

The Stanley Kubrick Archive: an evaluation of the success of the Archive's practices using Bosma's Three Fundamental Tasks of Film Archives

The Stanley Kubrick Archive (SKA) is a comprehensive collection relating to Kubrick's entire history. Housed at the University of the Arts London (UAL) Archives and Special Collections Centre, its position in this academic institution and its stated aim to "encourage research into Kubrick and his films" (Daniels, 2017) makes the Archive well-suited to analysis using a theoretical model of archiving.

Bosma (2015) suggests the model of 'Three Fundamental Tasks of Film Archives'. These are: Safeguarding, Presentation and Development of the collection. Using these three tasks and their subcategories, this evaluation will look at how effectively The Stanley Kubrick Archive approaches these subjects and how it is adapting to the changing environment of the world of archiving as a whole.

Safeguarding

Bosma (2015, p.87) defines the Safeguarding of films as "to acquire, minimising the loss of value, and restore if necessary". The majority of film archive acquisitions come from the catalogues of film distributors; however, another important source is donations from private collectors (Bosma, 2015). Film archives rely on these donations and instead of monetary compensation, offer in return the opportunity for the works to be preserved and seen by an audience. It is by this method that the SKA was acquired. Donated by the family of the late filmmaker, the collection was donated on the understanding that UAL would "protect, preserve and give access to the archive" whilst inspiring new artists (Mahurter, 2007). Although the donation by the Kubrick estate is of economic benefit to UAL, the donation of a sentimental collection brings with it significant considerations for the archivist. The collection comprises items that Kubrick's wife felt able to part with, so archivists and researchers should question whether enhanced critical analysis of Kubrick would come from greater access to the collection as a whole. Does the personal relationship of the donor influence how the Archive is curated?

The SKA consists of a wide range of archival material. As Forde and Rhys-Lewis (2014, p.5) state, "understanding the problems of different materials is one thing; finding the solutions is quite another". They also comment that "buildings are the first line of defence to ensure the survival of archival materials" (Forde and Rhys-Lewis, 2014, p.56), and adapting a pre-existing building could have brought with it some environmental issues. Designing the building specifically to house the centre enabled the Archive team to choose a storage system which best suited this extensive range of media (Mahurter, 2007). It was designed in adherence with 'PD5454 Recommendations for the storage and exhibition of archival documents'. As these standards have changed into 'BS EN 4971:2017' and 'BS EN 16893:2018', the Archive building has been able to adapt too (UAL, 2021) ensuring that the climate-controlled secure storage area, public enquiry room, display space, collection management area and digitisation area continue to meet standards.

Presentation

Presentation of an archive involves curating an archive programme (both in-house and through touring exhibitions), lending of materials and releasing publications supporting the

archive (Bosma, 2015). Exhibiting the Archive can support its accessibility aims, however there can also be “tension between the preservation and the exhibition practices” (Fossati, 2018, p.149).

The SKA is presented chronologically in-house, focusing on specific projects as you move through the building. Within each project the “archive materials are organised by their functions and placed within specific phases of filmmaking: development, pre-production, production, post-production and distribution” (Daniels, 2017). This use of both chronological and taxonomic classification is the most commonly used in archiving, to allow researchers to easily locate the items they are searching for (Yiakoumaki, 2009).

In terms of access, “a recent interesting development in the film archival field has been the experimentation with new alternative platforms to promote interaction” (Fossati, 2018, p.138). Whilst this quote mainly alludes to the external exhibition of archive materials, the SKA uses design and architecture within the building itself to encourage visitor interaction. The main hub of the archive, the Search Room, was inspired by Kubrick’s film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Exhibiting the Archive onsite in this manner adds another layer of appeal to visitors and I would argue the architecture alone could be a reason behind some audience visits. This emphasis on the intended style and look of the filmmaker plays into the notion of the “film as art” (Fossati, 2018, p.170) framework of some film archives, which puts the auteur’s ideas first and foremost, ahead of historical or practical archiving.

