the widest range of the world's films in the best technical and environmental conditions, that would also be a center for study, discussion, and exchange. The Cinémathèque was the place where future French New Wave directors (François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Eric Rohmer, among others) received their film education, especially in the Hollywood genre films that influenced their work. Accessibility became PFA's watchword, as well.



Henri Langlois. Date of photograph unknown. *BAM/PFA*.

Finally, the late 1960s was certainly the time for an individual with a passion to act first—just do it—and think about the details (and the funding) later. This is exactly how the Pacific Film Archive came into being.

Renan had envisioned an archive under the aegis of a fine arts museum, similar to what he encountered at New York's Museum of Modern Art, whose film department included an archive, a study center, and an exhibition program. He approached the San Francisco Museum of Art (now SFMOMA), which had a film



Jean-Pierre Gorin, Jean-Luc Godard, and Tom Luddy in Berkeley, 1970. Photograph by Jeremiah Goodwin. BAM/PFA.

In 1967 Renan was appointed director of the Pacific Film Archive—the idea now had a name—and a national advisory board that included Susan Sontag, Andrew Sarris, and Ernest Callenbach was appointed. Starting in September film programs were on a weekly schedule at Wheeler Auditorium (and occasionally in a lecture hall in Dwinelle). As the Archive's existence was quite unofficial as far as the university was concerned, the year's budget, \$800, was appropriated from the art museum's publications allocation. The films shown were not unlike today's programs at PFA: avant-garde and experimental, international, and classic cinema. In 1968 Luddy put together a Jean-Luc Godard retrospective (including a premiere), with the director introducing his films and even holding office hours on



Fritz Lang at UC Berkeley, November 1968. BAM/PFA.

campus for a week. The following year, Fritz Lang appeared with many films from his long career. Lotte Eisner, critic and biographer of Lang, also made the trip to Berkeley for this series (which had to be moved to an off-campus theater when a projection booth fire temporarily put Wheeler Hall out of commission). The organization that was put together “with spit, chewing gum, and good intentions” was gaining an international reputation before it even had an address.

Meanwhile, the political and social tenor of the times was reflected by some of the series and events PFA put on in partnership with Albert Johnson’s Committee for Arts and Lectures, with titles such as Upheaval Film Marathon, Strange People Film Marathon, ASUC Strike Benefit. Berkeley’s cinema lovers did not let the occasional inconveniences of upheaval keep them from Wheeler’s doors. In spite of tear gas and fire hoses brought in by police against a student demonstration in April 1970, an audience of 500 attended an Ingmar Bergman film.

Another key staff member came to PFA as it prepared for its grand opening, Willard Morrison. While officially the projectionist, he also served ex officio as programmer, manager, and technical specialist in the early years. Regarded by Renan as “one of the three or four most knowledgeable people in 16mm in the United States,”⁸ Morrison’s extensive collection of 16mm international classics was acquired by PFA and the Film Studies Program in the early 1980s, principally for study use by Berkeley students.

On January 22, 1971, PFA ended its peripatetic existence when its new home opened in the Berkeley Art Museum’s brand new building with a three-day series of international and experimental cinema. For the record, Akira Kurosawa’s *Dodesukaden* was the first film screened. It also caused the first PFA near-calamity when the reels arrived labeled—and numbered—in Japanese. While help from the Asia Center was hastily sought, Renan regaled the audience with anecdotes from film history, a practice he continued whenever the evening’s entertainment was not going as planned.

The early 1970s marked a period of transition for the Pacific Film Archive. Tom Luddy, the Berkeley student who had programmed films for PFA in the 1960s, came back as program director in 1972 (after a stint working for a New York distributor of international films). He was appointed PFA director and curator in 1975 and remained until early 1980. In 1973, with PFA established and settled—if not funded—Sheldon Renan left to try his hand

