

Algunos Aspectos del Filmoteca de la UNAM

by Noah Zweig

Among the world's university-based moving-image archives, the Filmoteca at La Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México is an exemplary institution. From the time the archive was founded in 1960, in Coyocán, Mexico City, it played a pivotal role not only in Mexican but in international film culture. Today UNAM is a notable preservation, conservation, exhibition and restoration archive. In a field that lacks formal training standards, the Filmoteca has succeeded in "preserving major moving images from decades past for the future," as founding director and film historian Manuel González Casanova states (González Casanova, 10).

Throughout UNAM's rich history, the Filmoteca has accomplished a great deal with modest resources, including the discovery of lost footage and entire films. It has played an ambassadorial role to FIAF and Latin American archival institutions. Over the years, UNAM tried to preserve its material on celluloid. As Paulo Antonio Paranguá explains, UNAM is home to a lab for restoration, the only perfectly operational one in the region (Paranguá, 14).

Today, the Filmoteca actively seeks long-lost films awaiting preservation. For example, in 1995, it sent out to archives around the world its list, "Las 10 Películas Mexicanas Perdidas Más Buscadas (In Search of 10 Lost Films)" (Edmondson, 5). So far, two of these films have shown up via an exchange with the Library of Congress: *Cruz diabla* (*The Diabolical Cruz*, Fernando de Fuentes, 1934) and, on deposit, *La mancha de sangre* (*The Stain of Blood*, Adolfo Best-Manguard, 1937). Since the beginning, the Filmoteca has believed that since every film is a product of a global cinema culture, the Filmoteca was obligated to conserve everything, irrespective of aesthetic or political biases (González Casanova, 12). Its first acquisition was Eisenstein's *Strike* (1917), a noticeably non-Mexican film. UNAM, in this respect, was of the Lindgren school of archives—an equal opportunity conservator. At the same time, the archive can also be considered a Langloisian contender in its 1960s film-club culture. As early as 1963, the Filmoteca organized a Mexican film festival in Paris. Ultimately it is UNAM's universalizing commitment to film preservation that makes it a model institution. To this day, the archive continues to screen a host of current and non-current films in its on-campus theaters: Cinematografo del Chopo, Cinematografico Fósforo and Sala Julio Brancho. UNAM's programming activities start with the academic community but the public is welcome.

From the outset, González Casanova notes, UNAM realized its limitations as a small operation. Like the rise of other archives, the Filmoteca was not born overnight. Its development was piecemeal. As with most university film archives, UNAM's was not the foremost in the minds of the founders of the institution at the inception. Indeed, producer Manuel Barbachano began loaning prints to González Cassanova; this continued, and over time, a collection would materialize (González Casanova, 17). The histories of some archives—UCLA's for example—were largely of like-minded people assembling collections little by little rather than a conscious construction.

Thus UNAM focused its energy on locating, acquiring and preserving films within México rather than taking on more ambitious undertakings (González Casanova, 17). The archive's efforts paid off. As early as 1962, it had rescued 110 titles in world cinema. Among them: *Carnavalesca* (*Carnival*, Palermi, 1917), *Espiritismo* (*Spirituality*, de Riso, 1918), *L'Ippocampo* (de Sica, 1945), *Beauty and the Beast* (Cocteau, 1946), *Einstein in México* (Lesser, 1933), *Santa* (Saint, Moreno, 1931), *The Immigrant* (Chaplin, 1917), *Conquest of the Pole* (Méliès, 1912). This practice continues. In FIAF's "Statistical Report on the Activities of Filmoteca UNAM, 1 January-31 December 1996," the Filmoteca reports that "as in former years we continued to receive films bestowed upon us by producers and distributors who decide to hand material over to us. An exceptional case was the Collection of Portes Gil, consisting of material filmed during the presidential term of Emilio Portes Gil. Besides this we also received several original nitrate negatives which for one reason or another were in [the Library of Congress's collection]." Its rescue work continued: in 1963, 136 films; 1965, 77 films; and between 1966 and 1967, 300. Current director Iván Trujillo says that UNAM's priority has always been "Mexican Cinema, and second films from Latin American countries" (Trujillo email).