Outside of the archive building itself, the collection has reached vast audiences through the touring Stanley Kubrick Exhibition which borrows all materials from the archive. Although using the same objects, each venue curates the exhibition individually. For example, the National Museum Krakow displayed the items traditionally in cabinets, whereas LACMA used fewer objects but installed screens showing clips from Kubrick films (Daniels, 2017). This means the environment and display techniques are different for each exhibition. The autonomy given to the individual curators increases the risk of damage to the collection. Another downside to this form of exhibition is the cost. Budgeting needs to be accurate as “ensuring the safety of the material requires a certain level of expenditure” (Forde and Rhys-Lewis, 2014, p.169) and this method further heightens the tensions between restricted budgets and procedures of preservation and exhibition (Bosma, 2015).

The overarching criticism of these archival curations is of the perceived ‘fandom’ of the curators, who tend to deify Kubrick rather than offer fresh insights or analysis. Some critics also suggest this is due to the previously mentioned influence of the Kubrick estate on the archive (Fenwick, 2017). The exhibition has been said to have a reverential tone and acts as a biography of Kubrick rather than an aid to research and development, one of the key tasks of an archive. These archival silences are something scholars and archivists should be cognisant of.

Development

Development of film archives can be defined as “adding value, giving it a connection to current times and contexts” (Bosma, 2015, p.92). These values include historical value, connecting value and educational value.

A key role of the archivist is to “uncover and present new views of archival collections in response to critical issues which shape today’s cultural landscape” (Craven, 2016, p.13) through a dialogue between present and past. Historical value can be shown, for example, through the vast documentation of equipment used throughout Kubrick’s career which can educate us on changing technological practices in filmmaking. Notes on distribution methods during past societal changes can influence how we react to these issues in the present.

The connecting value of the archive can best be seen through the Search Room of the Centre. This room aims to “act as a catalyst for interaction between scholars” (Daniels, 2017). From students studying at BA level to researchers much later in their career, the visitors to this room come from a range of backgrounds and interests. The value of these connections is immense, and as visitors offer fresh eyes, “the archive team learns more contextual information that can be added to the descriptions, or sometimes highlights errors in the descriptions and/or the arrangement” (Daniels, 2017).

The Archive’s placement within an educational institution alone lends itself well to creating educational value, however I believe the SKA encourages this value particularly well. Archival material is not used only in film educational settings, but also to teach in subjects such as Interior Design and to develop research in mental health depictions in media (Daniels, 2017). The collection of essays *Stanley Kubrick: New Perspectives* (Ljujić, 2015) released in 2015 was created as a result of a group of academics and archivists meeting at the Archive itself and focuses not just on Kubrick, but archival practices themselves. This “recurrent dialogue between archivists and scholars has stimulated academic interest” (Fossati, 2018, p.145), and researchers into archiving across many different subject areas use the SKA for research into the practice of archiving itself. The Archive has inspired, and is used to teach, the ‘Researching Skilfully in Archives’ sessions run by the UAL.

Recommendations

Throughout this analysis, both the positives and negatives of SKA’s current archival practices have been presented. However, to ensure the longevity of the archive we need to look ahead to how it can improve for the future.

The most important aspect to take into consideration is the digitisation of the archive. As Bosma (2015, p.90) states, “expectations about accessibility to film heritage are increasing” and digitisation of the archive is an obvious place to start. Technology is an archivist’s “best means of disseminating information, improving access and promoting [our] collections” (Craven, 2016, p.18). Whilst the vast majority of the Archive has been digitised, there is still some way to go for the digitisation of all artefacts, I would argue due to the large range of materials and media. The Archive can be accessed online but is difficult to navigate and is presented plainly, with a lack of curation. This contrasts with the design of the Archive building itself and the work that has gone into making the Archive an inspirational experience. For the largest archive of one of the most influential filmmakers in the world, not giving the online archive the same attention as the physical archive directly contradicts its aims to increase accessibility and to inspire new artists. Whilst the SKA carries so much intrinsic value, it is this area of digitisation that the Archive needs to develop if it is to keep up with the changing archival landscape and continue to satisfy the ‘Three Fundamental Tasks of Film Archives’ (Bosma, 2015).

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