

Brian Cruz

Metadata for Moving Image Collections

Assignment #1

For this assignment I have chosen to compare the UCLA Film and Television Archive and the Pacific Film Archive. The first thing I noticed is that each website required an extra click to reach the page where I could actually perform a search for moving image materials. On the UCLA site, this required clicking on the “Online Catalog” image. At Pacific, I had to click on “Advanced Search” on the home page, followed by “Film & Video Collection” on the following page. While both sites had a default search box on their home pages, neither gave relevant results for my queries. Neither had an option for merely browsing their catalogs that I could find.

The catalog search at UCLA is quite intimidating at first glance. There are a dozen search selections to choose from, ranging from title search to broadcast date search. Limits are available for both availability and records per page. Below the search form is an extremely lengthy help section, which gives multiple examples of potential search terms and the guidelines for getting the most relevant results. It would seem that they find their own search engine so complex and difficult to use that such a detailed help section is necessary. Notably, the link at the bottom of this help section, for “Detailed index tables”, results in a 404 Not Found error.

As intricate as the UCLA's catalog search page is, it is in fact only the basic search page. A tab is available for advanced search, which provides the usual number of Boolean terms. Frankly, this page is the one that should be default, as the basic search page has so many options as to be far from "basic", while allowing no Boolean functions which make it exceedingly unlikely that relevant results could be found. Only on this advanced search would I be able to search for a title from a specific year, which is about as basic as it gets.

The default search page at the Pacific Archives is as simple as possible. There is a text entry box and a button that says "submit". An inconspicuous link to their OskiCat catalog search is located in the text underneath. Typing a search term on this basic page leads to results from OskiCat anyway, which makes one wonder why this basic page is even necessary. The OskiCat "quick search" is fairly functional, with a help section that's only a fraction the length of UCLA's. Unfortunately, in order to search only within the Pacific Film Archive, it must be selected from a menu that defaults to "Entire Collection". Confusingly, the menu also includes an option for "Films/Videos", which as a moving image researcher I would be likely to select first before scrolling further to see the choice for "Pacific Film Archive". The "advanced keyword search" page offers multiple Boolean options, with more options for material types and their formats than UCLA offered.

My first search term is for the actress Joan Blondell (1906-1979). A longtime favorite of mine, Ms. Blondell has nearly 100 film credits, made over 50 appearances on television, has authored a novel and has had a biography written about her career. On UCLA's basic search page, I queried "Joan Blondell", as their help section indicated the first name/last name was the

proper format, with the “credits search” option selected. There were 160 results found, which consisted entirely of her film and television credits (though many were listed multiple times). There were three entries for her 1945 MGM feature “Adventure”, and I examined each one. The entries were clearly based on MARC records, and in fact a MARC view was available for each one. In addition, another section called “Holdings Information” appeared under the MARC data, and this is what primarily differed between the three entries. The first entry was for 4 reels of B&W 16mm safety film with an optical soundtrack, the second entry was for a VHS tape (curiously listed as only 81 minutes, while the feature’s actual running time is 125 minutes), and the third entry was for a DVD. One would think that combining these three entries into one, or at least noting the holdings information data in the search results, would make it easier find this film in the format one desired. Nevertheless, the metadata was fairly complete, with title, cast, credits, genre and summary all present.

A search for “Blondell, Joan” at Pacific (as per their guidelines) yielded only three results. Two were books and only one – 1981’s “The Woman Inside” – was a film. Out of curiosity, I ran the same search with “Films/Videos” selected, and received 31 results, nearly all of which were DVDs. Clearly the UCB library had a better collection of her works than Pacific Archive did. Examining the entry for the one film holding at Pacific, I couldn’t definitively determine the metadata standard being used, but it seemed very reminiscent of MARC, with added fields for “Access” and “Local Note”. The metadata indicated that Pacific held 5 reels of color 35mm acetate film with optical soundtrack, and the “Local Note” entry provided details from the last inspection reports dated 11/08/2008. Title, cast, credits, genre and summary were all present.

Next I searched for “Three Little Pigs”, looking specifically the 1933 Walt Disney cartoon. A title search at UCLA yielded eleven results, the first four of which were different entries for the Disney cartoon. Other adaptations filled out the rest of the results. I suspect the Disney cartoon was listed first in the search results because it was more commonly accessed of the various entries. One of the entries noted that it was a reissue version, while another indicated that it was the original uncensored version (the cartoon was originally released with a gag where the wolf disguised himself as a Fuller Brush salesman with stereotypical Jewish features; this gag was deleted in later reissues). I was impressed that the two versions were differentiated, although there no other indication of their difference other than one being “uncensored”. At Pacific, a title search yielded only 2 results, with a more modern 1991 adaption listed first, followed by the 1933 Disney original. Pacific’s metadata only indicated that they held a 16mm print, the only credited author was Walt Disney (the film was actually directed by Burt Gillett), and made no mention of whether it was the original or reissued version. UCLA clearly provided the better information in this case.

Next, I decided to search for a specific subject: amusement parks. At UCLA I entered “amusement parks” with the “topic” option selected. The 27 results listed only indicated entries with the LCSH heading of “amusement Parks”, but no actual titles! Only by clicking on individual results themselves did I see films like “Merry-Go-Round” and “Disneyland”. I tried doing a keyword search instead, and in this instance I received 145 results with actual titles listed, such as Buster Keaton’s “Balloonatic” and a multitude of television commercials. At Pacific, a subject search for “amusement parks” yielded three results, one of which was a 1-minute demo reel, another a Chinese film from 2004, and lastly the 1930 Fox film “Liliom” directed by Frank

Borzage. Overall, I was disappointed by the results of this search, though UCLA had by far the most relevant information.

Finally, I ran a search for director Frank Tashlin, who began his career as a director in animation and later moved on to live-action films like “Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?” A credits search at UCLA gave me 85 results, listed in alphabetical order, running from his 1965 feature “Alphabet Murders” to his 1938 animated short “You’re an Education”. The ability to sort the results in chronological order would have been useful, but overall the results were more than satisfactory. Performing an author search for “Tashlin, Frank” at Pacific yielded only four results: two features, one cartoon and a biography. Searching under “Films/Videos” rather than “Pacific Film Archives” yielded 13 results, mostly DVDs of his films. Disappointing, but obviously Pacific simply hasn’t archived much of Tashlin’s work.

In the end, while UCLA’s search proved more cumbersome, it gave the best results. Pacific’s results were insufficient by comparison, but I suspect they simply do not have the holdings that UCLA does.