Like many professional archives' approaches to collection development, UNAM uses various appraisal means. They have acquired films as purchases, exchanges, gifts or donations, and through legal deposit arrangements. Above all, model appraisal requires the archive actively exhaust all possibilities for acquisitions rather than passively waiting for offers. This formula has been successful. At present, UNAM has six vaults for acetate material, one of which was recently upgraded so it can store color films. Additionally there are six vaults, located on the other side of the campus, for nitrate. Collectively, the vaults keep about 30,000 reels (Trujillo email).

It could be argued, as John King does, that UNAM rescued the Mexican motion picture world from its stagnation in the 1950s and early 1960s. To describe the industry in the 1950s, King quotes historian Alberto Ruy Sánchez: "A national little big industry, articulated by world cinema (dominated by North America), sustained on the basis of limited counter-crisis: protectionist laws, semi-obligatory exhibition, attempts to form a monopoly which would finally become a State monopoly, a production based on stereotypes and an organization that excludes renovation in all its aspects" (King, 34-5). The era of which King speaks was a difficult one for eager, young artists. Carl J. Mora explains how for thirty years, the Union of Workers of Cinematic Production (STPC) had been exclusive to existing in-group members, most of them veteran filmmakers from the industry's early years; the Director's Guild did not actively seek new directors (Mora). National cinemas elsewhere were thriving, and while Mexico had the potential to grow, this was thwarted by the government. Mora points out that not since the Carranza presidency during the 1910s had there been an attempt at creating facilities for young cineastes. There was no place for would-be and up-and-coming directors to study the craft of the world's great masters. While film culture was flourishing around the globe, in Mexico it was mired in a growing bureaucratization and monopolization of culture. And in 1958, the Mexican Academy of Sciences and Cinematographic Arts decided to end the Ariel prize system. It had been instituted in 1946, as a national cinema award. Its

cancellation apparently symbolizes the stagnation of the cinema. The situation got so bad that Mexico's treasured filmmaker, Luis Buñuel, was forced to settle in France.

Furthermore, the increasing popularity of television and the influence of Hollywood made any revitalization of the national cinema seem unlikely. Since the government had priorities other than the cinema, film needed to grow by efforts of the people. There needed to be a way to sanctify the status of film heritage. Of course, Mexico, like anywhere else, would have taken film seriously as a form of entertainment with or without an archive; still, archival status symbolically made film sacramental. Though films in an archive did not yet have the status of paintings in a museum, they would now be headed that way. UNAM's objectives correspond to those of FIAF's founders. The goal has always been to preserve film's posterity, just as any archivist would treat any type of historical document.

The Filmoteca, as a university-based archive obviously provides a strong academic component. Its place in the moving-image world is alongside the archives of the George Eastman House, East Anglian Film Archive, and the Charles Stuart University. It is part of UNAM's Coordinación de Difusión Cultural, a mainstay of the university designed in 1947 to integrate cultural activities. Other participants include its theater, radio, television, music and literature departments. Gonzalez Gasanova, in 1959, called for all film activities to be run under the Diffusion's director.

The Filmoteca reaches an ever-growing constituency, as UNAM is the largest university in Latin America, with over 250,000 students. Indeed, one of the reasons the Filmoteca is such a large archive is because of the nature of the university. This potentially allows it to pick up along the way all kinds of voluntary assistance, sponsorship, and advocacy. Because of the size and the diversity of UNAM, the Filmoteca's constituency is virtually boundless. Through the university, there are potential connections to be made within and outside of academia. By law, universities have agreements with Mexican society, Trujillo explains. They are to first supply higher education. Second, they are to do research in the sciences and the humanities. In this respect, Trujillo explains, "we feel very close to UCLA, being a university film archive" (Trujillo email). Perhaps, then, UNAM can be considered a part of the public good. Moreover, Trujillo explains, UNAM facilitates "cultural extension," comparable to extended education programs in the US. That the Filmoteca ably performs all three explains its success. As far as these institutions go, it exemplifies the multipurpose archive. UNAM performs Edmondson's prescribed activities. Among these: "public research facilities, library and services;" "public screening and presentation facilities and programmes;" "on-line catalogue;" "oral history programme;" "professional teaching programme;" "marketing of collection-based products;" "publication programmes;" "lending of carriers and objects for external presentation and exhibition;" "public events programme: lectures, presentations, festivals, exhibitions;" and "public facilities: shop, cafeteria, meeting places." UNAM can be described as carrying most, if not all, of these.