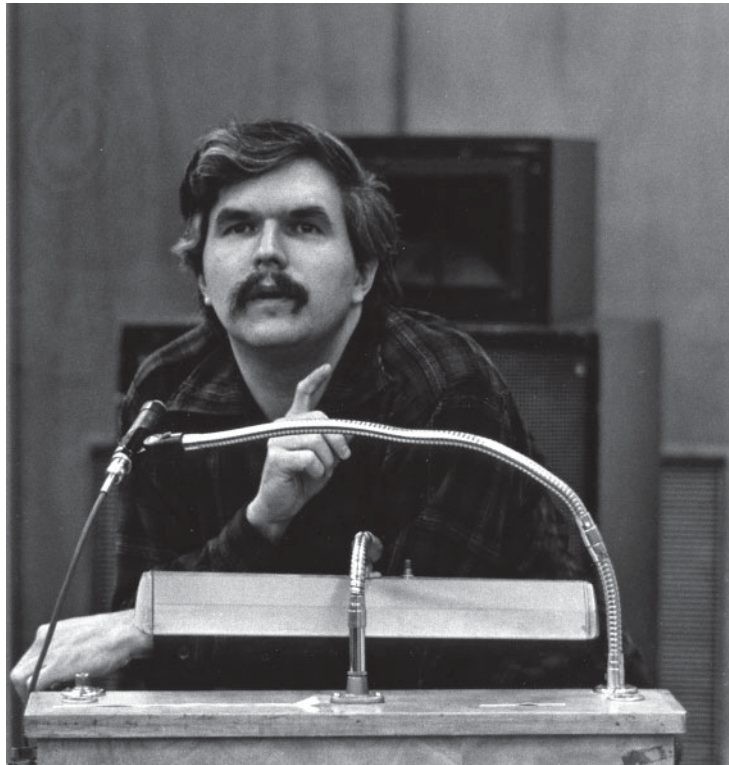


Sheldon Renan and Akira Kurosawa at the Pacific Film Archive, July 1978. Photograph by Sam Silver. BAM/PFA.

at film producing and screenwriting. (He has since been involved in a wide range of film, media, and technology projects.) While the programming ethos did not change, Luddy’s growing network of film contacts throughout the world generated a long and distinguished list of film artists who visited PFA during his tenure. Silent film performers, contemporary avant-garde filmmakers, film noir cinematographers, directors of the French New Wave as

well as auteurs from Senegal, Vietnam, Hungary, and Hollywood helped make PFA a gathering place, as the founders envisioned, for those who love film.

In 1974, for example, archive audiences were treated to visits by the French director Agnes Varda; experimental filmmakers Stan Brakhage and Kenneth Anger, whose contrasts in style and content demonstrate the breadth of territory in the avant-garde; veteran Hollywood director Nicholas Ray and up-and-comer Martin Scorsese; the author William Burroughs; Lotte Reiniger, an experimental animator whose



Stan Brakhage. Photograph by Robert A. Haller. BAM/PFA.

career spanned seven decades; and the actress Jane Fonda. Then, as now, a PFA program might look at the entire career of a director such as Douglas Sirk or Nicholas Ray, with the difference that, in the 1970s, these film artists were still alive and came as honored guests.

After Luddy left in 1980 to embark on his producing career, Lynda Myles, the director of the Edinburgh Film Festival, took over leadership of the archive. Due to monetary and structural factors, this was a crucial period for PFA's survival. Myles, together with the small staff, succeeded in keeping PFA alive while maintaining standards in the programs. However, within two years Myles also began a career in film production and left.

The year Luddy became director, the weekly *Avant-Garde/Independent Film* program was introduced. The new assistant curator, Edith Kramer (formerly manager of Canyon Cinema and film curator at SFMOMA), took charge of this program. The commitment to new conceptualizations of cinema that had been shown from the start was now a permanent and integral part of PFA exhibition (as well as its collection). Kramer, who took a brief leave, returned to assume the directorship in 1983, a position she still holds.

The past twenty years reflect the core values of the Pacific Film Archive's early days and reveal an expansion of programs into new areas. While preservation was always an Archive goal, the first preservation project was completed in 1987. Also under Kramer's watch, PFA has been a venue for many film festivals: San Francisco International (starting in 1984), Margaret Mead, Human Rights Watch International, San Francisco Asian American International, Women of Color, San Francisco Video Festival, and others. A number of collaborations with the wider Berkeley community (Berkeley High School and the Berkeley Historical Society, to name two) have also been initiated.

In 1986 Kathy Geritz took over the avant-garde program (which she runs today as *Alternative Visions*), and Kramer appointed Steve Seid in 1988 to begin a weekly Video Art

program.⁹ These programs give current experimenters in moving picture media an unparalleled forum to show their work and engage their audiences in discussions of ideas and techniques. Ever-evolving notions of what is experimental have a place to develop and see the light of day.