Like many archives, UNAM has diffuse origins. One of its antecedents, González Casanova explains, is the Mexican government's attempt in 1936 to preserve the films of

Emilio Gómez with María Elena Sánchez Valenzuela. It grew, as Edmondson describes it “under the auspices of a wide variety of collecting, academic and other institutions, as a natural extension of their work” (King, 132). In the 1950s and early 1960s, intellectuals formed cineclubs, or film societies. There was a movement of these groups who screened both classics of film history and innovative work of local and foreign directors. Like France’s Cinemathèque, they created a space for aesthetic and theoretical discussions of film. There was the Cine Club Progreso, King explains, inspired by French theorists Georges Sadoul and Louis Daquin. More important to the inchoate Filmoteca were the university-based societies: the Asociación Universitaria de Cine Experimental (AUCE) and the Cine Club de la Universidad. These groups formed the Federación Mexicana de Cineclubes in 1956. One of the things these groups discussed was the need for a film repository that would conserve cultural memory. And this need was realized at film exhibitions and other events. The films would be shown at the university and stay there; over time, a collection arose against the backdrop of the film societies. This club culture had a long-lasting effect on academia in that it fostered a generation of students who could view films critically. And the clubs enunciated the principles, both directly and indirectly, that would engender the rise of the archive. For UNAM, the cineclub movement was a blessing.

The growing social importance of film during the vibrant culture of the 1960s caused the idea of a film archive to become far more accessible and mainstream. The growing social importance of film made this possible. The French New Wave and Italian Neorealism, as well as the cinema that had underpinned international Third World revolutions, had a ripple effect on Mexico. Moreover, Republican exiles from Franco’s Spain, such as Luis Buñuel, had brought their artistic sensibilities to Mexico (Paranaguá, 13). Other filmmakers, such as Bustillo Oro, were trained elsewhere in Latin America but still influenced Mexican filmmaking. This culture of political socially conscious cinema is epitomized by the release of Benito Alazraki’s famous *Raíces* (*Roots*, 1955), which some consider to be the beginning of the Mexican independent film movement. And insofar as the cinema was becoming acceptable, on par with the other arts, the Filmoteca certainly came along at the right time.

UNAM’s strength was due to its public nexus, mainly the university-based film clubs. In 1963, as a consequence of the cineclubs, UNAM established a film department for the study of Mexican and foreign cinema, CUEC (Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos or University’s Center for Cinema Studies), the country’s first official school of cinema. To this day, the archive works closely with CUEC. Obviously the archive’s work in restoration has helped CUEC. For example, Luis Reyes de la Masa wrote his *Salón Roja: programas y crónicas del cine mudo en México*, (*Red Salon: Programs and Chronicles of Mexico’s Changing Cinema*) the first book on Mexican silent cinema, there (González Casanova). Trujillo explains that the archive lends films for other academic programs as well. UNAM subsidizes three films CUEC makes per year, providing some money for the shooting. And the archive each year screens a program of the schools most recent productions. The negatives of student films are kept in the archives’ vaults. At UNAM, not unlike UCLA, it seems the line between film school and archiving is increasingly fine.

The growth in the arts is partly attributable to President Adolfo López Mateos (elected in 1958) whose government considerably funded social welfare and education. These new policies helped give rise to things like CUEC. Filmmaking, in general, was picking up, in the spirit of 1960s culture; there was a spirit of hope in the arts. The availability of 16- and super 8-mm film made inexpensive production possible. And as King points out, intellectuals were encouraged by the success of the Cuban Revolution, which López Mateos recognized; this aura of hope percolated to the Filmoteca. The film school has been essential to the shaping of the Filmoteca's identity; in fact, CUEC and the Filmoteca can be thought of as the same organization (González Casanova, 13).