Japanese cinema is another programming emphasis from the early years that has continued to flourish. Just as the Japanese collection contains the works of filmmakers not normally seen outside of Japan, the programming has sought to introduce new directors and genres. Both the collection and the exhibitions today are under the curatorial supervision of Mona Nagai. Whether edgy films depicting restless youth of the 1960s or cinema of the World War II era, these programs always bring to the screen bodies of rarely seen work about which little is known, even in the cinema studies community. The films of internationally renowned directors Seijun Suzuki, Yasuzo Masumura, and Nagisa Oshima were shown at PFA long before most filmgoers in the United States were aware of them. Today's audiences have the opportunity to explore the works of young filmmakers in the "neo-eiga: New Japanese Cinema" programs.

Berkeley classes held film showings at PFA as early as 1976, when lectures and screenings by visiting instructors such as film historian Yvette Biro and the late critic Raymond Durnat enriched the exhibition program. (Class screenings on PFA's schedule are open to the public.) The Film Studies Program began holding regular class screenings at the Archive in 1979, with Albert Johnson's courses, *Images of Blacks on Film* (later, *Images of Minorities in Film*) and *Third World Cinema*. Johnson continued to offer these popular programs until his death in 1998. Collaborative relationships with instructors and departments have grown in recent years; *Film 50*, an introductory film survey developed by Marilyn Fabe (the first instructor hired specifically for Film Studies), plays to sold-out audiences of students, BAM/PFA members, and community members fortunate enough to get a ticket.

PFA's librarian and curators of avant-garde film and video have all taught university courses, some for several years. In addition, students can gain experience as interns in the library and as student curators for the avant-garde program. Curatorial interns organize annual programs that feature the work of student filmmakers. (The Women of Color Film Festival is also a student initiative.) Often in collaboration with the Consortium for the Arts at UC Berkeley, PFA sponsors artists' residencies, which bring filmmakers for screenings and meetings with students for periods of one day to two weeks. This is a more formalized version of Godard's 1969 visit, but inspired by the same notion of bringing together artists, audiences, and students. The yearly "How to Read a Film" workshops give high school teachers the background and the tools to bring cinema and media awareness into their curricula.



Chantal Akerman at the Pacific Film Archive, December 1, 1976. Photograph by Harry Dahlgren. BAM/PFA.

Preservation and the Film Collection

One of the great pleasures I've had was discovering what a funky playhouse the Archive vaults can be—a treasure trove of odds and ends, some real rarities, a jewel or two, and a lot of obscure stuff. It is a place where, for me, every day is Christmas. . . . [Its collection] is a wonderful mirror of PFA's overall mad, eclectic passion for film.

—Russell Merritt, introducing “A Potpourri of Puppet Pleasures,”
June 6, 1995

A film collection is often the result of happenstance and a curator's ability to convince a potential donor that an archive's vaults would make a better home for a film than the owner's garage. A grant occasionally helps an institution's acquisitions, but even the wealthiest organizations are unable to buy the films they want. Nevertheless, collections are shaped by the tastes and preservation priorities of the people who manage them.

Once PFA had a permanent home and a place to store films, the acquisitions began. The basis of the West Coast Avant-Garde collection and a large number of Japanese films arrived during 1971. These two are still among the most significant collections at the archive, frequently requested for viewing by local and visiting scholars.

The most explicit assertion in the agreement signed by Selz and Langlois states PFA's promise “to protect the films of independent California filmmakers and to contribute to their spreading, their preservation and protection.” (The “spreading” had already begun, from the very first screenings Renan arranged in 1966. He had, after all, written one of the first books on experimental cinema.) The 1960s had seen a surge in works from West Coast (often Bay Area) experimental filmmakers such as Bruce Conner, Chick Strand, Bruce Baillie, Gunvor Nelson, and Larry Jordan. Many of these artists saw the Pacific Film Archive as a safe haven for their material as well as a venue for their presentation. Deposits of pre-print elements, films, and videos from makers and grants from funding agencies have produced a major and unique collection.

The Japanese collection, the largest outside of Japan, did not simply appear on the doorstep (although this has happened on occasion). Spurred by love of Japanese cinema, a desire to see PFA reflect film art of the entire Pacific Rim (a factor in the institution's naming), and Langlois's opportune advice, Renan solicited major Japanese distributors operating in California and convinced them that a permanent California home for their prints would benefit everyone.