CUEC, under the direction of González Casanova, published *Nuevo Cine's* eponymous journal, essentially Mexico's *Cahiers du Cinema*. Only seven issues of the journal appeared, yet it had a long-lasting impact. *Nuevo Cine* helped initiate important projects like Jomí García Ascot's *En el balcón vacío* (*On the Empty Balcony*, 1961), which UNAM possesses. In response to being shut out of the industry, young filmmakers like Jaime Humberto Hermosillo (Mexico's first openly gay filmmaker), were able to express themselves through this radical journal. Likewise, they published a manifesto. *Nuevo Cine*, consisting of filmmakers and critics, signaled a new era in the country's film industry. An independent cinema movement was born. King lists the manifesto's participants: José de la Colina, Rafael Corkidi, Salvador Elizondo, J.M. García Ascot, Carlos Monsiváis, Alberto Isaac, Paul Leduc and Fernando Macoltela, all of whom would become "the most important film-makers, critics and chroniclers of the next twenty years. Their manifesto was a plea for renovation, for artistic creativity, for independent cinema and for specialist film courses, journals and the establishment of a cinemathèque" (King).

Shortly after these developments in an emerging university-based film culture came the presidency of Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-1976), who, along with his brother Rodolfo Echeverría (appointed to head the Banco Cinematográfico), was interested in film. Echeverría's policy can be characterized by the prime importance he granted to mass communications. For the first time in Mexican political history, the government launched an official policy of using radio, television and especially cinema for international means of communication. For UNAM, this is significant insofar as cinema's importance was becoming increasingly important in the public's view. Leftists in universities had good reason to be suspicious of Echeverría since, as former interior minister, it was he who had unleashed the army on the students in Tlateloco in 1968 (though he would later release these political prisoners). Though it does not justify violence, UNAM and the archival world in general would benefit from his policies. However, the left would always regard Echeverría with skepticism and hostility. Many considered his pro-left and "third worldist" foreign policy mere opportunism. To this day, human-rights advocates and other activists consider Echeverría a war criminal with blood on his hands who should be held accountable for crimes against humanity.

In any event, under Echeverría, the State became directly involved in filmmaking to the almost total exclusion of private producers. In 1971, Echeverría proposed a "Plan for the Restructure of the Mexican Film Industry" in order to "renovate objectives and means during the six-year period so as to change the image of the national cinema, so

deteriorated at the beginning of the decade” (Mora, 113). Among other things, this included state ownership of the Banco Cinematografico and the major theater chains. Essentially this plan subsidized film through a combination of public and private sources. The result was an environment in which films were taken more and more seriously and so their preservation was considered key.

UNAM was no longer the sole archive. The new government ordered the construction of the Cineteca Nacional in 1974. This new archive, run by the Secretariat of Public Education and the Director of Radio, Television and Cinema of the Interior Secretary with the support of the National Council for the Culture and the Arts. This archive was subsidized entirely by the federal government. The Cineteca’s reason for being is to rescue, classify, conserve, recover, preserve and disseminate cinematic work from México and elsewhere. The Cineteca’s Cinemathèque is landmark as an exhibition theater (sadly, the archive had to be rebuilt following a devastating 1982 fire). Indeed, the archive has eight screening rooms, a bookstore, a cafeteria and a restaurant. Moreover, its Center of Documentation and Information offers a wealth of research materials. Unlike the Filmoteca, the Cineteca largely began preserving prints of commercial Mexican film productions (but at present it has some classics among Mexican history), which are kept in the Cineteca’s four vaults. The holdings include over 12,000 35- and 16-mm films. Though the Cineteca did not do as much work in preservation as UNAM, the importance the government bestowed to it indirectly paved UNAM’s way for more preservation. For example, under this regime, another filmmaking school, the Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica was built.

CUEC, meanwhile, would remain an influential force. Its members recorded the events of 1968, in what would become *El grito* (The Shout, Leobardo López Aretche, 1968), which is among UNAM’s holdings. Mora explains that this film, perhaps the best-known film made about this era, “is the only objective record that exists of any popular movement that occurred in the last thirty years of national life...[it] is in the final analysis, the most complete and coherent filmic record that exists of the Movement, seen from the inside, contrary to the calumnies spread by the rest of the mass media” (Mora, 112-13).

In 1968, a sizeable student and middle-class continually protesting against the right-wing party, PAN. For their opposition, they were faced with collective punishment. With the Olympic Games approaching in Mexico City that year, the Escheverría government decided it had to crack down on the dissidents. On October 2, the army opened fire on demonstrators around the Plaza de Tres Culturas in Tlatelolco. This state-ordered massacre led to the deaths of several hundred dead and the arrests of thousand people. In the tumultuous climate that followed, no one wanted to make fictional films; filmmakers concentrated on capturing events (Fernández Violante, 197). All of these developments made UNAM’s archiving necessary. The events of 1968 further galvanized the artistic and academic communities upon which the Filmoteca is founded. Indeed, a group of UNAM students preserved footage of this crackdown on students. And insofar as such footage had to be stored, the Filmoteca was there.

UNAM started providing prints for film history courses in CUEC in the 1960s as well as for cinema appreciation courses in UNAM's preparatory school. As a result of its activeness, the archive got its own budget and was able to spend more of its resources on preservation and programming. Whereas three to five films were preserved per year when under CUEC, it was now able to complete ten a year (González Casanova, 6). Likewise, as Houston explains, the Library had to make its collections available for the growing demand of college film courses in the 1950s. Like Filmoteca, the Library of Congress' emphasis was from the beginning just not on films' preservation but on their study. (Houston, 18) In turn, UNAM's dissemination grew, as it became a central cultural and educational service. By the 1970s, UNAM was distributing up to 400 titles a month. Some of the films UNAM rescued in the 1970s include some treasures from the 1930s: *La mujer del Puerto* (Arcady Boytler, 1933), *La noche de los mayas* (Chano Urueta, 1939) and others.

At the request of UNESCO, UNAM was recognized by FIAF in 1970 (and it became an official member in 1977). From this vantage point, the Filmoteca was able to communicate with European film schools and archives. After becoming an effective FIAF member, UNAM extended its services to Mexican and foreign universities, offering access to its films. Moreover, it started new activities: cinema research and the diffusion of culture via courses, seminars, exhibitions, radio broadcasts (such as "El minuto de la Filmoteca"), publications, and television shows (like *Fabrica de sueños* or *The Manufacturing of Dreams*). Between 1973 and 1976, UNAM's archive aired two programs dedicated to the art of film. In the 1970s, it rescued some of México's silent treasures such as *El aniversario de la muerte de la suegra de Enhart* (*The Anniversary of Enhart's Mother-In-Law's Death*, Hermanos Alva, 1912) and *El puño de hierro*, which tells a cautionary tale of drug abuse, much as *Reefer Madness* would later. The archive received some films from private companies such as Procinemex, which gave them eighty films. Moreover, the Filmoteca began internationalizing its holdings, acquiring works by Keaton, Lang, Murnau, Kurosawa, and Bergman.

The Filmoteca had already done so much by 1976 that it became independent from CUEC; the university gave the archive its own funding. Perhaps this era marks the maturity of it as a guardian of cinema legacy, analogous to UCLA. Robert Rosen said, during the same period, after the latter started seriously working on preservation, "Now we feel that [the archive] come of age. We are ready and anxious to assume our full share of the responsibility for preserving our film heritage" (Slide, 71). The Filmoteca had archivists and directors such as Jerzy Toeplitz, José de la Colina and Santiago Alvarez teach courses. CUEC became thoroughly involved in filmmaking, becoming, between 1970 and 1976, nearly the sole producer of independent cinema (Trujillo). Insofar as the commercial film industry was entirely in the hands of López Portillo's government, UNAM offered an alternative. Mainstream cinema almost always engenders a dialectical opposite, usually in the form of noncommercial, or independent film. And it continued to organize its collections into exhibitions, many of which were distributed to other schools. For example, *García Urbizu and the Origins of Cinema* was distributed. By this time, UNAM was quite a well-organized institution. It has its own documentation department which catalogs and archives all of its material on cinema (posters, stills, notes, periodicals)

and prepares requests from cultural institutions. It has published manuals for FIAF institutions and in FIAF's *The Journal for Film Preservation*.