Soviet silents (including rare examples of Russian Eccentric cinema), seminal 1970s video art, films from Eastern Europe and Soviet Georgia (pursued and acquired by Tom Luddy during his tenure), and rarely seen animation are among other major concentrations found in PFA vaults.

An essential—and costly—part of collection management is preservation. While this was part of PFA's mission from its inception, it was not until 1987 that the Archive was able to undertake its first preservation effort. The final reel of the 1919 *La Tosca*, identified for PFA by Langlois in 1976 and not known to exist elsewhere, was very preservation-worthy as it starred one of Italy's most renowned silent-film divas, Francesca Bertini. This reel was made from volatile cellulose nitrate, as were virtually all films manufactured before 1950, a fact that presents archivists with their greatest challenge in terms of time and choosing which films to save. Videotape has an even shorter shelf life, and experimental work in that medium requires timely attention.

Thanks to the active interest of prominent film directors, some production and distribution companies, and the occasional cable television station, the late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed a surge of public awareness of film preservation. (This interest appears to continue in the form of the rerelease of restored versions of films, the yearly announcement of the Library of Congress's additions to its National Film Registry, and the not infrequent feature stories on the fragility of some part of the American artistic heritage and how it is being saved.) PFA received its first grant for preservation in 1990, and since then many projects have been funded and completed, protecting the major collections of film and video, as well as irreplaceable individual works such as *La Tosca*.

The Library and Film Study Center

There are many wonderful reference libraries in the East Bay, but none so acutely specialized as that run by the angels at the Pacific Film Archive. I called the other day asking for the name of a half-remembered early '60s science fiction film; all I could recall about it was that it involved the Van Allen radiation belt catching on fire. "Let's see, Van Allen radiation belts..." says the librarian, flipping through some kind of miraculous index. "Here it is! Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea, 1961, Irwin Allen."

—Paul Rauber, "Best of the East Bay, 1988," *San Francisco Bay Guardian*

The PFA Library and Film Study Center opened in 1972 as part of the original conception of the Pacific Film Archive. Begun by Linda Artel (who also started the Children's Film Program in the same year), the library is the largest of its kind in Northern California and among a small and select group of such facilities located anywhere. The noncirculating holdings contain both rare and standard books and periodicals from many countries—a Russian cinema encyclopedia that is one of a handful of sets available anywhere outside of Russia, issues of journals that stopped publication long ago, sometimes after very few editions. Distributor catalogs—past and present—help in the increasingly difficult search for film print availability. Nearly a thousand exhibitor manuals and pressbooks provide primary source material for researchers of film production history, business practices, advertising slogans, and graphic design. And, growing by about one file drawer every few months, the overstuffed clipping files are chock-full of articles, pamphlets, documents, flyers, and other printed material, all meticulously organized and cross-referenced by film title, person's name, subject, and film festival or cinematheque. Some of this material is gradually being made available on the Internet as it continues to be painstakingly transferred into digital format through the grant-funded CineFiles project.

The film and video collection and access to the holdings of the study center are open to the entire campus community as well as to filmmakers, scholars, programmers, critics, and others with film-related research needs. (Some services cost a modest fee.) The film information service, which answers all questions great and small about cinema, is available to anyone with a telephone. A documentary filmmaker may need to find all extant battle-field footage shot in Belgium during World War I or a Hollywood actor may need to find all films—fiction and nonfiction—that deal with autism to prepare for a role. A query may come from a doctor organizing a conference who needs to know what films concern plastic surgery and how can she obtain them (and, by the way, also obtain the rights for public showing), or a historian employed by a major bank seeking out footage of the founder as well as information (and prints) of the films he financed. Sometimes, the question comes from friends settling a bet (in what film did Mae West say "come up and see me sometime" and

did she actually say it?).

Berkeley professors use the library's resources to research their publications or find prints they need for use in their classes. Students from Berkeley and all Bay Area film schools use the study center to prepare for exams and research papers. They are not always film majors—students in economics, history, art, psychology, business, ethnic studies, sociology, and the languages often choose projects that involve the historical, aesthetic, technological, theoretical, business, or social aspects of film and filmmaking. Sometimes, students need a little guidance from the reference staff (“I need to write a paper on Asian-American women in film and it's due tomorrow”).

PFA staff also uses the library when preparing future programs, cataloging films, or conducting research for film notes for the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive bimonthly publication. Many grants and a phalanx of interns and volunteers help the small library staff, headed by Nancy Goldman, keep the whole operation going.