The Filmoteca, as a FIAF affiliate, has always worked internationally with other archives. Indeed, John Hay Whitney, a signatory of FIAF's 1938 charter, stated that "as a result of the close cooperation made possible between the member organizations, the work of preserving for posterity this valuable new type of social and historical document will be assured. It will make possible the easier exchange of books, printed matter, still photographs, scenarios and other material pertinent to the world of film, as well as insuring the preservation of films themselves" (Slide, 22). For example, as Francisco Gaytan explains, when UNAM was seeking a copy of the little-known Eisenstein documentary *La destrucción de Oaxaca* (1931), it was able to obtain a print from MOMA. "By miracles of present day communication," he writes, "on learning of the existence of this film, several film archives have asked for it, not only here but abroad. MOMA has authorized its diffusion and it has therefore been shown very successfully." Although this incident does not constitute a recovery of a lost film per se, it does underline UNAM's fundamental dedication to international archive cooperation. Already it has been shown at the Filmoteca de la Generalitat de Catalunya, at the Huelva and Lleida Festivals, the Cineteca Nacional and the Filmmuseum.

At present, the Filmoteca and the Cineteca have a friendly relationship, according to Trujillo. "We give them service by producing black-and-white prints in our lab," he says, "and we exchange films for programming." With Cineteca and the Cineteca de Nuevo Leon, both of them FIAF affiliates, the Filmoteca, abides to FIAF's code of ethics. The Filmoteca's interaction with academic and archival institutions is part of its success story. In 1965, for example, the Cinemateca Argentina invited UNAM to the Festival Internacional de Mar del Plata. The archive proposed the formation of a regional group of archives. Eventually, the Unión de Cinematecas de América Latina (UCAL) was born. These international relations became essential to UNAM's modus operandi, González Casanova explains. UCAL consists of twelve archives from the subcontinent, and holds yearly congresses. At the 1972 UCAL, UNAM declared the importance not only of Mexican but, collectively, Latin American heritage, by way of film. This congress was significant in that the archives proclaimed a cultural decolonization from European and American influence. It was declared that the primary task of each film archive was, to the best of its ability, to promote, conserve, and spread the cinema of its respective country as well as Latin America as a whole; their identities were to be autonomous from Euro-American hegemony. It may be a stretch, but perhaps one can see internationalist unity in Latin American filmmaking reflect the third-worldist archival world. King refers to Ruy, who cites *Actas de Marusia (Minutes of Marusia)* by the Chilean exile director Miguel Littín (1975) as an internationalist film (King, 137). The film featured Italian actor Gian Maria Volonte, and the music of Mikis Theodorakis, and dealt with Mexican themes and a massacre of miners in Chile in 1907, which was an allegory of the 1971 coup. Cinema was considered the authentic record par excellence that could, for instance, capture these countries' dark histories. Since, in Latin America, many populations had to suffer under governments subsidized by US foreign policy, there was much to catch on film.

UNAM would collaborate again in 1980 with UNESCO for the first Latin American Moving Image meeting in the Mexican vacation center, Oaxtepec, Morelos. The archives had a meeting, known as the Encuentro Latinoamericano de Imágenes en Movimiento (The Latin American Moving-Image Conference). Essentially the regional institutions agreed on greater archival cooperation and interchange within Latin America. One of the purposes of the Encuentro, González Casanova explains, was to analyze the importance cinema played as a cultural factor within the national liberation of “developing” countries, particularly the role of archives within that process. Unfortunately, though, Latin America’s growth was stifled in the 1980s because the state had priorities elsewhere. Neoliberal reforms hindered the developments of national cinemas. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s these cinemas lingered on, using what resources they had, but did not grow. The 1990s, according to Mary Lea Bandy, Houston says, was the time of these archives’ growth. The 1992 FIAF Congress, held in Montevideo, helped develop the region.

UNAM has rescued, restored, or preserved nearly 21,000 films on acetate. Its collection, Trujillo explains, is rich in holdings from both the Golden years (*la época de oro*), the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, of Mexican cinema and from the silent period (including materials from the Mexican Revolution). More contemporary items include a sizeable collection of 8- and super 8 mm tapes. Recently, the archive has been working on an arduous project, the transfer of 8- and super-8 films into digital formats. UNAM does not have an accession policy. It collects a wealth of different kinds of films. “If it’s Mexican,” Trujillo goes on, “we will collect it.” UNAM tries to preserve its material on celluloid.