The Film-Going Experience

Watching films in the “best possible conditions” means many things, although not necessarily the comfort of the seats (deemed, until recently, the hardest in the Bay Area). From the start, Renan felt that critical to the design of a theater were good sight lines. The floor was pitched at just the right angle to ensure that everyone seated had an unobstructed view of the screen, regardless of individual differences in height. To eliminate one major source of audience noise and distraction, food and drink were—and remain—prohibited. (One student wrote of PFA as a place “where the word popcorn is never spoken and lives are sometimes turned around.”)¹⁰ The curatorial staff tirelessly seeks the best possible prints in their original formats, and the projectionists who examine and show the prints are famously perfectionist. Head projectionist Craig Valenza has practiced his art at PFA since its very early days. The theater ushers are alert to any stray beam of light or unidentified hum that might invade the audience's cinema experience. A 1988 renovation and 1991 installation of Dolby Surround-sound system (both the gifts of donors) further improved the conditions for viewing. In 1999, seismic realities caught up with PFA's George Gund Theater causing a move to a new 222-seat facility across the street. The same high technical standards prevail in the new (and temporary) space with the added benefit of comfortable seats.

An important element of a successful cinemathèque or film institute exhibition program is the film note. In the heyday of the film club, it was not uncommon for a one- to three-page essay to accompany the evening's showcase. These notes sought to educate the audience about cinema beyond the film at hand. Formal, if considerably shorter, film notes in a monthly calendar began at PFA in 1973. As brief as these were, they managed to add elements of film history and criticism to the necessary plot description and credits. Luddy's experience as Cinema Guild film notes writer no doubt informed the tone of PFA's descriptions. He frequently brought in outside filmmakers and critics, Yvette Biro, Raymond Durnat, Errol Morris, and Jean-Pierre Gorin, among others, who produced richly conceived short notes. The film notes have developed into an art form all their own. Educating the reader is important, but so is producing a piece of critical writing that engages and even entertains. Editor Judy Bloch has been guiding the notes in this direction since 1980.

A glance at some of the special events that took place at the Pacific Film Archive will add understanding of the wide range of audiences that call PFA home. Special evenings were not only about films and presenting their makers in person. Sometimes the event organizers went beyond sight and sound to reach audiences. A 1978 screening of Les Blank's *Always for Pleasure* (a film exploring the New Orleans cultural propensity for a good time) was accompanied not only by live Cajun music, but also by “smellaround”—the pungent

fragrance of Louisiana red beans and rice cooking in the wings. Called “aromarama” the following year for Blank’s *Garlic Is As Good As 10 Mothers*, the technique remained the same.

Two PFA events in 1993 give a glimpse of the range of sensibilities, from the solemn to the playful, that fit agreeably within the archive’s mission. Venerable Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni was honored with the Berkeley Citation in a ceremony at PFA presided over by the chancellor.¹¹ Three months later, counterculture legend Wavy Gravy held court as free ice cream was given away in the lobby and a program of psychedelic music films from the 1960s screened in the theater.

The live entertainment was not always listed on the program. On more than one occasion over the years, Albert Johnson was known to finish his introduction to a Fred Astaire or Vincente Minnelli musical with his own soft shoe and serenade. Other times, noncinematic concerns informed the evening’s event. “The Spanish Civil War on Film,” a series observing the conflict’s fiftieth anniversary in 1986, was inaugurated by a visit by several surviving—and voluble—veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. The reminiscences and spirited discussions that followed—both inside and outside of the theater—confirmed that Berkeley was still the home of political contrasts and debates. As eclectic as programming is, there are times when the evening’s entertainment drew a very different crowd: “Elvis Citings,” a compilation program from 1990, and the 1994 “Bowling: Life in the Fast Lane,” it is safe to say, introduced new audiences to PFA.

A regular visitor but special event himself was William K. Everson, film historian, New York University instructor, and collector. Everson made the first of his semiannual visits to PFA in 1973. Both beloved and admired, Everson shared his vast collection and his detailed and idiosyncratic knowledge of all aspects of film history with PFA audiences until his death in 1996.

Silent films have been shown at PFA since Langlois lent treasures from the Cinémathèque’s collection during the Wheeler and Dwinelle Hall days. While live musical accompaniment may not have been a dependable feature during the prehistory, it has been



Professor Albert Johnson. Date of photograph unknown. BAM/PFA.

a requisite part of a silent film program for most of PFA's existence. Sometimes the piano accompanist will view the film ahead of time and create a score from existing and original elements; other times the pianist will improvise as the film plays for the audience. On occasion a silent film showing will be the setting for an extraordinary event. The 1990s saw a number of unusual harmonic configurations: a theremin trio (for the Soviet science fiction film *Aelita*), a one-man band, and a group with fanciful historical instruments such as the marxophone and the pocket clarinet. The "Unsilent Film" series, with the help of a grant, commissioned composers to create original film scores and perform them at Archive screenings. And PFA has been one of the few places outside Japan where audiences could experience benshi, the Japanese narrative art for silent films. One of the few present-day benshi practitioners came for a short series in 1989 and an extensive program in 2002.

The best "events," however, may not be planned. While the PFA presentation of a newly restored print of D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* at the Castro Theater in January 1990 was special in terms of venue and Wurlitzer organ accompaniment, it was the audience reaction to this 1916 spectacle that made it a memorable night. The emotional and vocal responses of the sold-out house to every chase sequence, breathtaking shot, or shift in fortune for a beloved or despised character is still recalled by those who were present. For many, it was the first silent film they had ever seen. The evening's success inspired an occasional series of PFA programs at the Castro over the next few years, "The Movie Palace Experience."

The late 1960s may have been the right time—maybe one of the only times—for an organization such as the Pacific Film Archive to arise and become a permanent university institution, given the insurgent methods used to bring it about. It was also a time when film societies flourished, art and repertory houses appeared even in mid-size cities, and academic attention to the cinema grew beyond the neglected corners of more established disciplines. But that does not mean that cinephilia is a phenomenon of a past, more visually literate time or that there has been a "decay of cinema."¹² Edith Kramer summed up the perspective that has informed PFA's programming from the earliest Sheldon Renan days of "let's put on a show":

Ever since I've been in this business somebody is saying, "Film is dead." [But] there are still experiments going on, and people still doing original things, wonderful things, with the medium that have nothing to do with the business of film. I really have no patience with predictions of "this is the end" or "there are no good films this year." The people who say that are not looking at cinema the way we are looking at it.¹³

It is not the business of film, but the sheer enjoyment and astonishment of film in its many forms, that keeps the Pacific Film Archive moving forward and looking back at the same time.



Edith Kramer, awarded Officier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. Presented by Emmanuel Delloye, Cultural Attache. January 23, 2000. BAM/PFA.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Barbara Erickson, "A Farewell to Luddy," Sunday Magazine, *Contra Costa Times*, October 7, 1979; unpublished interviews with Sheldon Renan, 1971 and 1995 (PFA history files, PFA Library and Film Study Center).
- 2 David Stewart, "The Study of Motion Pictures in Colleges and Universities," *Educational Record*, Winter 1965 (reprint).
- 3 Robert Windeler, "A Study of Film Soaring on College Campuses," *New York Times*, April 18, 1968.
- 4 Stewart, *ibid.*
- 5 The original name of what is today the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA). Refer to Lucinda Barnes article in this issue.
- 6 Richard Roud, *A Passion for Films: Henri Langlois and the Cinémathèque Française* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), 170-71.
- 7 Agreement and correspondence between Cinémathèque Française and University Art Museum, March 3, 1969 (PFA history files).
- 8 Minutes of the Subcommittee on the Pacific Film Archive Meeting, December 11, 1970 (PFA history files).
- 9 The Berkeley Art Museum had been a pioneer in video presentation in the late 1970s and early 1980s, under the curatorship of David Ross.
- 10 Letter to PFA, 1992.
- 11 Two other distinguished PFA guests were awarded the prestigious Berkeley Citation: Roberto Rossellini (1973) and Satyajit Ray (1975).
- 12 Susan Sontag, "The Decay of Cinema," *New York Times*, February 25, 1996.
- 13 Edith Kramer, interviewed by Michael Fox for "Reelin' in the Years," *The Monthly*, May 1990. (Quote appears in slightly different form in published article.)

Lee Amazonas is an adviser for graduate and undergraduate students at UC. For many year she provided reference services in the Pacific Film Archives library and research for the film notes, and she remains a frequent member of the audience. Lee has an MA in Cinema Studies from New York University and an MS in Counseling from San Francisco State University.