Regarding access, the Filmoteca, like many institutions, is fairly open. “[We] support all kinds of film researchers,” Trujillo explains, “providing them access to the film collections. UNAM serves a variety of users. The Filmoteca is often accessed. Indeed, it received in 1992 (the last year in which data are available) 190 users researching 210 films (Gautier). Gautier’s list points out that whereas some institutions charge researchers an access fee, UNAM is free. Its facilities have rooms, flatbed tables, video monitors but not nitrate screens for viewing. As a full-time participant in international and national film festivals and FIAF events, where films appear either by request or at the volition of the archive, UNAM actively makes itself accessible. Like UCLA, the need for “university access” is a cogent and convenient rationale for its work; as long as the university community will need to access it, the archive can continue. Indeed, UNAM sets an example of accessibility, fulfilling the archival mission of, as Claes describes it, “spreading the culture and aesthetic of these media and ensuring that, in a sea channel of surfing and cyber-shopping, both present and future generations do not forget the true meaning of cinema” (Claes, 110). UNAM receives a high volume of requests because of its location and especially because it works with CUEC.

It should be stressed that in giving access, UNAM is doing more than showing the user the film. For film archives, the notion of access to the film goes beyond the mere screening of the film. The archives will educate the user—for example, explaining from an archivist’s standpoint the knowledge of the item so far. Ideal access should inform the

user about what the archive has done with the film. As Claes puts it, “access to the collection involves not only the contact between visitor and film material but also the dissemination of information about the collection.” The Filmoteca’s series, for example, are thematic. In one month, for example, it showed two series: the first, a Fassbinder retrospective, and the second concerns Latin American literature in film. Central to UNAM’s access is its distribution service. Like MOMA, it has a department for distribution activities. Its programming makes it very accessible. Past exhibitions include a Buñuel series, *La mirada del siglo*, which includes his oeuvre, as producer, director, screenwriter, and actor.

The Filmografía Mexicana is a database on the Filmoteca’s website, which includes the credits of over 12,000 titles of films produced in Mexico starting in the year 1896. It was developed by the Department of Cataloging at the Filmoteca. It is as much “a tool of consultation for investigators as for any person interested in deepening his knowledge on the Mexican cinema” (Claes, 111). This service is just one example of the archive carrying one of its core objectives: “extender lo más ampliamente posible los beneficios de la cultura” (to spread as much as possible the benefits of culture). The database is free and open to the public but requires registration. The entries do not reflect UNAM’s holdings but they are rather a comprehensive list of Mexican films. It would have been difficult to create a NAMID-like union catalog that lists the whereabouts of everything; in fact, an attempt at such a network would have failed because of these institutions understandable penchants for secrecy. Out of fear of legal problems, archives generally do not make public the entirety of their holdings. UNAM has good reason to fear the notion of an online database. Like most places, the revolving door of government to business has controlled Mexican cinema in decades past. If public or private copyright owners were to see UNAM’s collection, there could be unpleasant legal results for the archive.

The Filmografía plays a role comparable to the IMDB in its scope. It represents the ideal kind of list: an ever-changing work in process. Film databases such as this one are in the tradition of film lists from the 1960s. Ever since, critics have composed lists—either topical, or in this case thoroughgoing—to maintain the worth of films. Because of cinema’s relative youth, it still needed some species of legitimacy back then.

In 1989, the archive opened a library, and used the FIAF classification scheme for its collection of 7040 books (85% of which are film-related, the rest television). The collection included the library also has thousands of published and unpublished scripts, 150,000 microfilm cards, clippings, files, lobby cards, posters, press books, exhibitor’s campaign manuals, audiocassettes, photographs, and collections of stills of Mexican stars: María Félix, Dolores Del Río, and Columba Dominguez, and others.

Overall, it should be stressed that the archive is a pioneer in many respects. For twenty years it has helped produce scientific films through the collaboration of the International Association of Scientific Cinema (González Casanova). Scientific film was an area hitherto unexplored in the annals of Mexican cinema. The Filmoteca is thoroughly involved in it. The archive organized in the 1980s the *Primeras Jornadas de*

Cine Científico. The Filmoteca is an invaluable resource for Mexico, Latin America and the world. Its collection has been a blessing to film studies.

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